

Development Program 4-7 years

This is known, as the “introductory stage” of development with the main emphasis being; getting player’s to “enjoy” and “familiarize” them self with the game of soccer.

The coaches aim is to get each player to fall in love with the game whilst guiding them towards some of the skills needed to participate in the game.

All warm up activities will involve producing the picture in the young players mind of what the session will consist of. This can be achieved by performing the activity without the ball but still incorporating soccer specific movement, once the players are familiar with the organization of the practice we can then introduce the ball.

At this age, parents should be encouraged to be part of the sessions it can assist in avoiding some of the social issues that are sometimes encountered with infants. Some young children do not like leaving their parents and working with other people regardless of age. Just imagine what is going through the young child’s mind, having to leave “mummy and daddy” to work with a coach who they have never seen or met before? Therefore by getting parents involved it helps;

- 1) To overcome the social issues mentioned above.
- 2) It sends a message out to parents as to the importance of their role in their Childs development.
- 3) It also allows the practice to function.

As the child becomes more comfortable; the parent’s role in the session will decrease however, parents must be continually encouraged to be involved in the process away from the session.

The following syllabus has been installed by Derek Broadley of the soccer-expert team at the Berks Mini-Soccer Academy in Reading Pennsylvania.

These sessions are for players in the 4-7 year age bracket and each session runs for 1-½ hours.

The Mini-Academy coach provides all equipment along with water and snacks for the players. The most important addition not seen at most sessions; is the debrief to parents for up to 15 minutes at the end of every session (1 hour 15 mins into the session). This is to inform parents as to the content of the session and to advise them of issues that came up with individual players during the session. Once we highlight an issue, the coach can demonstrate strategies for dealing with it, within the soccer environment.

All young players performances will be inconsistent at this age. It is therefore beneficial to inform ALL parents of situations that contribute to inconsistency and the effects it has on performance. (Competitiveness, shyness, hyper-activity etc)

These issues will arise out of the session’s overtime, (or even in other sports). Therefore it is important to give parents the skills needed to identify, and then to approach different situations in their own and other children.

Most of these so-called issues are nothing more than the “natural learning process’s” taking place in children and therefore coaches need to work along side the people who

can influence the children in the learning process, whilst acknowledging the reasons “why” they are happening.

The following sessions can be introduced in any order but it is suggested to follow in the orders that are written.

I will give sizes based on a group of 15 players just as a guideline but these will change for each group and for each session.

REFER TO INDEX OF WORDS & TERMS AT THE END OF THIS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR WORDS AND TERMS YOU MAY NOT UNDERSTAND

Session One

Staying with the ball; Activity one

The session lay out does not need to be a specific shape (i.e. square circle etc) however, the area size has to be big enough for the children to understand the set up and to allow for the skills to be performed with sufficient “Time and Space”.

The area size should be 30 yards by 30 yards with at least 45 gates of different colors. (Gates = 2 cones apart)

Each player will get into a gate (between 2 cones) of their choice as their starting point. The players are then instructed to jog slowly in a sequence of colors through the gates.

Coaching points

- 1) Run with head up
- 2) Plan your route
- 3) Maintain a constant speed

Coaches must look at each individual player and correct as appropriate. Parents can assist in this activity.

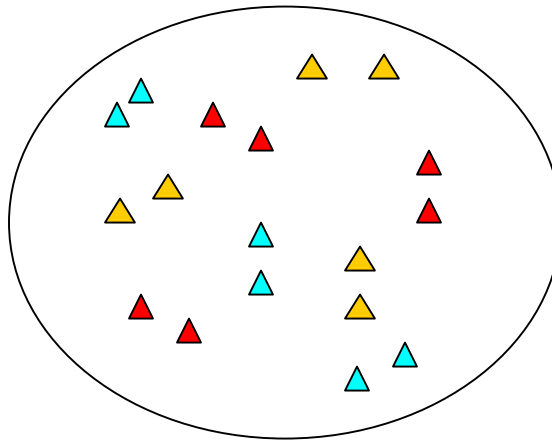


Diagram one

Progression

Ask players to perform different movements in their sequence guided by different colored gates. (i.e. Green to blue; hopping, blue to red; skipping, red to green; running backwards etc)

Coaches should look at the quality of the movement and refer to speed. (Most players may go to fast?) The coach can select certain movements after the players have had an opportunity to experiment.

Progression

Ask players to perform at different speeds in their sequence guided by the different colored gates. (Green to blue; fast, blue to red; slow red to green; jogging)

Coaches can give examples and demonstrate.

Players must avoid each other and they cannot go through a gate that is occupied by someone else.

Although players have a sequence they must make decisions based on the actions of the players around them.

Staying with the ball; Activity two ***Refer to Diagram one***

Same area size and session set up.

Players with their ball standing in a gate (Between two cones)

Players are asked to run with the ball in a sequence through colored gates as in the previous activity. (Green to blue; blue to red; red to green)

Coaching points

- 1) Run with the head up
- 2) Plan the route
- 3) Keep control of the ball

Progression

Ask players to use alternate feet in the sequence (Green to blue; right foot, blue to red; left foot, red to green; either/both)

Coaches to watch individuals to see if they can maintain their sequence. Coaches should encourage good speed. "Who is the quickest?" This will aid in movement but must not compromise quality.

Progression

Ask players to use the outside of the foot once they exit the gate to change direction to the next gate.

Coaches will be able to see when the player is making the decision on the direction of the next gate. (Coaches should coach individuals without stopping the players who are coping with this task.)

Progression

Ask players to choose a color in their sequence and when they approach that color not to go through that gate. (They have to do a turn to avoid going through)

Staying with the ball; Activity three

Refer to Diagram one

Put players in pairs and number them 1 and 2. Number 1 does not have the ball; number 2 has a ball; Number one jogs slowly through a sequence and is followed by number 2 who runs with their ball. (If odd numbers get a group of 3 players with 2 players following number 1)

Coaching Points

- 1) Run with head up
- 2) Keep close to the player you are following
- 3) Keep control of the ball
- 4) Avoid contact with other players

Coaches to encourage player without the ball to maintain a constant speed and not to turn around and look for other players. Also to encourage long and short runs between gates.

Staying with the ball; Activity four

Split group into three teams (or suitable equal teams)

Three goals in triangle with three groups sitting down in set positions.

Place cones/gates in an area 15—18 yards away from goal.

Give each player a number between 1 and 5.

When coach calls out the number the player who's number is called out, has to run with the ball through a sequence of gates/cones before heading for the goal to score.

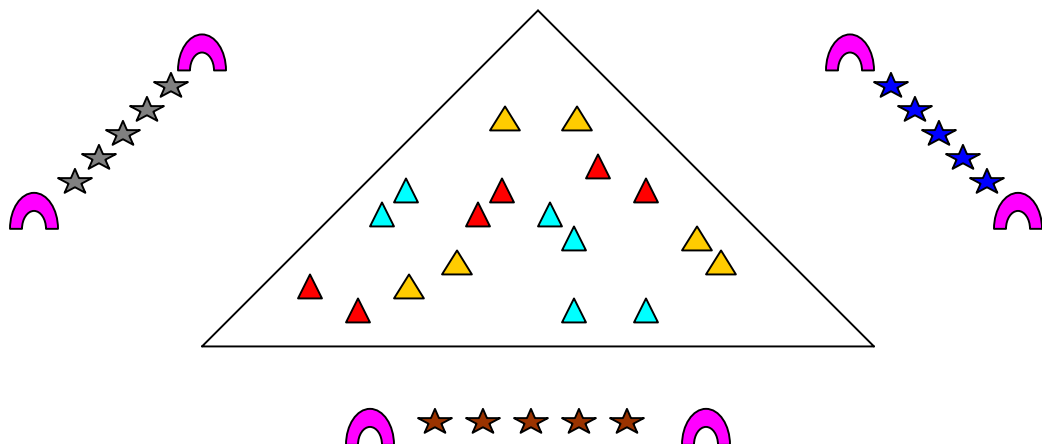


Diagram two

Coaching points

- 1) Run with your head up
- 2) Plan your route
- 3) Keep ball under control
- 4) Score at earliest opportunity

Coaches can add more goals to keep waiting time down

Staying with the ball; Activity five

2v2 small-sided games on fields of 20x15 yards

If odd numbers, play 3v2 on one field.

Coaches can match up players based on ability.

Parents debrief as players eat snacks

Session Two

Interacting with others Activity one

Place triangles all over an area 40 x 40 yards (Triangles = 3 cones 2 feet apart)
Triangles must be different colors and various sizes dependent on ability.

The players are instructed to select a triangle as a starting point. They are informed that when they are inside a triangle they are “safe”.

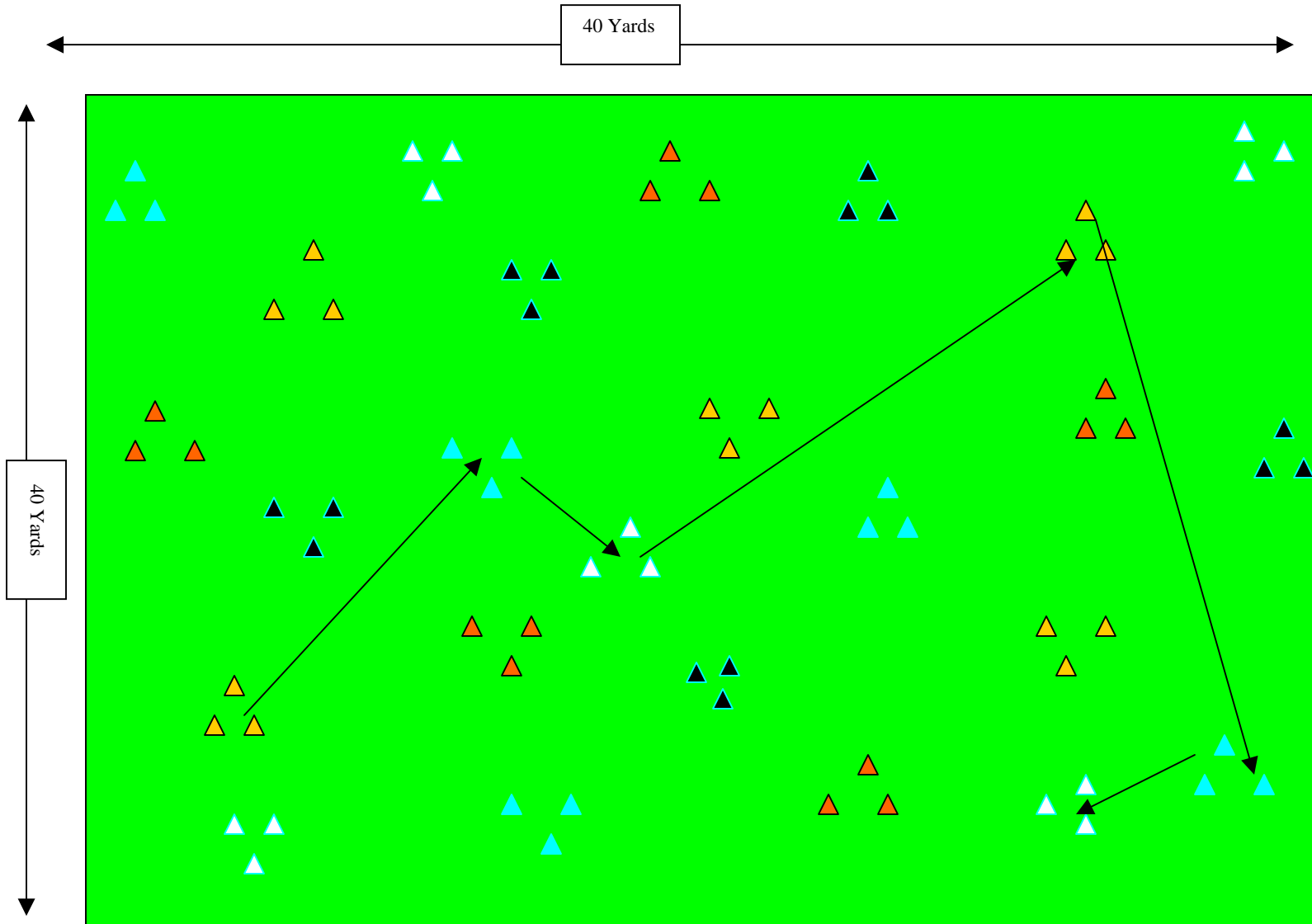


Diagram three

Interacting with others activity one (Warm up)

Players to select a sequence of colors and they jog slowly from one triangle to the next in their sequence. The coach can choose various speeds dependent age, ability and weather conditions.

Move onto getting the players to do a stretch or foot exercise in each different triangle; (in red triangle hopping right foot, green triangle hopping on left foot; blue triangle two foot jumping)

Finish off the warm-up activity by getting players to change speeds between triangles whilst continuing with stretching or foot movements in triangles.

Progression

Introduce a ball to each player and get him or her to perform his or her sequence stopping in every triangle. The triangle has three openings get the players to enter on side and leave through another.

Coaches to focus on running with the ball and what happens in the triangle.

Different parts of the foot can be used in the triangle to change direction for exit.

Ask the players to exit the same side as they enter using the sole of their foot. (Drag back turn or similar)

Progression (add defender)

Now the players are comfortable with the organization of the practice we can now start to introduce the topic. The players have to go from triangle to triangle without getting touch by a defender. Start without the ball; give all players a chance to be defender before introducing the ball.

This activity gets the players to start to see the competitive side of soccer.

Remind them to get their heads up and look for the defenders whilst keeping control of the ball. Add defenders if appropriate, limit the time allowed in a triangle if appropriate.

Activity Two

Progression

Use the centre circle or similar size area. Mark off a triangle 8yards x 8 yards x 8 yards.

Start with the coach as the defender with the players having to line up around outside the circle. The object of the activity is for the players to enter the circle run through the triangle and return outside the circle without getting touched by the coach. The coach/defender cannot enter the triangle (Safe area) When players are successful they must shout out loudly “goal!”

Give all players the opportunity to be defender, (add competitive component by counting how many tags/ touches the defenders get)

Add a ball to the players on the outside. Due to age you can remain with tag or start to introduce tackling.

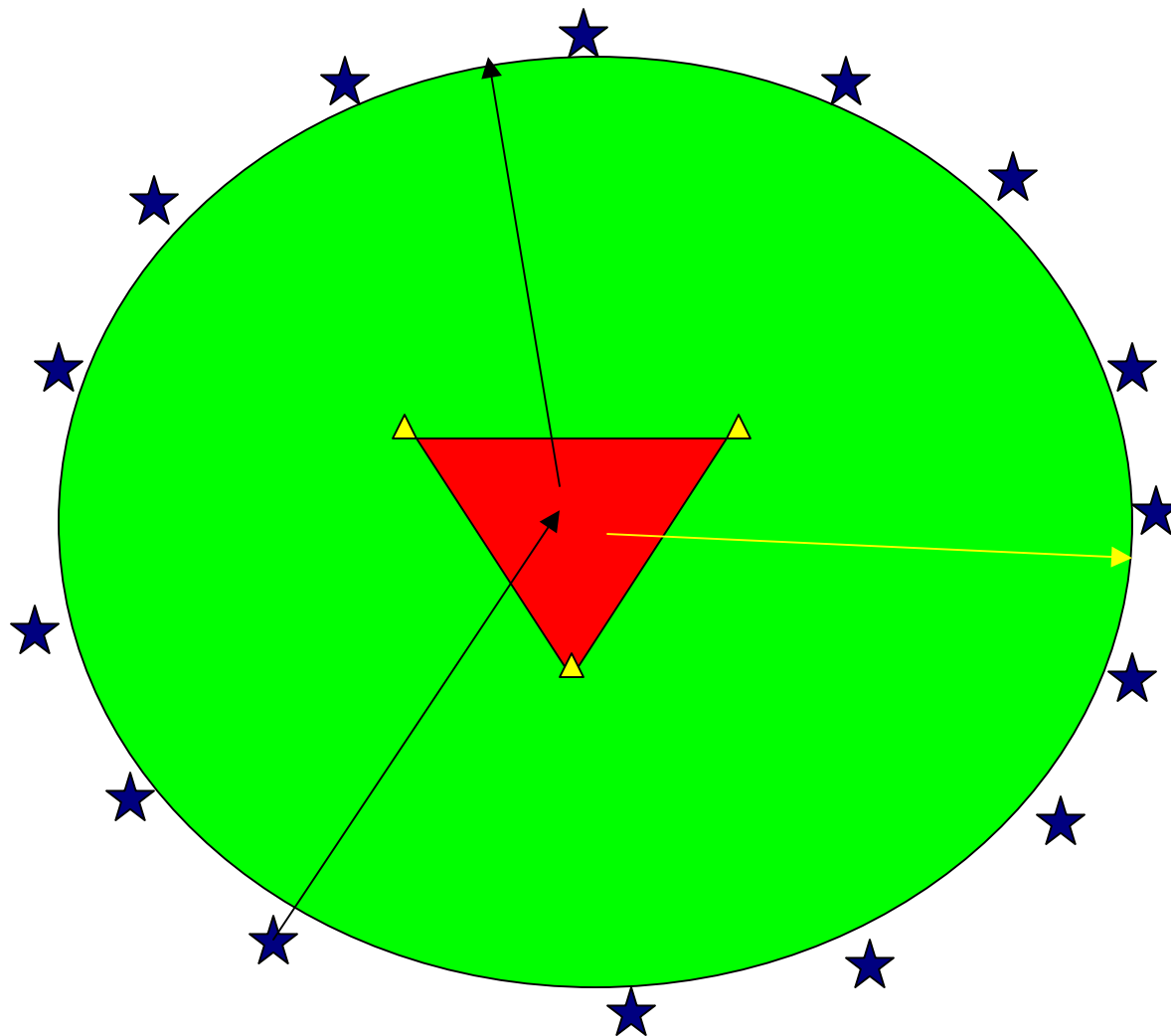


Diagram four

Coaching Points

- 1) Running with head up
- 2) Keep control of the ball
- 3) Select opportunity to enter the circle

Encourage players to dribble around the area outside the circle thus avoiding defenders.

Progression

Put players into teams of 2 according to ability. Get them to set up a field with goals and play against another pair of similar ability.

Once the game starts call them in to set up some rules. Guide them towards rule that helps the game to flow.

Call the group together to discuss rules in each game and change the teams around if possible to play against a different pair.

These games must be at least 10 minutes in length. *Diagram three*

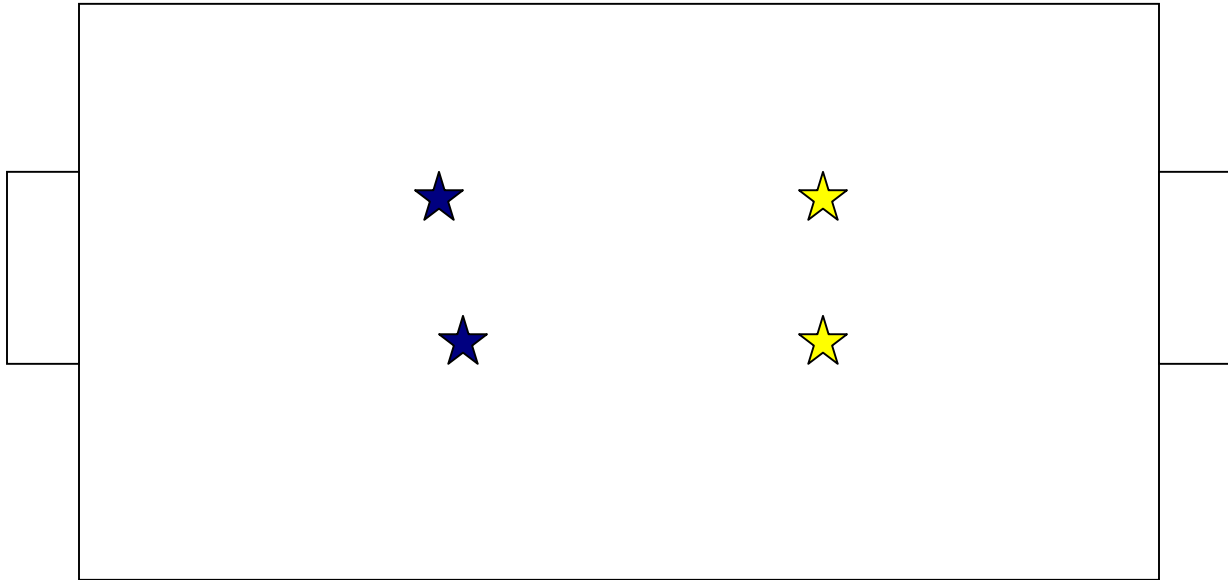


Diagram five

Final Activity

Back to the circle with the triangle inside. But now add 4 goals 10 yards away from the circle.

In their pairs the players have to pass the ball backwards and forward 3-5 times inside the circle. Once the 3-5 passes have taken place the person in possession runs into the triangle and throws the ball towards one of the four goals for their partner to chase and score as quickly as possible. Once they score they retrieve the ball and start the process again.

Coaches should encourage the players to shoot early and from distance.

To add competition; the coach can place all the soccer balls in a pile and the players have to score goals and then take another ball. Once all of the balls have been used count the number of goals scored by each pair.

Parents debrief as players eat snacks

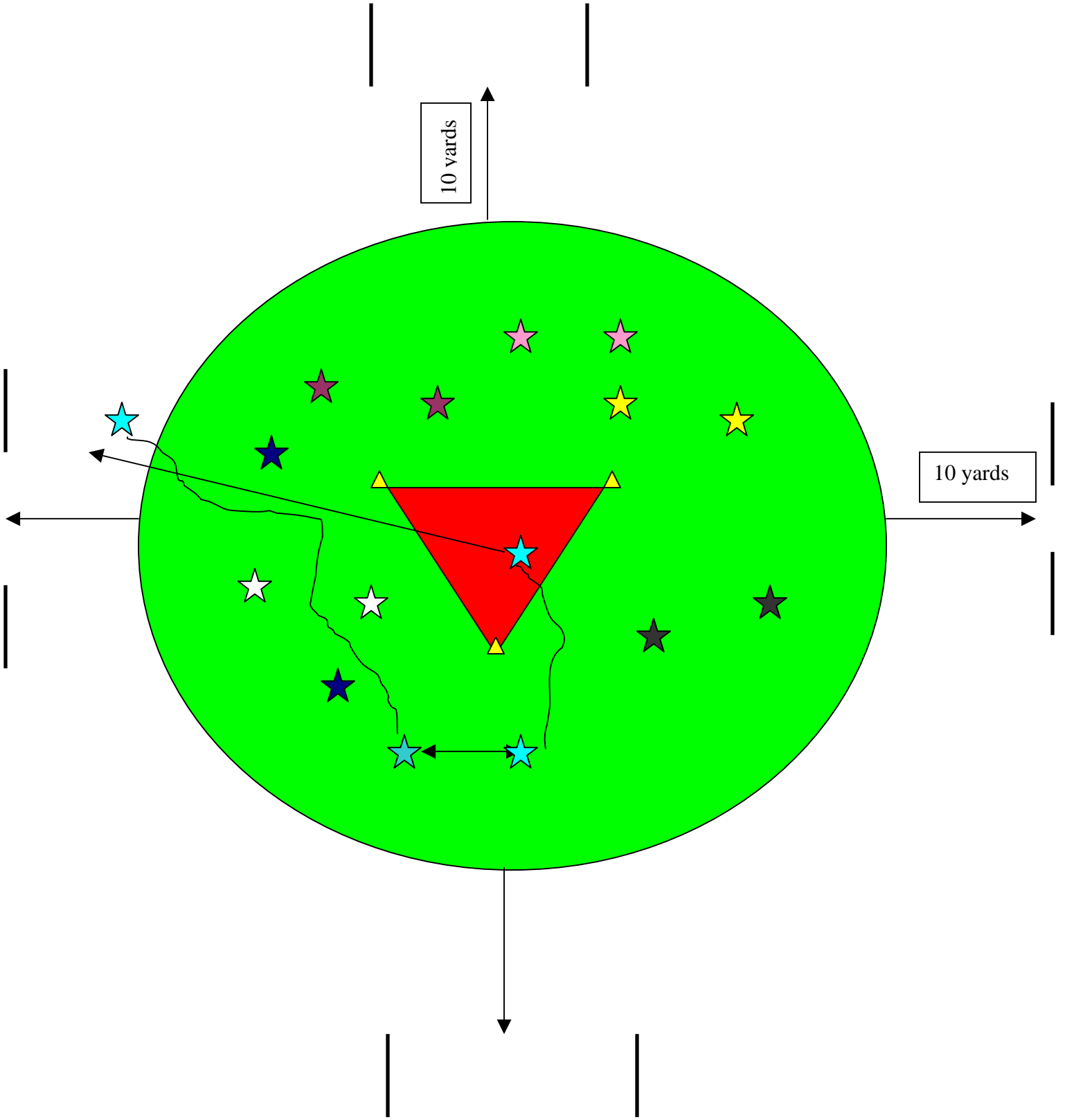


Diagram six

Session Three

Skill acquisition Activity one Warm-up

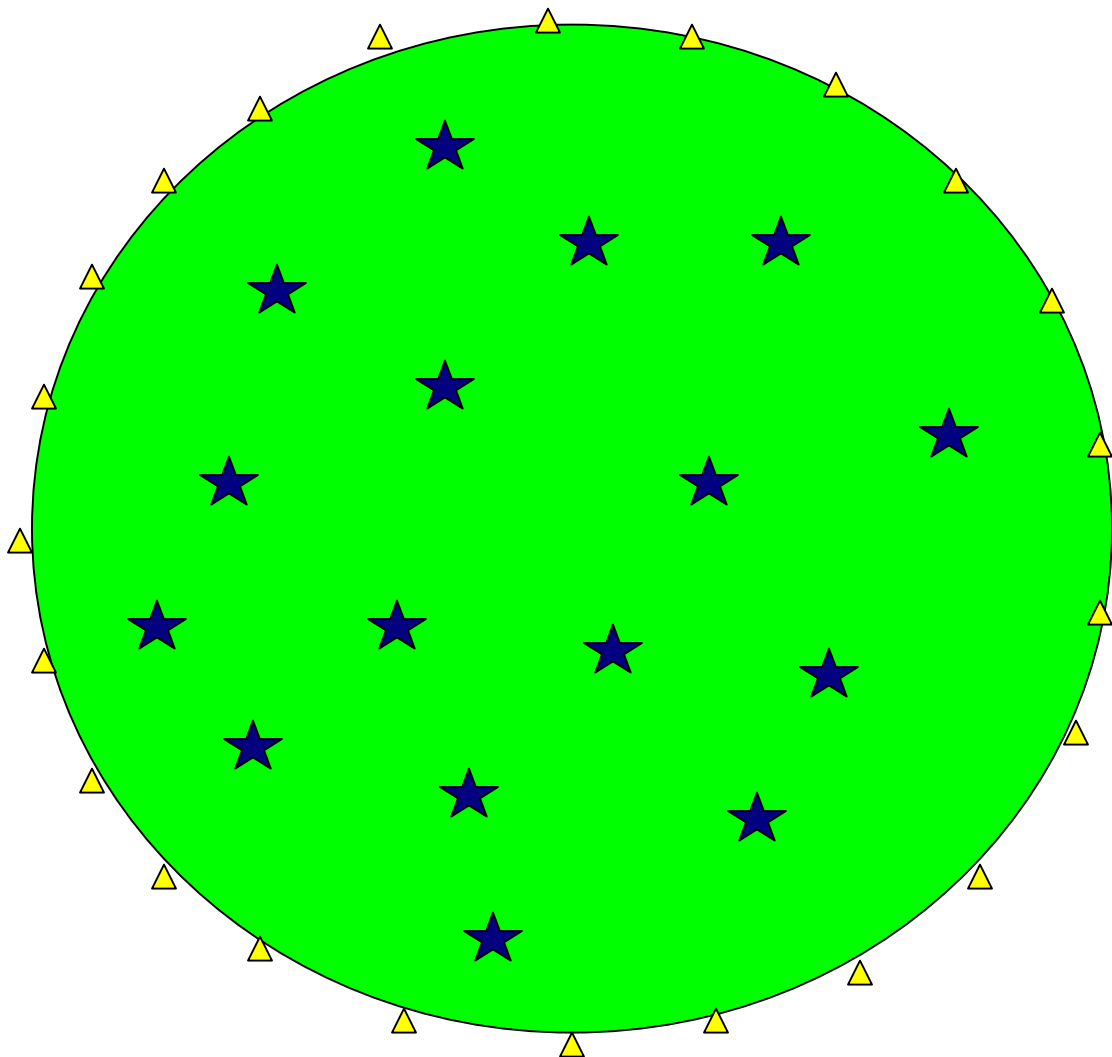
Diagram seven below

Each player needs to have a ball in an area of 20 x 20 (Inside the center circle)
The coach asks the players to stay with their ball around the area and encourages them to move quickly.

The coach should watch how the players change direction and ask individuals to demonstrate to the group different styles. Demonstrate one example and let the group practice before moving on.

After giving several demonstrations ask the players to throw the ball into the air away from them (but not going out of the area), they must then chase the ball and turn and then dribble before picking it up again and repeating.

Coaches can then ask different players to demonstrate again and discuss (quickly) the important points.



Coaching Points

- 1) Keep your eye on the ball
- 2) Turn using different parts of the foot.
- 3) Keep control of the ball

Move onto; Throw the ball into the air and then use a part of the body to direct the ball away from the player, (Not out of the area) they must then chase turn and dribble the ball before repeating the process.

Coaches should encourage players to experiment with different parts of the body.

The same coaching points will come out but coaches must ask why they are choosing specific turns?

Skill Acquisition Activity two ***Diagram eight below***

Ask players to stand next to one of the cones around the area marked out for previous activity (20 x20 yard circle)

60% of the players without a ball.

The players with a ball have to dribble the ball across the area to a player without a ball. The must stop the ball in front of this and take their place on the cone. The 2nd player then repeats the activity.

The coach must insist on the players “stopping” the ball in front of the players. Also insist on this activity being done very quickly.

Coaching Points

- 1) Take a big first touch into the space.
- 2) Get the head up to find a free player.
- 3) Move across the ground quickly but with the ball under control.

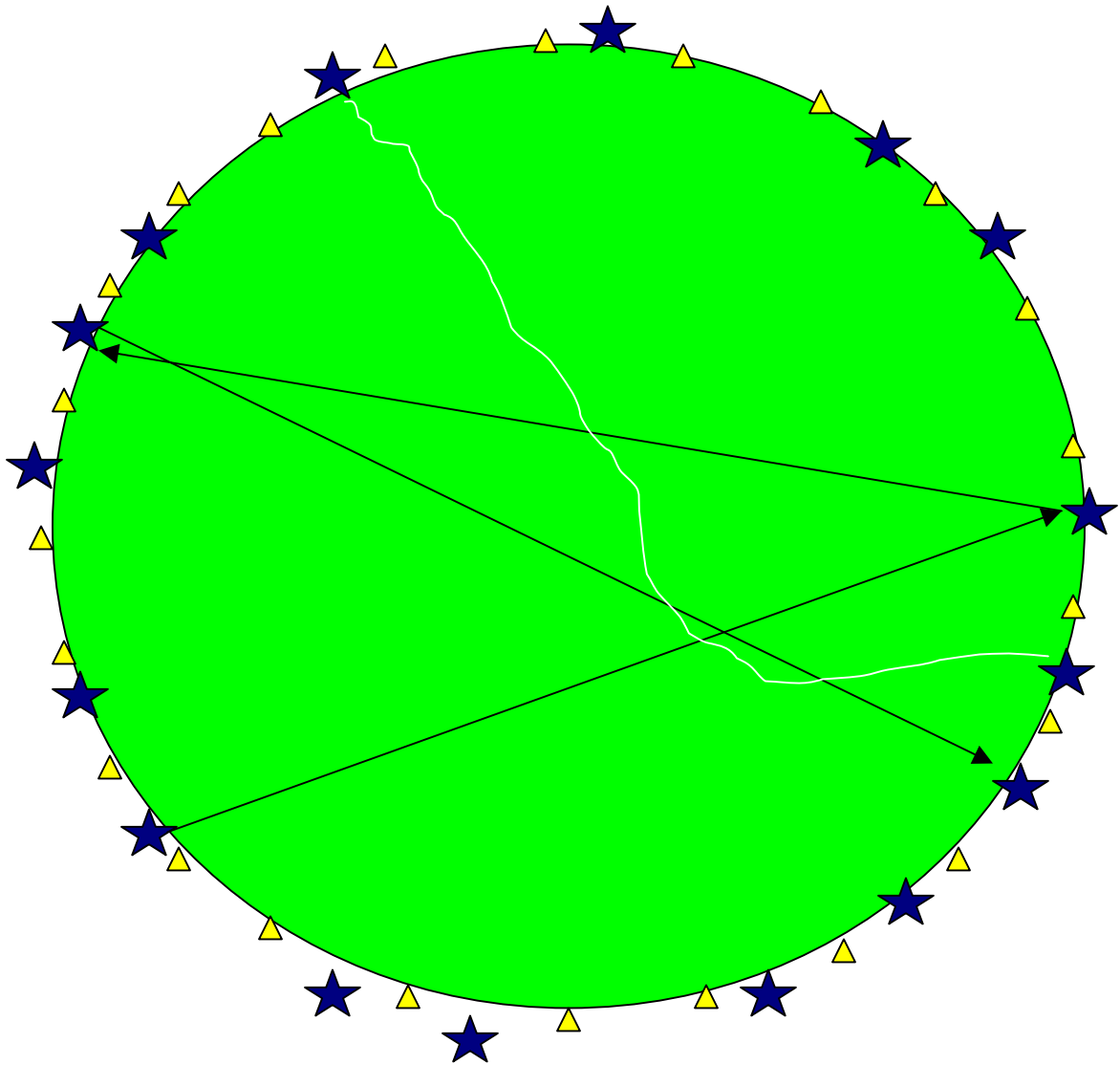
Progressions

Ask the player to pick the ball up, throw the ball into the air, chase the ball, regain control and find a free player.

Play the ball out into the circle, spin around in a complete circle then chase the ball, control and find a free player.

Throw ball into the air, use a different part of the body to direct the ball into space, control and find free player.

Coaches should focus on the control of the ball, the turns and the speed of the activity.



Skill acquisition Activity three

Refer to Diagram five

Put players into teams of two, get them to sort out the field and play against another team.

Allow for 8-10 minutes of free play.

Coaches to influence appropriate levels of ability in these games.

After 8-10 minutes the coach can go around to individual games and ask the players to introduce two rules for their game.

Allow another 8-10 minutes of play and then bring all teams together and discuss the rules (giving reasons for the rules) introduced in all of the games.

Skill acquisition Activity four

Diagram ten

Two goals 24 yards apart with two six yard boxes marked out in front of both goals. The width of the area should be the same size as the width of the six-yard box 20yards approximately. The area in between the 2 six yard boxes is the area we will be working in.

Keep the players in their teams and give them a number that both players must remember.

The players must stay with their ball turning, dribbling inside the area until their number is called. Once their number is called both players must try and score. The first player to score gets a point.

Condition; both players cannot score in the same goal.

If the players do not keep moving their number will not be called out.

Progressions

Players must hit the net without bouncing.

Players must pick the ball up and volley the ball into the goal.

Players must pick the ball up and half volley into the goal

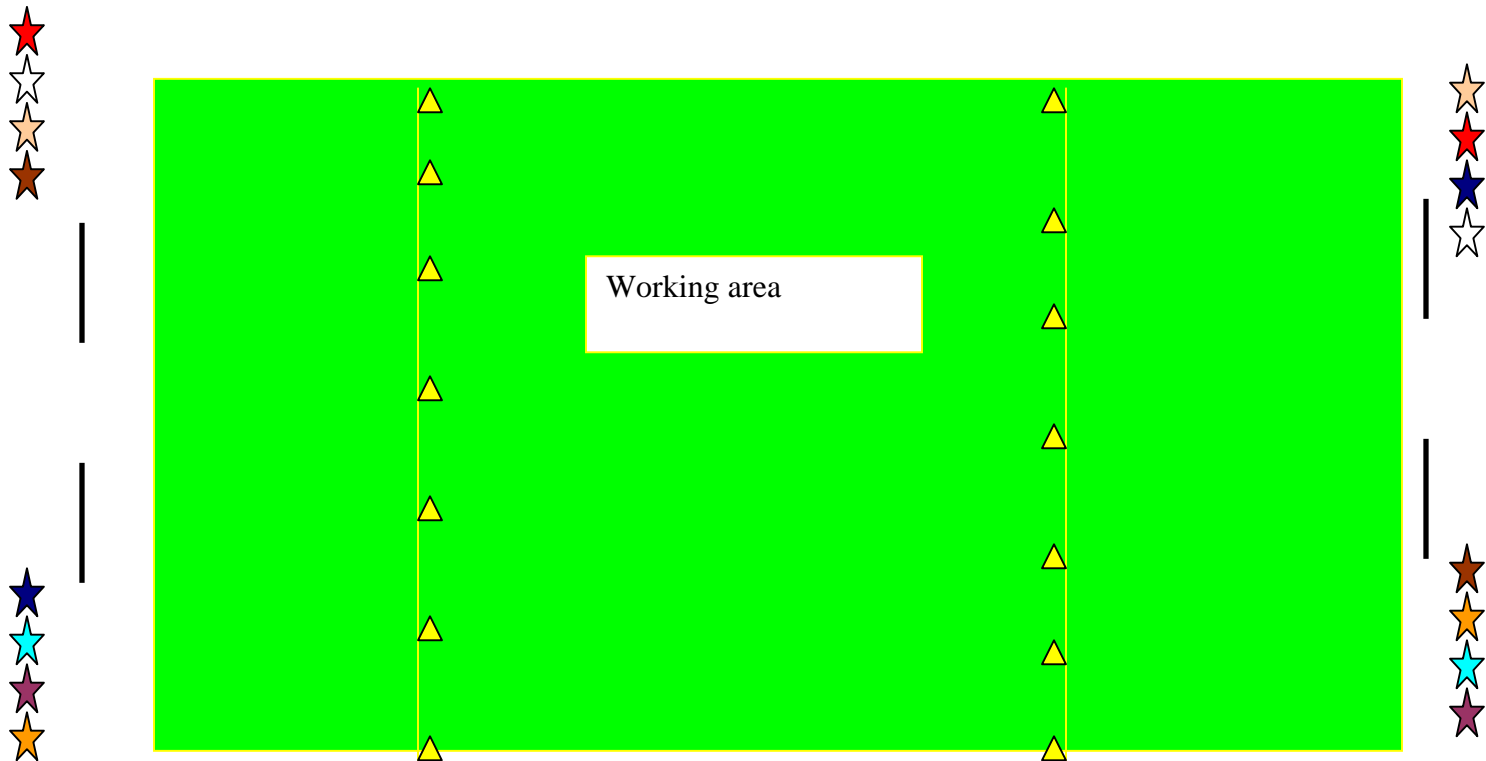


Diagram ten

Skill acquisition Activity five

See ***Diagram nine below***

Players to line up along side each of the goals. Each member of the team on opposite sides next to the goals.

The coach will call out the numbers and the players must throw the ball across the nearest six-yard box and run on and shoot the ball first time at the opposite goal. The first player to score gets a point.

Progressions

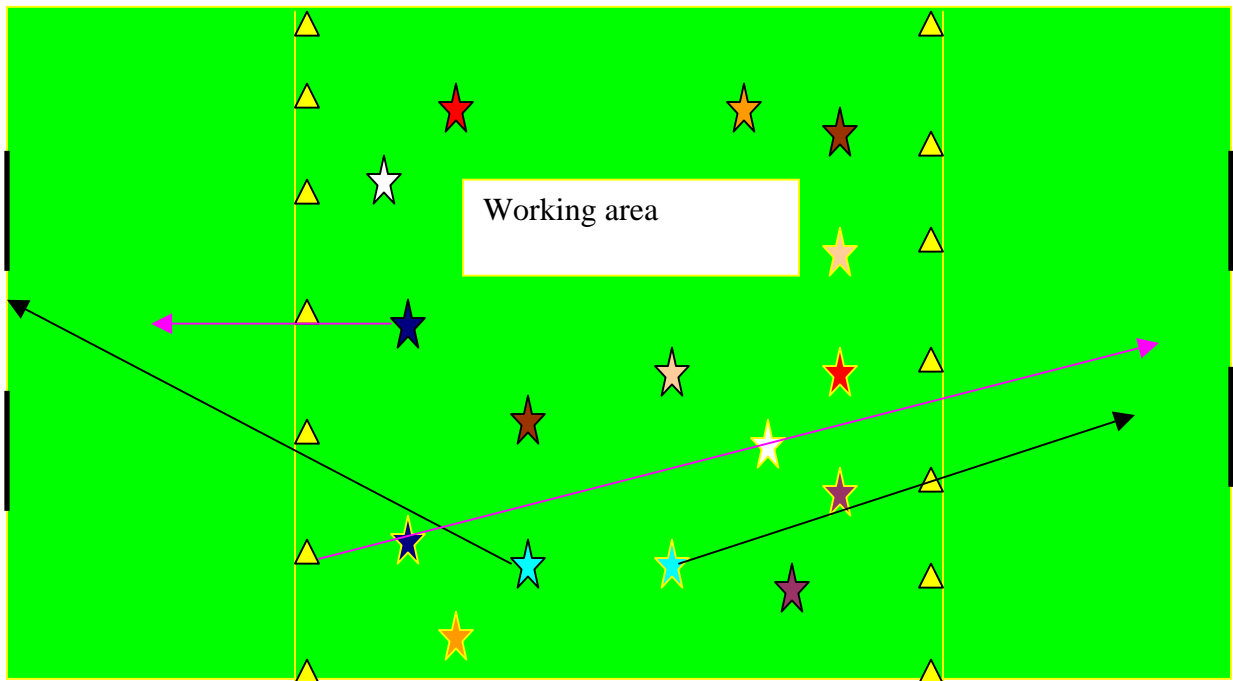
Throw the ball into the air; control the ball into the shooting area and score.

Shoot from inside the nearest six-yard box.

Volley the ball from the edge of the nearest six-yard box.

Throw the ball into the shooting area and hit your opponent's ball as quickly as you can.

Parents debrief whilst players have snack



Session Four - Competitive games

Competitive games Activity one Warm up

Diagram eleven

Use an area the size of a center circle. Ask players to dribble the ball in and around the area without contact with other players. Coaches should insist that this is done with speed.

Introduce different ways of turning away from the other players.

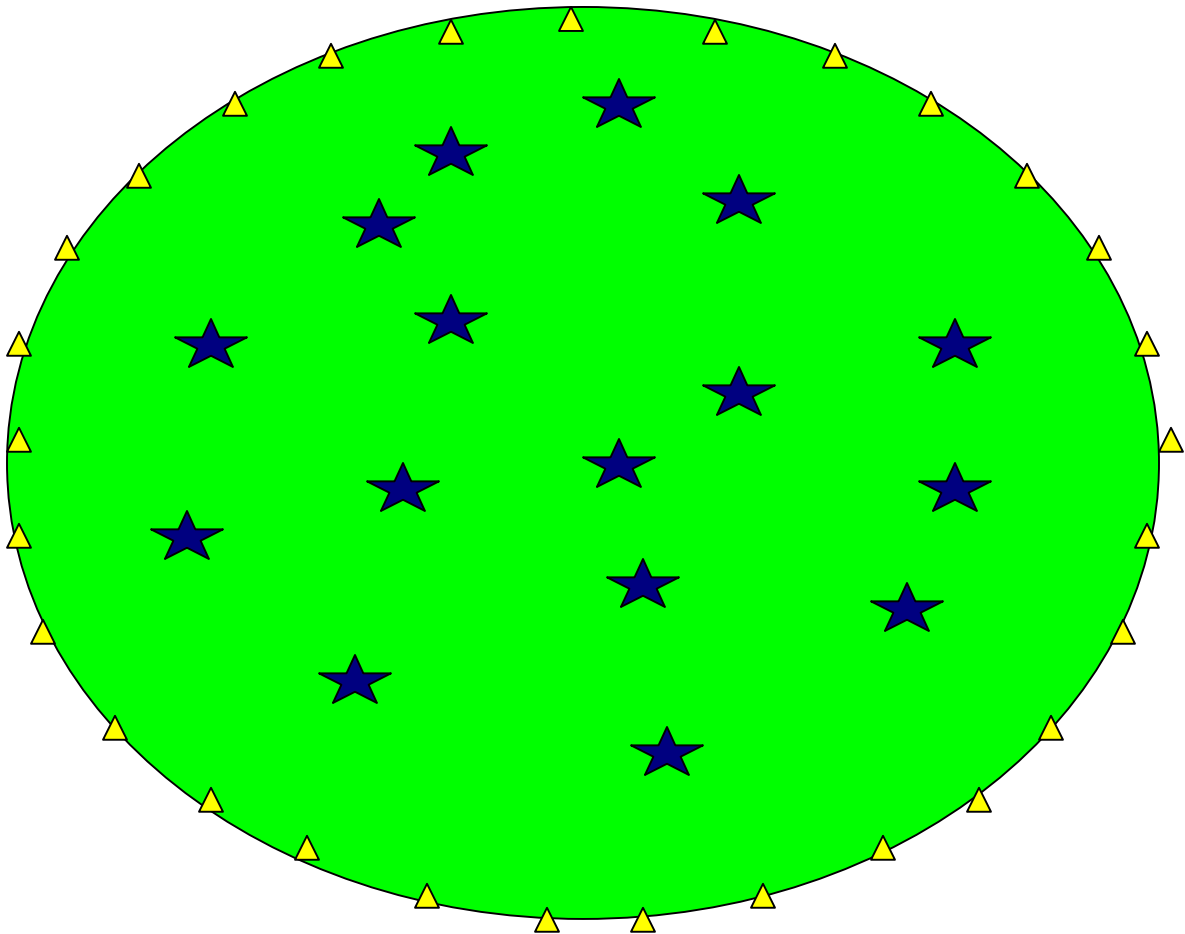


Diagram eleven

Competitive games activity two

Diagram twelve

Get the players to stand beside a cone situated around the area (Center circle) and number them as a one or two.

The coach then asks the player's in the group "one" to run around the circle (without the ball) and get back to their ball as quickly as they can by running around all of the number

(two's" who remain at their cones. (I.E. Players to run around the circle and get back to their spot) Repeat this with number two's.

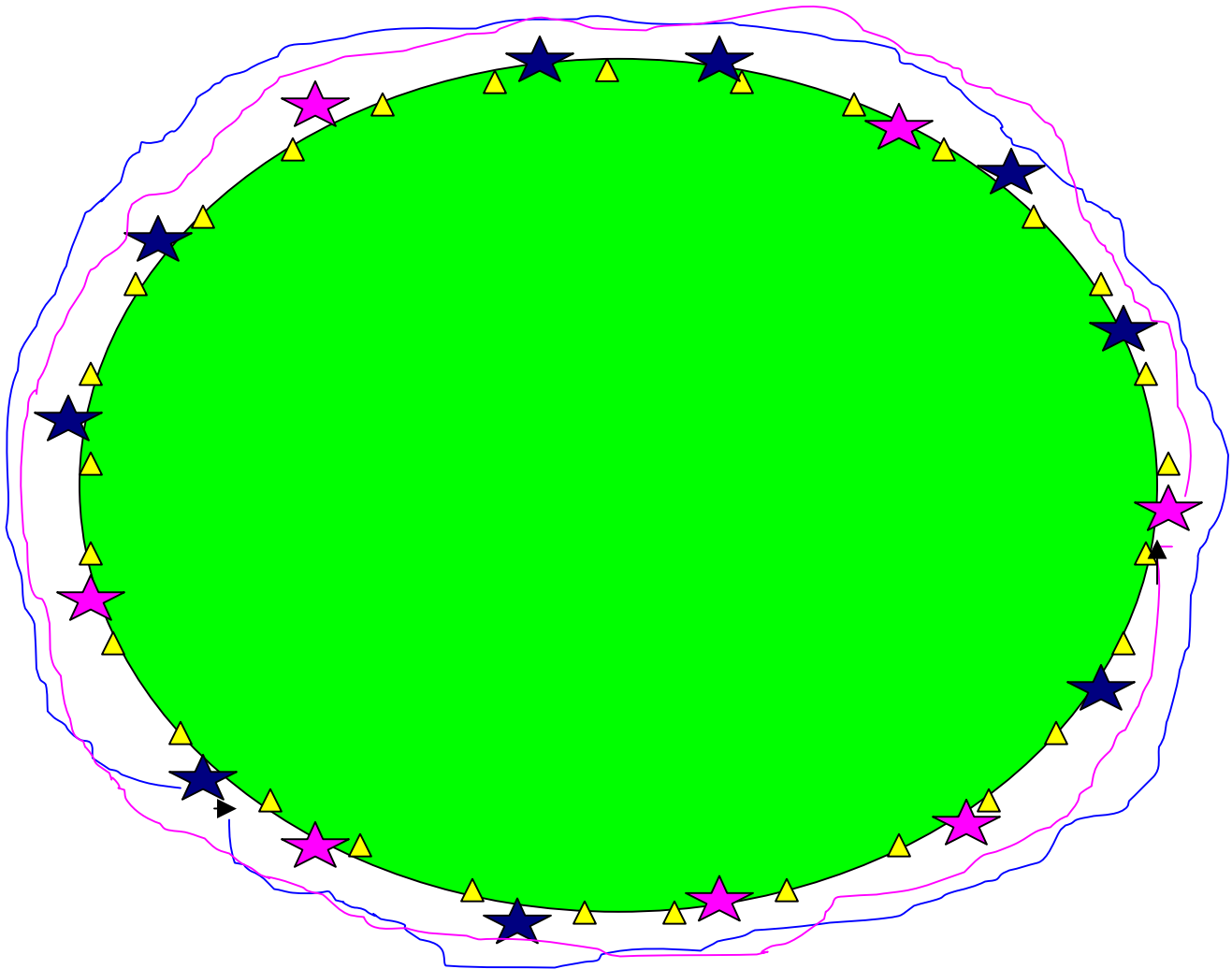


Diagram twelve

Progressions

Players select the direction
Groups run together any direction
Groups run in opposite directions
Add the ball and repeat all of the above.
One group with a ball one without a ball

Coaches must continue to reinforce the need to get back quickly and win.

Competitive Games activity Three

Introduce an outer circle around the center circle two yards wider than the circle. This will be a safety zone/skills zone for the players.

With in the inner circle add 5-6 gates.

The players must move around the outer circle until they can enter the inner circle run through a gate and get back into the safety zone without getting touched by the coach.
(Without a ball)

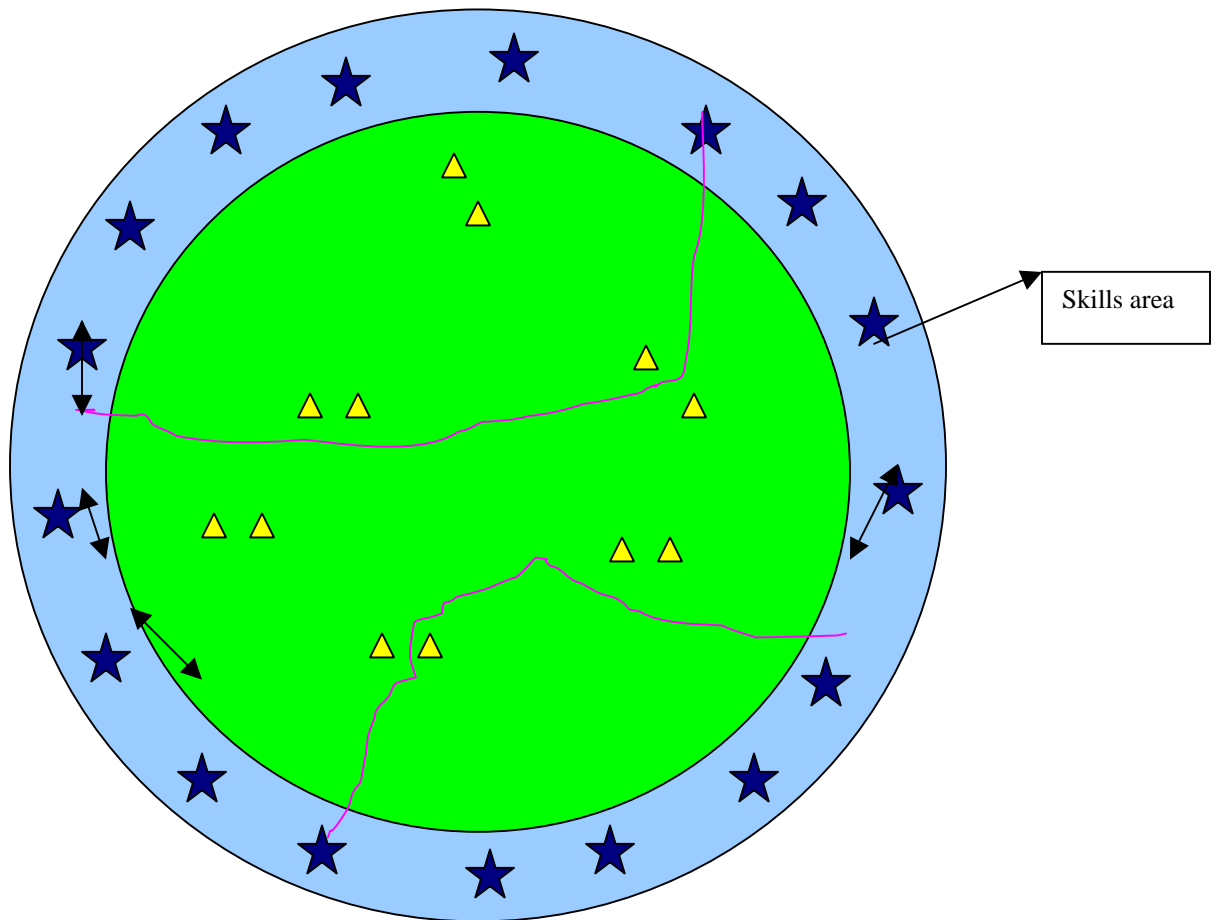


Diagram thirteen

Progressions

- Add defenders to replace the coach
- Limit defenders to one half of the circle
- Add the ball. (Insist not standing still in skill/safety zone)
- Get players to dribble through different gates before specified by the coach. Different Colors or numbers
- Add or restrict defenders.
- Gates on different sides of the circle before leaving inner circle.

Competitive Games Activity four

Diagram fourteen

Select teams according to ability and play 3 versus 3 in an area no bigger than 20 x 20 yards.

Ask teams to select some rules for the game. Play for 8-10 minutes then review the rules and make changes if necessary. Play for a further 8-10 minutes.

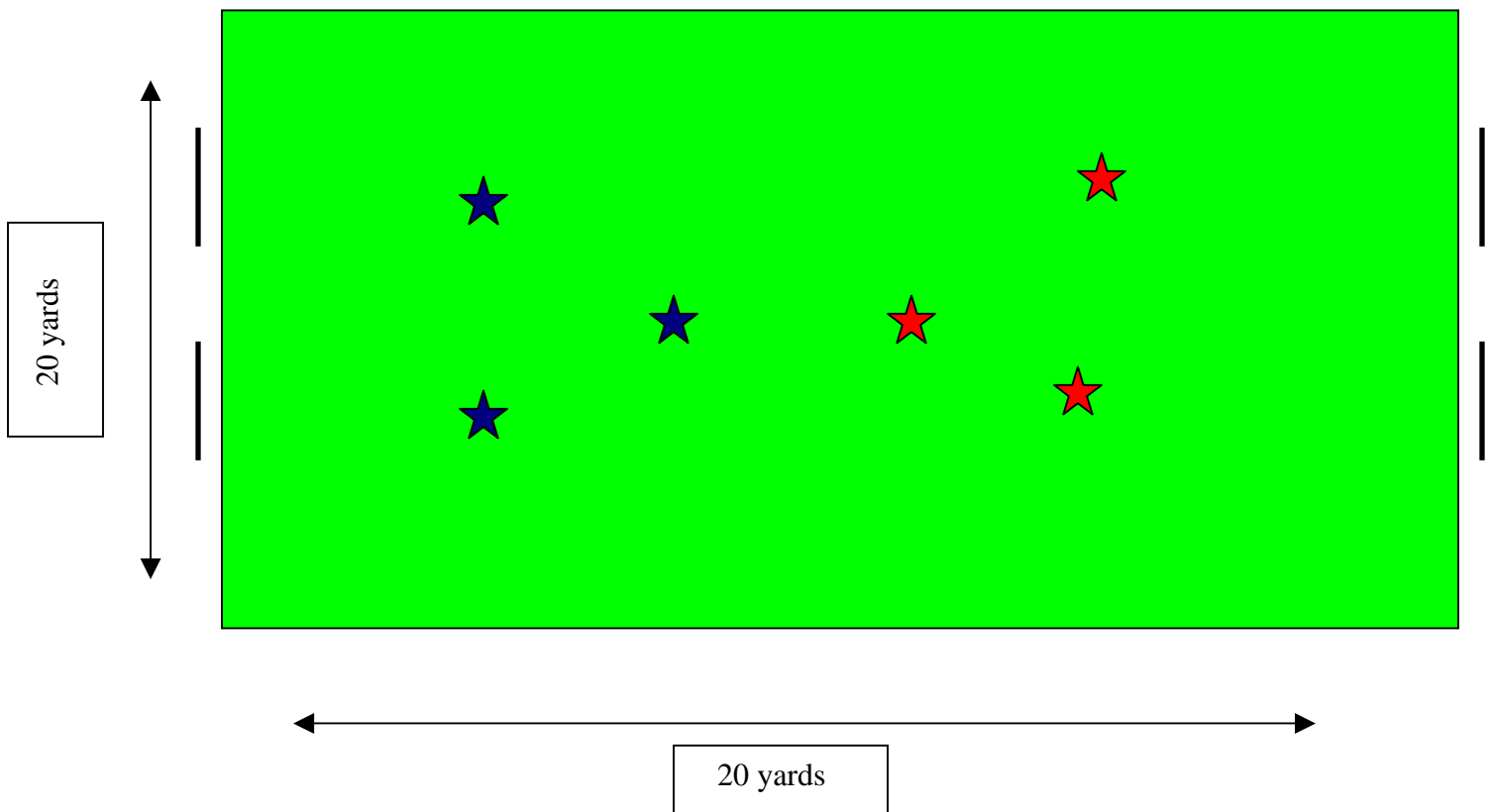
Bring all teams together and discuss the rules in each game and then set rules for a bigger game involving all of the players.

In the big game set the field out in thirds. (Two attacking thirds and a middle third)

Each team will have players in each third; the players can only play in the areas directed by the coach.

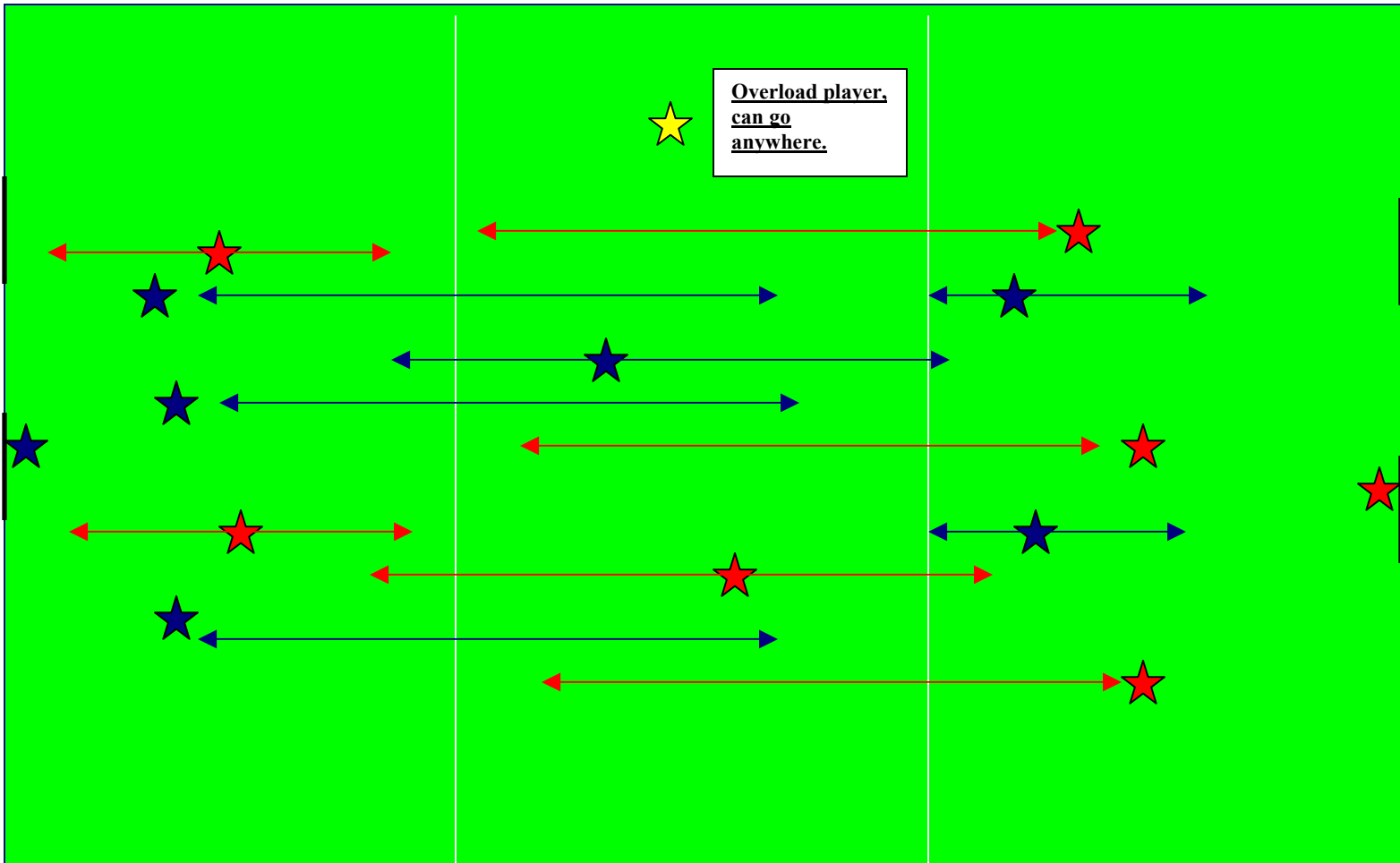
Example; Strikers must stay in their own final third. Defenders can operate in their defending third and middle third. Midfield players can operate in all areas.

Parents debrief whilst players have snacks



Overload players in Yellow on diagram fifteen on next page

Diagram fifteen



Session Five

Ball manipulation work Activity one ***See Diagram sixteen below***

Prepare an area somewhere in the region of 40 x 40 yards any shape.

Within the area place sets of cones in groups of 4-5 cones around the area. Try and use different color cones in each group.

The players are requested to stay with their ball and visit each set of cones; they must dribble the ball in and out of the cones before going and finding a spare set of cones.

Progressions

The coach can decide on a certain color cone to start the dribbling at each set.

Use different feet for each sequence of cones.

The coach can direct a certain part of the foot to be used whilst the dribbling

Coach shouts out “turn” at any time and players must go in opposite direction wherever they are.

Introduce turns during the practice.

Coach to request dribbling with weaker foot.

Coaching Points

- 1) Keep control of the ball.
- 2) Perform the practice with speed.
- 3) Use different parts of the foot.
- 4) Keep the head up where possible.

Ball manipulation Activity two ***See Diagram sixteen below***

Keeping the same session lay out as the previous activity, put the players in pairs with a ball between two. The players perform the same activity but once they complete a dribbling sequence they must then pick up the ball and throw it to their partner, they then control the ball and then select the nearest set of cones to dribble through and repeat.

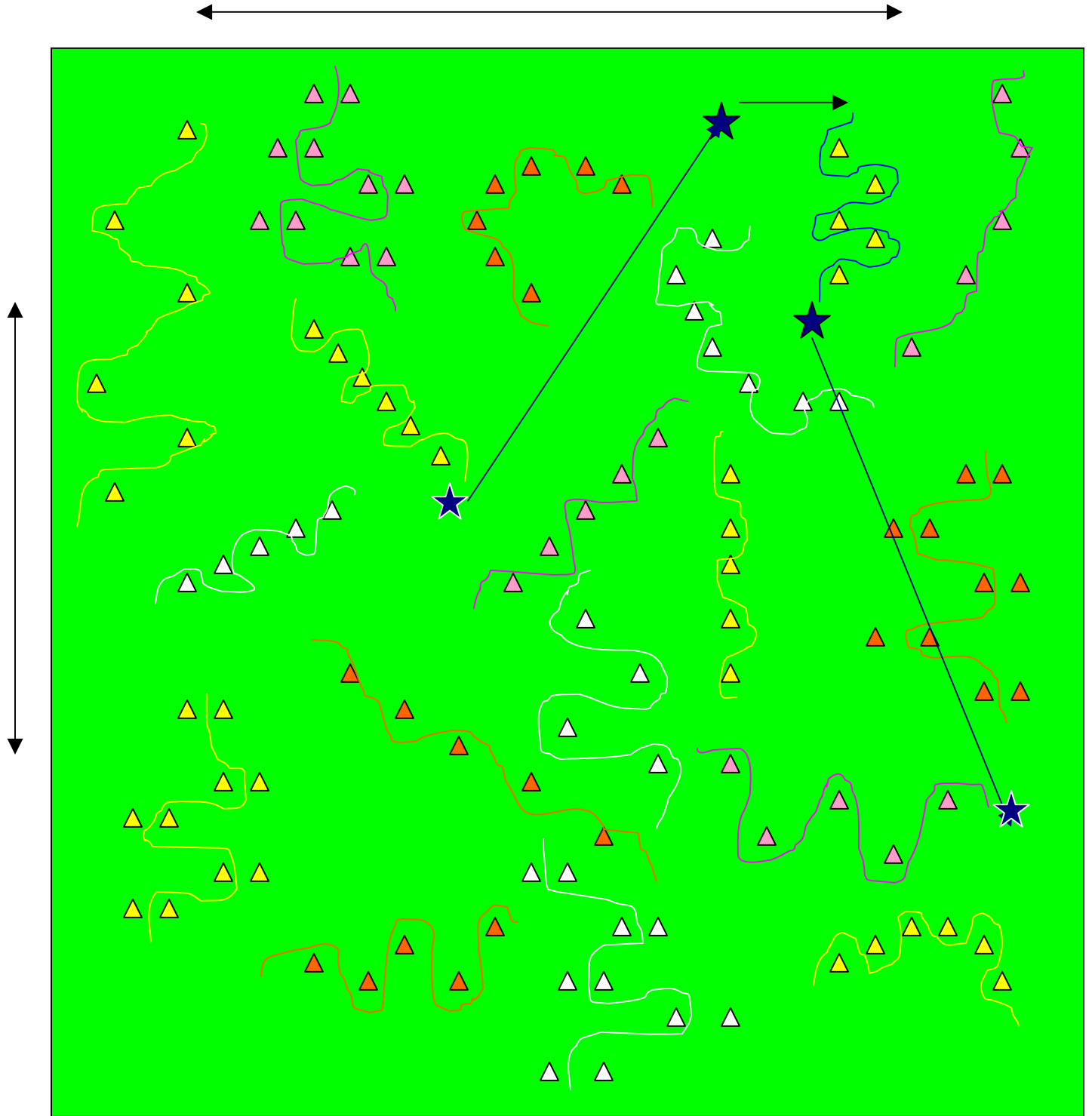
Progressions

- 1) Vary the throws; high, low, bounce.
- 2) Instead of dribbling through the cones, players can pass the ball through cones alternatively.
- 3) Players can play with the other players and not just their partners.

Coaching points

- 1) Control the ball towards the cones
- 2) Use different parts of the body.
- 3) Keep the ball under control during the dribbling.
- 4) Complete a good pass

Diagram Sixteen



Ball manipulation Activity three **See Diagram Sixteen**

Keep the same session layout as two previous activities. Keep players with their partners but now add a defender who has to stop them from dribbling or passing through the sequence of cones. Start off with the ball in the hands first, with the defender having to “tag” instead of tackling.

Progression

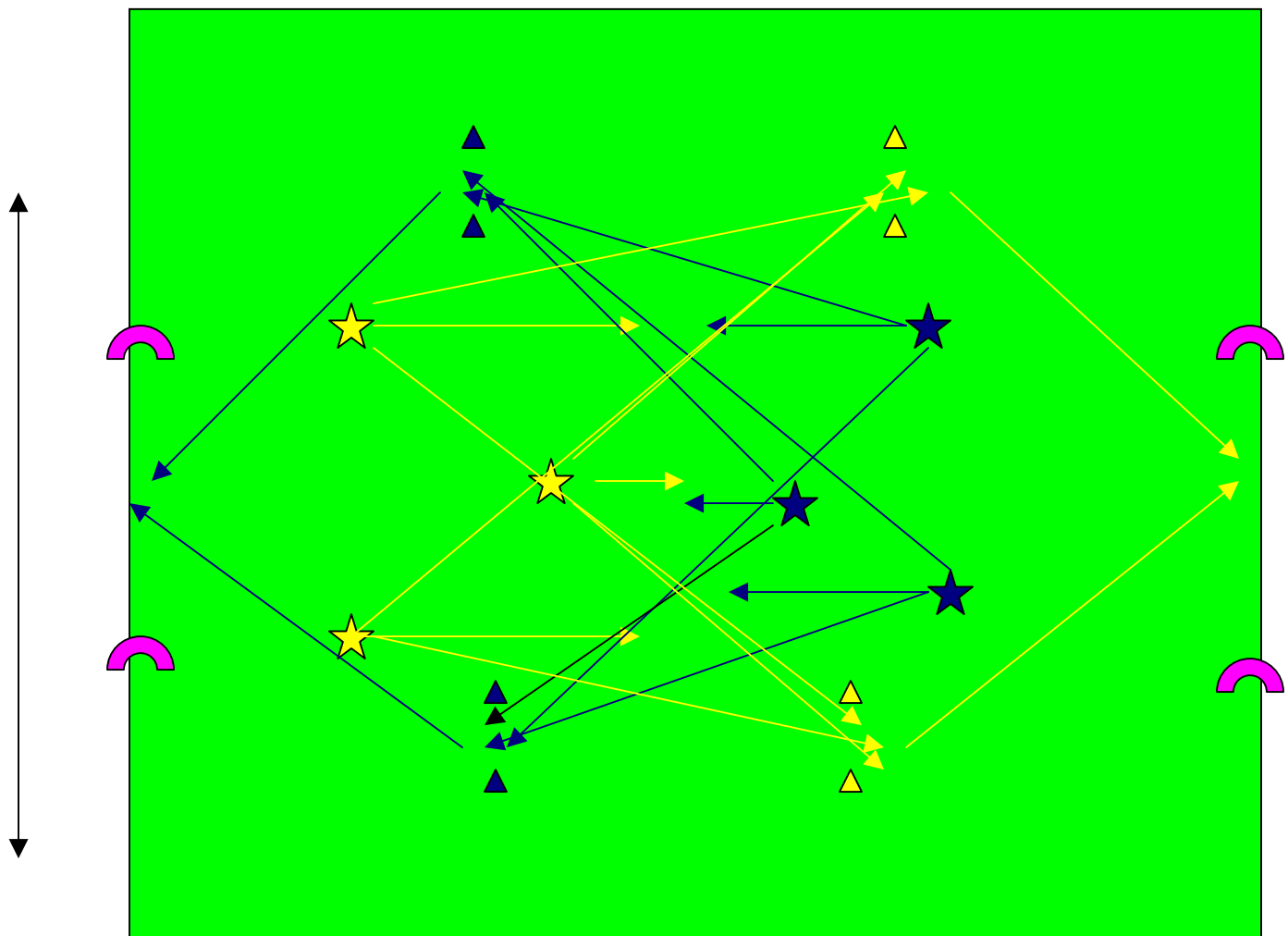
- 1) Add the ball.
- 2) Play with other players not just your partner.
- 3) Add defenders
- 4) Take away the number of sequences.

Ball manipulation Activity four **See Diagram Seventeen below**

Place players in teams of 3-4 in an area of 20 x 20 yards. Have two big goals one at each end as a normal field. Add in 2 small gates on the area, if players can run through the gates that count as a goal.

Add more gates if needed (less ability) and color co-ordinate the gates.
Play for 8-10 minutes and then review add rules.

Play for another 8-10 minutes switching teams if appropriate.

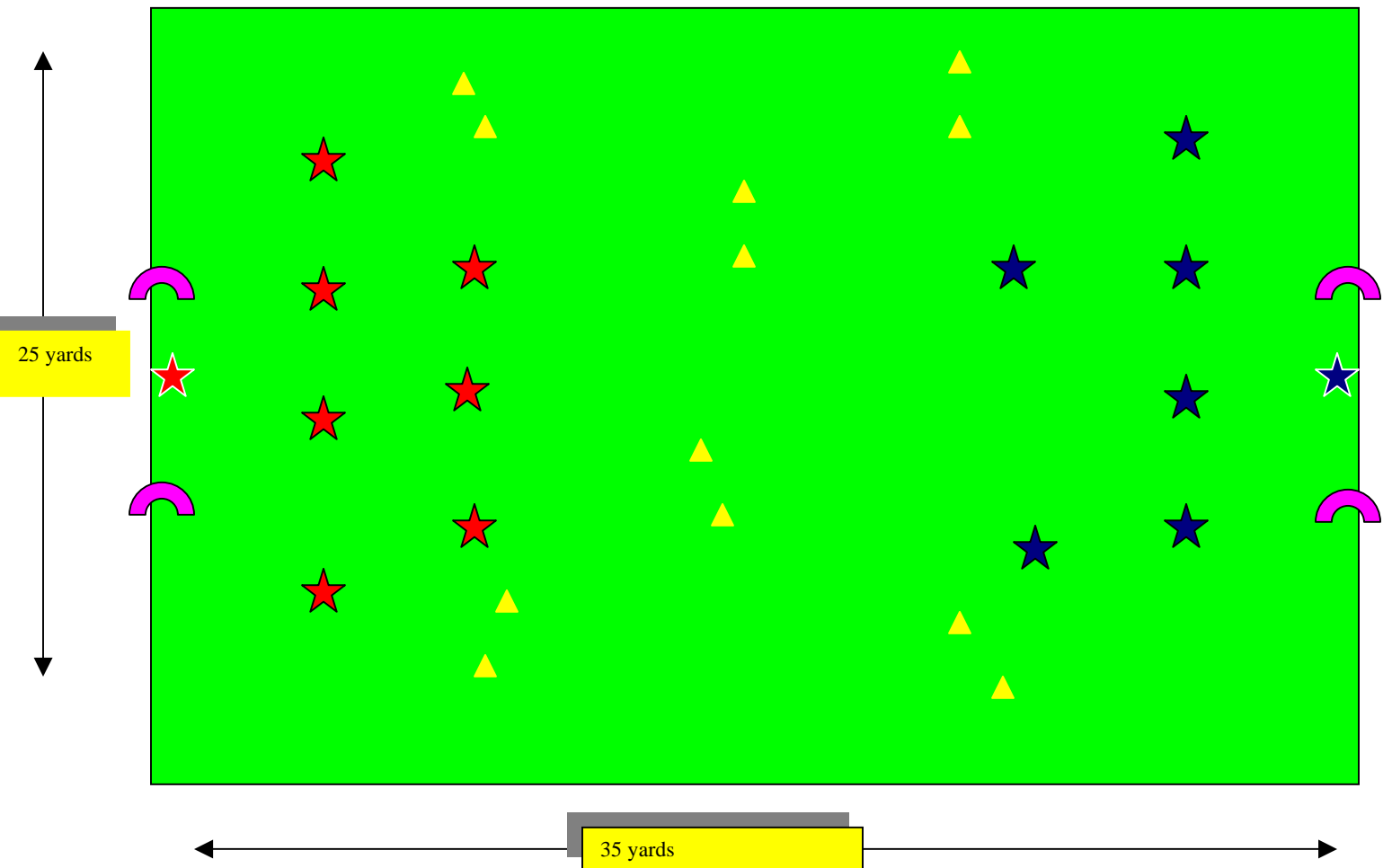


Ball manipulation Activity five

See Diagram Eighteen below

Divide the group into 2 teams on a field 35 x 25 yards. Add 4-6 gates as in previous activity to encourage the players to dribble through and get goals.

Parents debrief whilst players have snacks

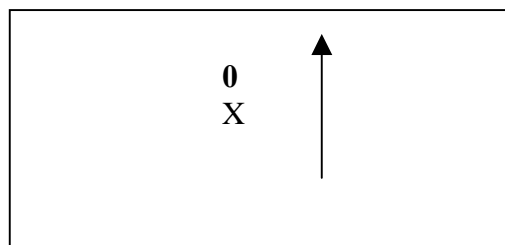


INDEX

- GK** means Goalkeeper
X means player
O means player
▲ means player
R means resting player
Bibs means pinnies
O/L means overload player(s). This is where a player(s) is/are free from a team and play(s) for who ever it is indicated in the practice resulting in that team having an **EXTRA** player(s). This helps the practice to be more successful. E.g. If you are doing a finishing practice having an overload player (**EXTRA** player) on the attacking team it will help the practice be successful.

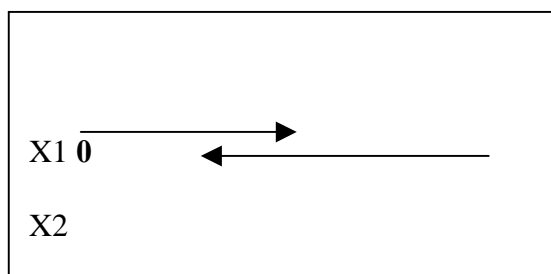
Unopposed - this is where players in possession of the ball have no opponents allowing them to perform the skill being practiced

Overlaps - this is where a player supports a team mate in possession of the ball by running past them on the outside of their position.



OVERLAP

Take-overs - this indicates where a player in position of the ball runs with the ball towards a team mate. The team mate then 'takes' the ball of him/her and therefore directly changing the direction of play



TAKE OVER

X1 travels with ball in direction of arrow and X2 travelling in the opposite direction takes the ball of X1

Combination - A combination is where two players combine when in possession of the ball to confuse opponents. A take-over is a combination. Other examples of combinations are the wall-pass, overlaps, underlaps and one-two's.

Conditioned Touches – where players are given a condition when playing e.g. maximum of two touches.

Safety Zone – where players can perform skills without pressure from defenders