



How players I

The essential elements of an up-to-date, efficient shooting training program. By **Ralf Peter** and **Norbert Vieth**, DFB staff members

Intense situations in front of the goal and (more importantly) successful shots—these are clearly the high points of any match. Safety, precision and versatility are important factors for successful shooting. Young players have to learn and master the basics of technique and tactics if they want to perform like true “goal getters” in front of their opponents’ goals.

Whatever happens in front of the goal in a match must already be familiar to players from many practice sessions.

How are goals scored?

Shooting training must always be structured according to one of the basic principles of modern soccer: Practice influences match play, and vice versa. Training objectives arise directly from the match, because they’re meant to improve match performance. This is the only way a soccer training program can truly prepare players for the demands of match play.

This basic insight of modern soccer training influences the content of practice sessions as well. All exercises must be directly related to the demands of match play. There’s no point in practicing things that don’t happen during a match!

But how do soccer players set up goals and score? Analyses from professional and amateur soccer have yielded some valuable information.

Regarding setting up goals and scoring, the most important trends are the following:

- Most goals are shot from within the penalty box. In particular, attackers are extremely successful in the area between the penalty box line and the penalty spot. The proportion of goals scored on long shots from outside the penalty box, on the other hand, is vanishingly small.
- Direct shots seem to have the most potential for scoring goals. Current analyses support this observation. For example, nearly 40 percent of all

Sebastian Deisler has a broad repertoire of accurate shooting techniques that allow him to shine whether he is setting up shots or putting them away.

YOUTH TRAINING

Learn to shoot

goals in the 2000-01 Bundesliga season were scored on direct or volley shots.

- Meanwhile, goals scored after long-distance dribbling and goals scored after controlling the ball came in at the low end of the scale.
- Headers, on the other hand, have excellent chances of success: Current Bundesliga statistics corroborate earlier analyses, which showed that roughly every fifth goal is scored on a header.
- Attackers use an extremely wide variety of techniques, as each situation demands: shots from the ground and from the air, side volleys and half-volleys, “soft” and carefully aimed shots at extremely short range or long shots with maximum power.
- In closing, one other interesting aspect of the analyses deserves to be considered: On the majority of successful shots, not only is the shooter in the penalty box, but often the passer is as well.

These results clearly illustrate the best ways for forwards to score in today’s soccer. When it comes to setting up shots, combination plays and solo runs to the penalty box line are hardly ever effective methods – the opposition stops them before they even get started. In today’s soccer, defenders keep the playing space in front of the goal extremely tight; attackers barely have room to move! They have fractions of a second, at most, to take their shots.

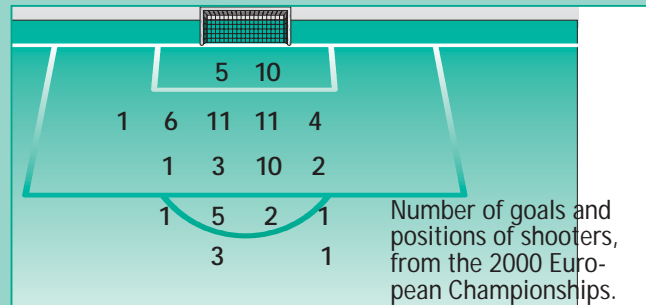
Shooting training should be realistic

If we compare most traditional shooting exercises against these statistics, it becomes clear just how many coaches ignore the principle that the challenges players face in practice must correspond to the demands of match play.

So what are the individual guidelines to be observed by today’s training programs? Here are the most important ones:

- Make time and opposition pressure a part of as many shooting exercises as possible.
- Shooting training should always combine games in and around the penalty box with simple and complex exercises that conclude with shooting. In the games, special rules and requirements encourage players to practice the technical-tactical aspects of shooting in a very focused way.
- The precise mix of simple exercises, more complex exercises and focused games is determined by players’ ability level (see the section below on “Shooting Training for Youth Players”), the time of the year, and/or the team’s current standing. Your expertise and intuition will help you decide which “prescription” is the right one for your team right now.
- The games and exercises within a given practice session must systematically build on one another. Always move from simple to complex.

Illustr. 1 Shooting training: The basics



Game analyses show that the majority of goals are scored from the penalty box – a fact to keep in mind when creating a shooting training program that is relevant to match play.

1

All exercises must be directly related to the demands of match play. Match conditions should determine the content and objectives of the training program.

2

Especially in youth soccer, it’s important to have a variety of shooting exercises that are playful, age-appropriate and focused on fun.

3

Create the right mix: some simple exercises, and others that are more complex and demanding, plus shooting games.

4

Practice shooting in small groups. Set up regular small group sessions (based on position and ability level) focusing on various concepts.

5

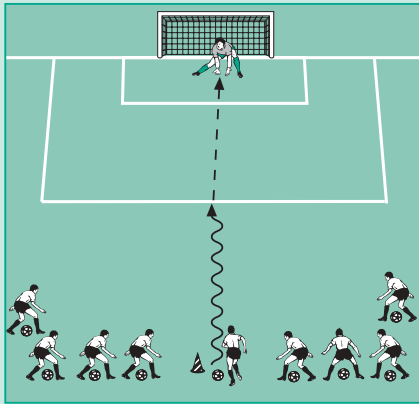
The concept of setting up goals and shooting requires a systematic, long-term training program.

6

Encourage players to enjoy the risks of shooting. Successful shots, even during practice, always deserve special attention and recognition.

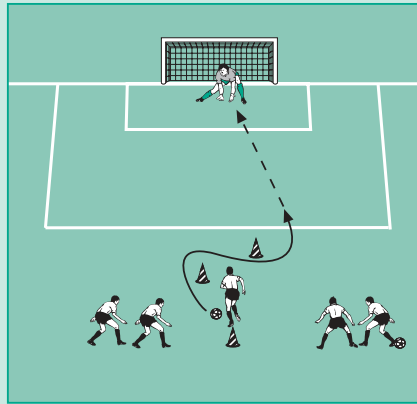
Illustr. 2 Guidelines for shooting training 1

TIPS Shooting exercises



WRONG

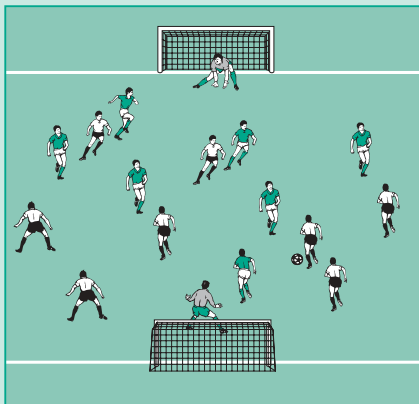
- Large groups practice in front of a single goal; individual players have to wait much too long.
- Training programs are standardized, with a few exercises that are always the same.
- Shooting exercises are not relevant to match play (e.g. dribbling from the centerline).
- There is no time or opposition pressure.



RIGHT

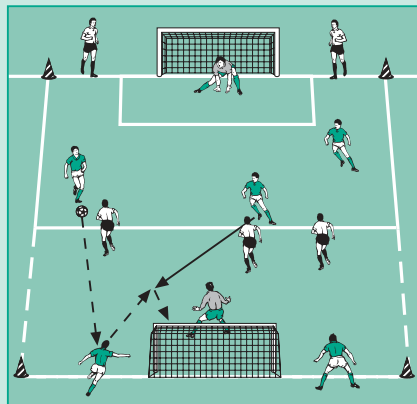
- Practice on multiple goals simultaneously, so groups can be smaller and repetitions become more frequent.
- Make exercises systematically more demanding, and introduce variations that include opponents as soon as possible.
- Make use of a broad repertoire of shooting exercises that are attractive, yet always based on match play.

TIPS Shooting games



WRONG

- Repertoire is limited to a few standard variations with large teams.
- Games take place in zones and areas that are not relevant to match play.
- Team is not divided up in terms of match requirements (no position-specific training).
- Coach makes no demonstrations or corrections.



RIGHT

- Program includes a variety of small-sided games in and around the penalty zone.
- Special rules encourage players to take risks and shoot often, creatively and flexibly.
- Short, extremely intense games alternate with simple shooting exercises.

Good shooters don't grow on trees: Shooting training for youth players

6- to 10-year-olds

● Shooting goals is the most fun part of soccer. Kids are fascinated and excited by the simple idea of "shooting and blocking shots." Therefore, youth players should be given plenty of opportunities to shoot and gather positive experiences in the course of practicing with their team.

● The small-sided games that are the mainstay of youth training at this age level provide young players with, first and foremost, opportunities to shoot. But the coach still needs to choose teams carefully and introduce additional rules if necessary, to make sure all players, even the less skilled ones, get the chance to score on a regular basis.

● In addition to small games on goals, shooting opportunities can be built into practically any exercise that teaches basic techniques (like dribbling, receiving and controlling the ball, and passing); these exercises become competitions focusing on the question, "Which of you can score the most goals on this exercise?" This increases kids' motivation immensely.

● In teaching shooting techniques, as with all motivational exercises that teach basic techniques, the objective is not perfectly executed movement sequences. At this age level, children should be becoming familiar with basic techniques in crude form and developing their own "style" with the ball. The coach should only make corrections occasionally, for exceptionally noticeable problems.

10- to 14-year-olds

● 10- to 12-year-olds normally have excellent coordination. Quick, precise movements are easy for them. So young players in this "golden age of learning" should now start expanding and perfecting the specific techniques they've already mastered in crude form.

● This rule applies to shooting as well. On one hand, young players should practice shooting techniques repeatedly, until they're polished and close to the "ideal picture." On the other, repetition of specific movement sequences isn't the only thing that's important at this age level. Players must also learn to apply techniques appropriately in order to be able to deal with game situations effectively.

● In terms of learning and stabilizing shooting techniques, this means: Whatever happens in front of the goal in a match must already be familiar to players from many practice sessions. Therefore, the coach should regularly

organize games and exercises to provide the shooter with challenges that are new, but always in keeping with the real demands of match play.

- Between the ages of 12 and 14, players' mental abilities improve, and tactics training can become more demanding. With regard to shooting training, this means systematic training in group tactics for taking advantage of shooting opportunities.

- At this age level, practice should always be accompanied by demonstrations and corrections. On-the-spot visual presentations are indispensable for youth players. They are far more instructive than lots of long theoretical discussions.

14- to 18-year-olds

- At this age level, technique training moves back into the foreground, since 14- to 16-year-olds, in particular, have both excellent observational skills and high coordination in this "second golden age of learning."

- This is the coach's last opportunity to achieve major advances and bring technical skills to a high level in a relatively short amount of practice time.

- Naturally, 14- to 18-year-olds face considerably higher demands on their technical ability. Above all, it's important to coordinate technical-tactical sequences with improvements in individual technical skills (including much more dynamic movements).

- Therefore, developing a dynamic "match technique" (i.e. stabilizing shooting techniques under time and opposition pressure and at high speed) becomes the main focus of practice.

Tips on organizing shooting training

Perfectly planned shooting exercises that are relevant to your team's age level, current style and ability level, and the demands of the game—these are a must. But it is just as important to organize your training program efficiently. Although it is impossible to take every problem into account ahead of time (the ability to improvise is an important coaching skill), you can keep things running smoothly by following a few basic rules:

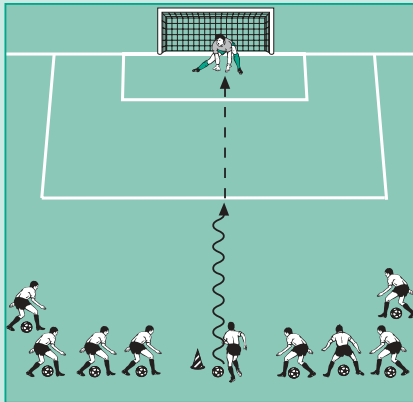
- Always make sure players never have to wait too long between repetitions. With shooting exercises, this means always forming small groups.

Acquiring a portable goal is the best way to make your practice sessions more efficient.

- To help players orient themselves, mark starting positions, dribbling and running paths, and shooting lines.

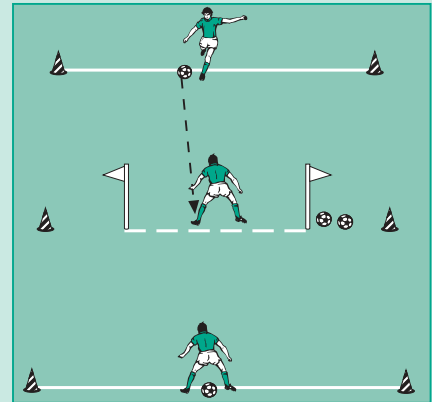
Illustr. 3 Guidelines for shooting training 2

TIPS Shooting training for beginners



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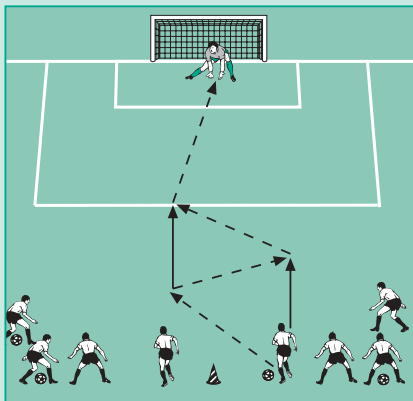
- Static, monotonous practice sessions because there are not enough shooting exercises.
- Large groups practice on one goal.
- Goals scored are not recorded; successful shooters are not acknowledged.
- Everyone does the same exercise: Less advanced players are overwhelmed; more advanced players are bored.



RIGHT

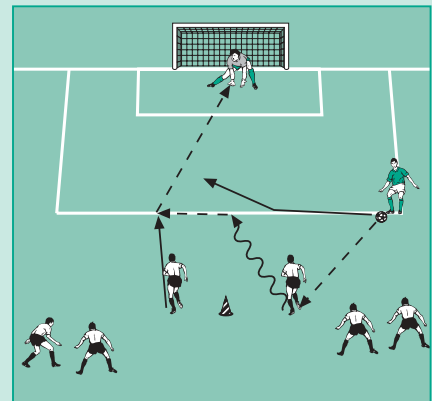
- Combine every shooting exercise with a competition: "Who can shoot the most goals in this exercise?"
- Make shooting a part of every basic technique exercise.
- Provide a variety of challenges with exercises that are constantly changing but always age-appropriate and interesting.

TIPS Shooting training for advanced players



WRONG

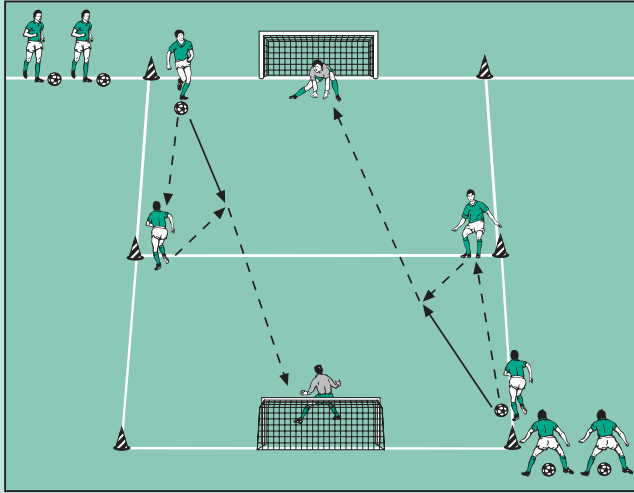
- Exercises are artificial, with no relation to match play.
- Instead of a systematically constructed shooting program, the team jumps randomly from variation to variation.
- Coach does not provide corrections or detailed suggestions for improvements.
- Players are not divided into groups based on position and ability level.



RIGHT

- All shooting exercises are related to real game situations.
- Opposition pressure, intensity and field size all vary.
- Coach offers detailed corrections and suggestions.
- General exercises focusing on perfecting shooting techniques are mixed with position-specific exercises.

1 Learning/Mastering shooting techniques



Sample shooting exercise Instep Kick

Setup

- Set up two goals with goalkeepers facing each other, separated by twice the length of the penalty box.
- Players form two groups of equal size and stand at opposite corners.
- In front of each goal stands a passer.
- Each player has a ball.

Sequence

- The first player in each group plays a wall pass with the passer, dribbles a short distance and shoots with a precise instep kick. Afterwards, each player switches to the other group.
- Variation: The shooter must shoot no later than the third touch.

Objectives/Principles of this section

Objectives

- Perfect mastery of a variety of shooting techniques, to give players a variety of ways to score in match play.
- A solid foundation for accurate shooting, even under time and opposition pressure.
- Main focus group for this section is 8- to 12-year-olds.

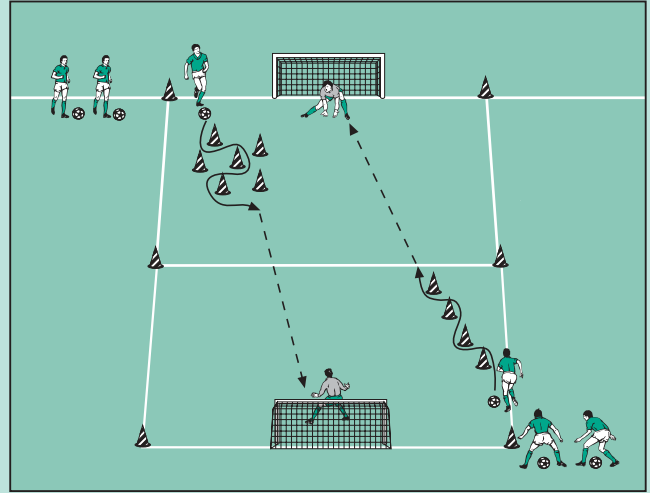
Principles

- Let players try out and polish the various techniques by repeating them multiple times. Keep the exercises interesting!
- Precision is more important than speed or power.
- Plan to spend several practice sessions concentrating on and systematically teaching each technique.

Additional training concepts

- shooting with the inside of the foot
- side volleys
- volley
- drop-kick
- header

2 Combining shooting with other techniques



Sample shooting exercise Learning to dribble and shoot

Setup

- Set up two goals with goalkeepers facing each other, separated by twice the length of the penalty box.
- Players form two groups of equal size and stand at opposite corners.
- Each player has a ball.
- Set up two different slalom courses: one straight slalom and one "cone jungle."

Sequence

- The first two players dribble through their respective slalom courses and shoot. Afterwards, each player switches to the other group.
- Variation: Set up one staggered slalom and a single cone (player dribbles around it one time).

Objectives/Principles of this section

Objectives

- Learning various basic techniques, with a shot at the end of each sequence. The point is to motivate players to focus better on all the techniques.
- Having fun!
- Main focus group for this section: 8- to 12-year-olds

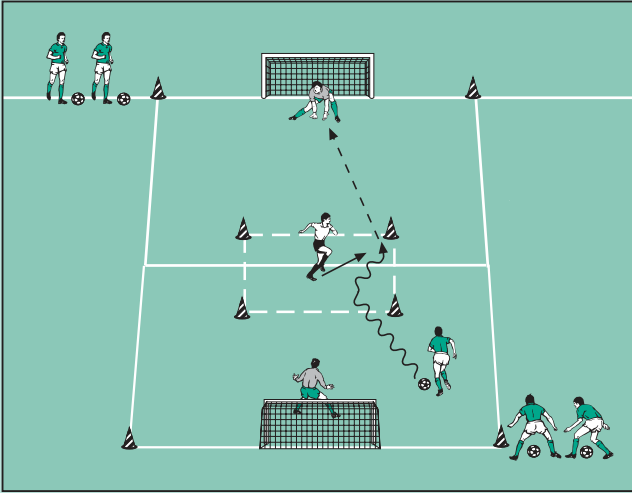
Principles

- Plan to spend three or four practice sessions in a row on each technical concept.
- To avoid challenging players too much or too little, give more advanced players different exercises (small group training).
- Plan small-sided games on goals between exercises.

Additional training concepts

- controlling passes on the ground and in the air before shooting
- various techniques in sequence, concluding with a shot

3 Combining shooting with basic tactics



Sample shooting exercise Playing 1 v. 1 to shoot

Setup

- Set up two goals with goalkeepers facing each other, separated by twice the length of the penalty box.
- Players form two groups of equal size and stand at opposite corners.
- Each player has a ball.
- One defender stands in a marked zone between the two goals.

Sequence

- The first player in one group dribbles toward the zone and tries to get past the defender and shoots.
- The next play starts with the first player in the other group (switch defenders after four plays).
- Variation: If the defender wins the ball, they switch positions.

Objectives/Principles of this section

Objectives

- Learning the basics of individual and group tactics, with a shot at the end of each sequence.
- Motivating players to concentrate on tactics training, and demonstrating how to use a variety of attack methods in match play.
- Main focus group: 10- to 14-year-olds

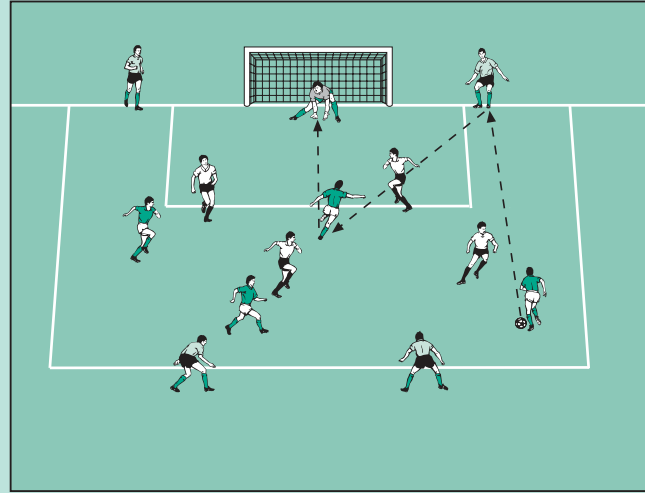
Principles

- Plan to spend three or four practice sessions in a row on each tactical concept.
- Teach players the widest range of individual and group tactics possible.
- Exercises should always approximate match play.
- Praise good performance!

Additional training concepts

- various 1 v. 1 attack situations, concluding with a shot
- various forms of combination play, concluding with a shot

4 Combining shooting with complex tactics



Sample shooting exercise Shooting game

Setup

- Players form three teams of four in front of a goal with goalkeeper.
- Teams A and B play 4 v. 4 inside the penalty box.
- Team C's players stand on the sidelines and to the left and right of the goal to act as passers.
- Keep extra balls ready by the goal.

Sequence

- Attackers play combinations with passers to score.
- If the defenders can win the ball and pass to a passer, Teams A and B immediately switch roles.
- Variation: Attackers must shoot directly.

Objectives/Principles of this section

Objectives

- Being flexible and using the right shooting techniques.
- Being willing to take risky shots.
- Playing intuitively and creatively.
- Main focus group: all age and ability levels; match demands to your players

Principles

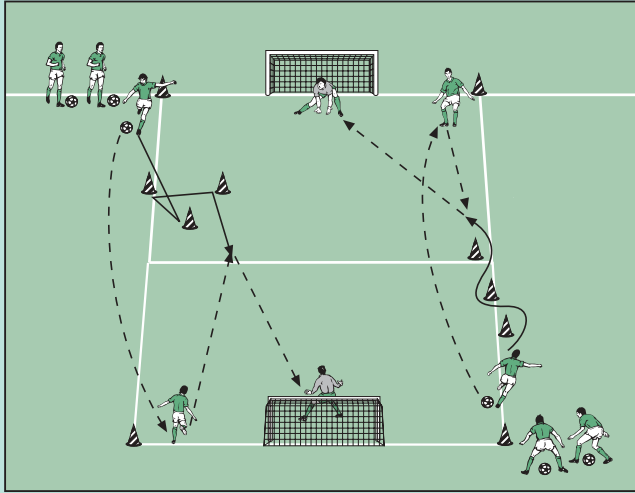
- Use special rules to focus players on the technical-tactical aspects of shooting and to ensure that shooting situations are frequent and realistic.
- The majority of practice should be devoted to exercises in small fields on two goals with goalkeepers.
- Make sure play periods and rest periods are properly balanced.

Additional training concepts

- 2 v. 1 concluding with a shot
- 2 v. 2 concluding with a shot
- 3 v. 2 concluding with a shot
- 3 v. 3 concluding with a shot

5

Combining shooting with condition



Sample shooting exercise

Short sprints and shooting

Setup

- Set up two goals with goalkeepers facing each other, separated by twice the length of the penalty box.
- Players form two groups of equal size at opposite corners.
- Each player has a ball.
- In front of each group stands a passer.

- Set up a different sprinting path in front of each group.

Sequence

- The first two players pass to their passers and sprint to the ends of their paths.
- Then they receive passes from their passers, dribble a short distance and shoot.
- Variation: The shooter becomes the next passer.

Objectives/Principles of this section

Objectives

- Improving various aspects of condition in conjunction with shooting. The objective is to get players motivated for focused condition training.
- Adapting quickly to new challenges.
- Main focus group for this section: 14- to 18-year-olds, plus all amateurs

Principles

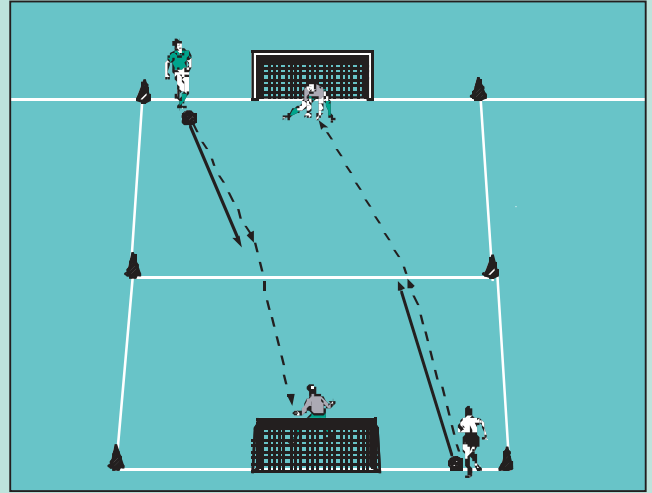
- Players should always be fresh for running exercises.
- Encourage players to get involved and stay fully focused.
- Make sure that running distances simulate match play (up to 15 yards).
- An intensive warm-up is mandatory before every speed training session.

Additional training concepts

- endurance runs or short series of sprints/ jumps, concluding with a shot
- coordination exercises concluding with a shot
- pressure training

6

Combining shooting with motivation



Sample shooting exercise

Who can score the most goals?

Setup

- Players execute various shooting combinations appropriate to the team's age and ability level.
- Important: Avoid exercises in which multiple players are involved in the combination, but only one gets to shoot.

Sequence

- Players keep track of all the goals they score in all the different exercises.
- At the end, the coach tallies the totals. Which player has scored the most goals?

Objectives/Principles of this section

Objectives

- Improving motivation and encouraging players to concentrate on shooting by making them compete against one another.
- Main focus group for this section: all age and ability levels, but especially beginners (young kids always want to compare themselves with others and see how their own abilities measure up)

Principles

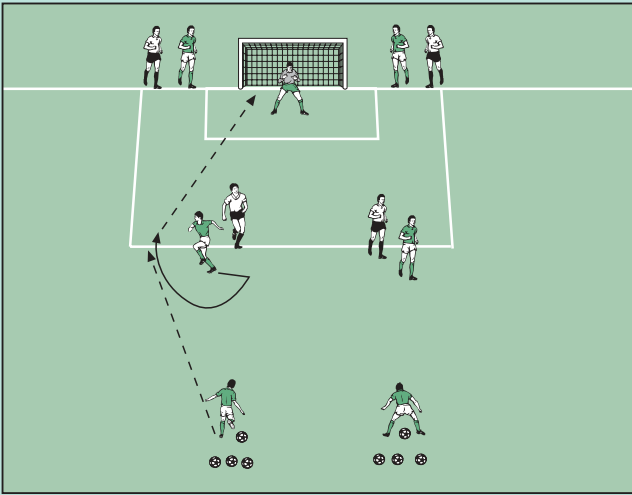
- Set up exercises so that every player can succeed.
- Don't forget to allot time for scoring the competitions and honoring the winners.
- If possible, record each player's score after each exercise.

Additional training concepts

- Shooting competitions between various groups
- Station training with various shooting exercises

7

Combining shooting with position training



Sample shooting exercise

2 man-markers v. 2 forwards

Setup

- Two forwards play against two man-markers in front of a goal with goalkeeper.
- Two passers occupy mid-field attacker positions in the backfield; each has several balls.

Sequence

- One after another, the forwards execute a series of plays and shoot.
- Play 1: 1 v. 1 on the goal after a pass to a forward.
- Play 2: 2 v. 2 on the goal after a pass from a passer.
- Play 3: One passer moves up, creating a 2 v. 1 situation.

Objectives/Principles of this section

Objectives

- Learning to set up shooting opportunities and score more effectively in the context of a specific basic formation.
- Systematically improving individual players in terms of the requirements specific to their positions.
- Main focus group: 14- to 18-year-olds, high-level amateurs

Principles

- Do not introduce position-specific shooting exercises until players have mastered a broad repertoire of shooting techniques.
- Make position-specific training for attackers (individually or in small groups) a regular part of your training program.
- Make focused, individual corrections.

Additional training concepts

- Using individual and group attack tactics in a formation with three forwards.
- Using a variety of attack tactics in a formation with a forward that plays on top.