An introduction to finishing

Training finishing in game-like situations

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In this installment of our continuing series on tactics, we are focusing on the possession phase of the game. The object of possessing the ball is to finish. Finishing is without doubt one of the most difficult topics to teach, due to the difficulty of recreating the intensity of the "game moment" in practice. If we want youth players to be able to practice finishing in suitable learning environments, we must work to ensure that finishing sessions are conducted with game-like intensity.

Line-based practices create a casual, staged environment, producing the exact opposite of the finishing moment in a game. The real finishing moment is one where the adrenalin is flowing, the crowd is screaming and the psychological pressure is at its height.

Finishing is essentially about solving problems in intense situations. Youth players need to learn that there are several ways to finish. The technique a player chooses to finish with depends on many variables: the position of the goalkeeper, the speed of the trailing sweeper, etc.

Most youth players believe that scoring goals is simply about being able to strike the ball with power. Often they choose power when it is the worst possible solution to the problem that the goalkeeper is posing. The sample practice session in this article introduces youth players to the many finishing solutions that are available and then examines these solutions in different pressure situations.

Technical/tactical notes

Before the shot, orient yourself in relation to the goal. Aim either at the open half (on long-distance shots) or the corners (at close range). Shots on the ground are harder for the keeper to stop. For the shot itself, focus on the ball so you can hit it accurately. For powerful long-distance shots, use the instep (full, inside or outside instep). You can finish more accurately with the inside or outside of the foot; you can also put spin on the ball that way. Wind up quickly and strike unexpectedly (possibly with the toes) when you are near the goal. Always stiffen your foot when shooting, either by flexing it (inside of foot), extending it (all instep varieties) or extending and rotating it inward (outside of foot). Use momentum instead of force: After contact, let the shooting foot follow through in the direction of the shot and keep watching the ball.

Coaching notes

Players should always be warmed up before practicing finishing. Set up games and exercises so that players practice shooting with both feet (preferably alternately). In actual play, most goals are shot from between the goal box and the penalty spot, and most shooters shoot on the first touch. Therefore, players should practice finishing at close range, adding opposition pressure as soon as possible. Small fields (e.g. twice the size of the penalty box) make for more chances. Missed chances should have immediate consequences (e.g. missing a good chance to shoot leads to an immediate penalty kick for the opposition). This also increases the mental pressure on players during training and improves their concentration.

Players should practice finishing at close range, adding opposition pressure as soon as possible.

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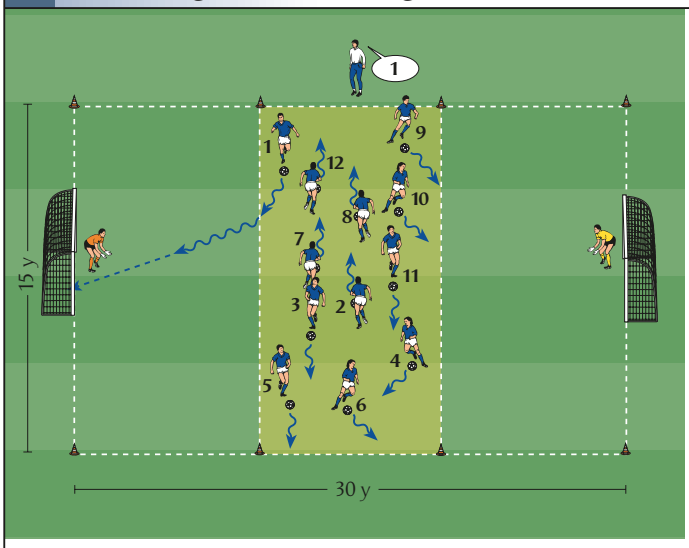
WARM-UP

Finishing after dribbling



Setup

- Mark out a 15 x 30-yard field with a 15x 10-yard field inside it.
- Set up two goals with goalkeepers.
- Each player has a ball and a number.
- Even numbers attack one goal; odd numbers attack the other.

Sequence

- Players dribble in the small field.
- The coach calls out a number (e.g. “1”), and that player attacks the appropriate goal.
- At the same time, the player with the following number (e.g. “2”) attacks the other goal.

Variations

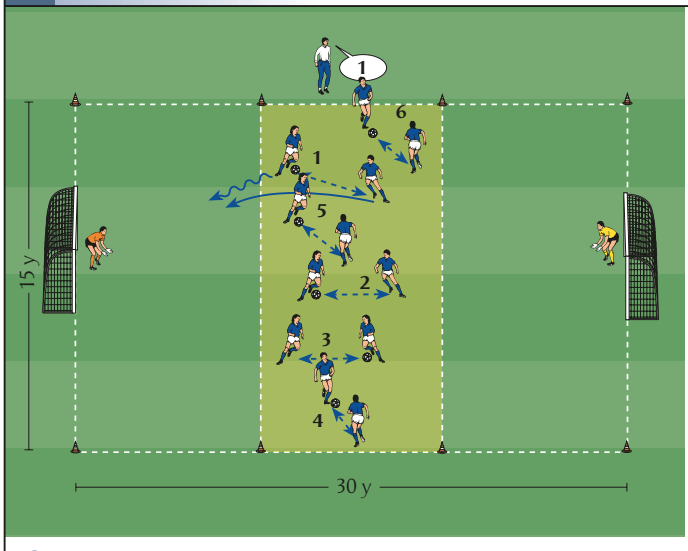
- Use a specific dribbling technique or practice different turns and fakes.
- Use a specific finishing technique.

Coaching points

- Explain and analyze the different ways players can score (pass, chip, curl, power strike or dribble the ball in).
- Work on perfecting chosen techniques.
- Have players mentally record how many goals they score.
- Have players imagine that they are a player with a great pace who has been set free from a slow sweeper; ten thousand fans are screaming their name and they are going to goal.

MAIN SESSION

1 Finishing 1 v. 1



Setup

- Setup is same as above.
- Divide players into pairs.
- Each pair has a ball and a number.

Sequence

- Partners work on passing and moving in the small field.
- The coach calls out the number of a pair. Whichever partner has the ball attacks the appropriate goal.
- The partner not in possession kneels briefly and then tracks the attacking player as a defender.

Variations

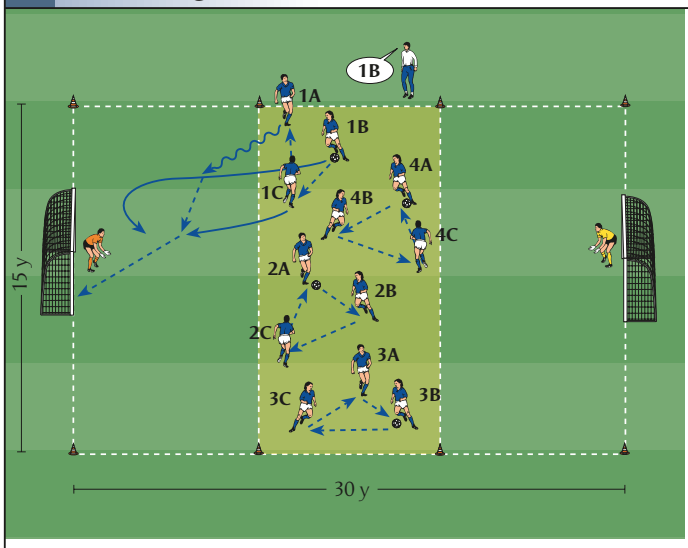
- Change the pairs so that each player competes against a different one.
- Remove the kneeling restriction, so that the defender can go straight after the attacker.

Coaching points

- Encourage all players to make quick one- or two-touch passes.
- Make this an intense competition (attempt to replicate actual match intensity).
- Assess players’ scoring methods.
- Encourage players to analyze the problem presented by the goalkeeper and the defender. Is the shooter quicker than the defender? Can the shooter stay between the defender and the ball?
- By having the defender kneel, the coach can introduce pressure gradually. This should lead to a high level of success.

MAIN SESSION

2 Finishing 2 v. 1



Setup

- Setup is same as above.
- Divide players into groups of three.
- Each group has a number and a ball.
- Each player within each group is also given a letter (A, B or C).

Sequence

- Groups work on passing and moving in the small field.
- The coach calls out a number followed by a letter.
- The player whose letter has been called retreats and becomes a central defender. The other two attack and attempt to score.

Variations

- Try different types of pressure situations and numbers going to goal.
- Focus on a single finishing technique.
- Limit players' time to score.
- Goals do not count if attackers wander blatantly offside.

Coaching points

- Run the practice at a fast pace, constantly attempting to elevate the intensity.
- Show players different ways in which they could combine and runs they could make.
- Teach players to frame the goal and follow effectively on all attempts to score.
- Attackers should tempt the defender to concede either the pass or the dribble.

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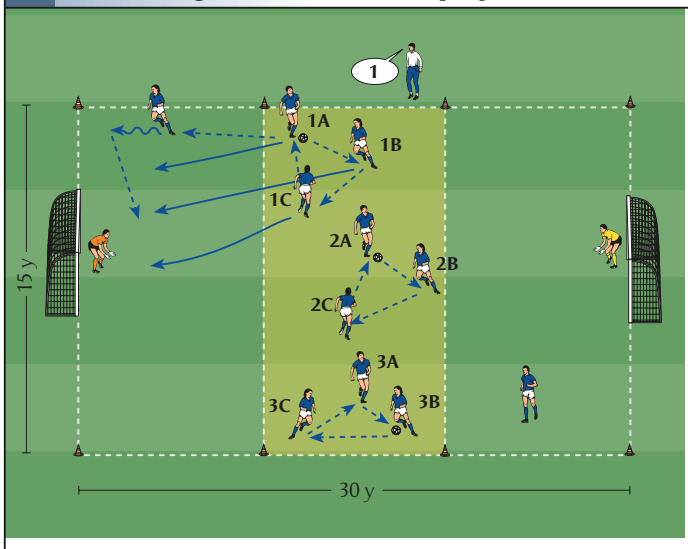
MAIN SESSION

3 Finishing 2 v. 1 with wide players



Setup

- Setup is same as above.
- Add two wide players.

Sequence

- Sequence is the same as in Exercise 2
- If the coach simply calls a group number (no letter), that group plays the ball wide and attacks as a group of three (wide players play the ball in from the flanks).

Coaching points

- Focus on timing of runs in front of the goal, reading the visual cues given by the wide player and arriving at the same time at the ball.
- Players should make intelligent angled runs to near and far post.

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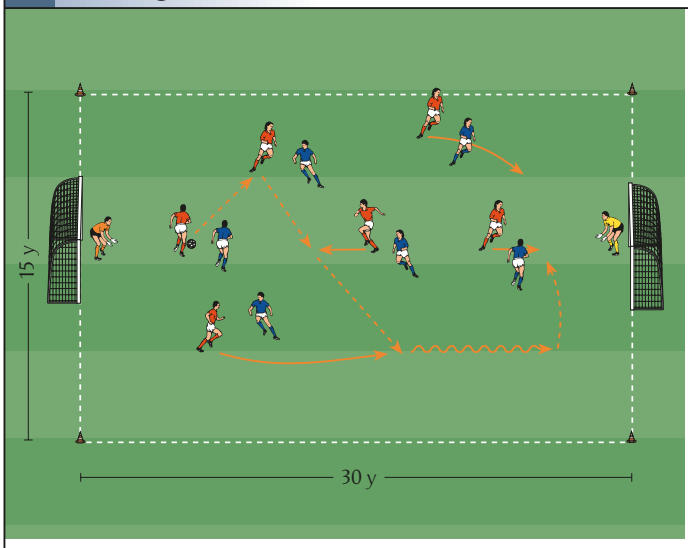
CONCLUSION

6 v. 6 game



Setup

- Mark out a 15 x 30-yard field.
- Set up two goals.
- Divide players into two teams of six with goalkeepers.

Sequence

- Teams play 6 v. 6 with restrictions.
- Restriction 1: After gaining possession, attackers have just 30 seconds to attempt to finish.
- Restriction 2: If one player has already scored, that player cannot score again until all other team members have scored.

Variations

- Any goal scored in the final game is worth double points.
- Play without restrictions.

Coaching points

- Have players (or a record keeper) announce the total number of goals they have scored throughout the practice. Remind them throughout the session that this will happen. This will help put more stress on the finishing environment.

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