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Introduction

We all realize that having possession of the ball is better than not having it. Our kids have more fun when they have the ball then when they do not. But what do we do in our practices to specifically work on the skills necessary to maintain possession?

This section concerns basic possession of the ball; You have it. How do you keep it?

Many of the drills described herein were demonstrated by Coach Frank Schmidt of Sachem High School at the 1999 LIJSL Convention. Frank's high school team is defending (2 years running) NYS Class A champions. He used an Under 9 team, that he had never worked with before, to demonstrate.

Basic Possession – Shielding

Shielding Warm Up

Start with a brief warm up tied to the 10-10-10 practice regime shown elsewhere in this manual. Break the players into two groups about 15 yards apart. Players each have a ball and face each other. Each player picks out a shadow partner.

Each pair of players then dribbles the ball to the center of the field. As the players approach they prepare to shield the ball from the oncoming player. At first start with a simple swivel of the hips so that as the players pass each other, the body of the player shields the ball from the body of the opponent. When they pass each other they swivel back the other way and complete their run to the far end of the field.

In essence you have 2, 90° swivels and the players pass each other back to back.

The next progression is to use a spin move as they approach. The first spin move is to make a 360° turn using four (4) small chopping steps with the inside of the foot. Make sure both players turn the same way and use the same foot or there will be collisions.

After several runs like this progress to an outside of the foot turn again using four (4) very light touches on the ball to make the move.

Shielding Fundamentals

Start with two (2) players; a shielder and a person trying to get the ball. Player #1 is the shielder. The shielding player has the ball to the outside of their body. A common mistake is to have the ball between their legs. You want the entire body between the defender and the ball.

The shielder gets **LOW**, almost as if they were sitting in a chair. A common mistake is to stand almost straight up. The problem with this is very easy to demonstrate. Have a player stand straight up with a ball at their outside leg. A defender trying to steal the ball is allowed to get as close to the ball carrier as they want and try to poke the ball away. They should be able to easily reach the ball. Now have the attacker "*sit in their chair*". Again have the defender get as close as they want to and try to poke the ball away. You'll see that they can't do it. By *sitting in the chair*, i.e. getting low, the attacker has created their own space denying it to the defender.

After proper stance has been demonstrated you need to show them how to hold their arms. Players must play with their arms up and **away** from their bodies. There must be a space between the arm and the body of the player.

What is described above is a perfectly legal play. You can shield with your arms as long as you do not push your opponent away with them. That is the common mistake that players make and refs call.

Now put the ball aside for a moment and just have two players assume the roles of shielder and defender. Have the defender try to approach on the shielder's space

by leaning into their shield arm. In a proper stance and with proper arm placement, a 60 pound 8 year old can hold off a 190 adult! (Coach Schmidt demonstrated this at the 1999 LIJSL convention)

Have the players switch positions with each other and let them go at it for a while. They'll have a lot of fun with this. It teaches aggressiveness (within the rules) and breeds confidence.

Shielding Fundamentals – Progression #1

The next step is to introduce the ball. Set the players up as described above but this time let the shielder hold the defender off by moving the ball around with the outside of their foot (if the player tries to cut in front) and the inside of the foot, (if the player tries to come from behind). Do not let the ball handler move from their spot on the field. This isn't a drill to see who can out run the other. Switch positions after every 'win". Stress stance and arm position.

Shielding Fundamentals – Progression #2

The purpose of this next progression is to instill the concept of **"the ball is mine."** In order to do that we are going to let the defender play outside the rules by first allowing them to push the attacker with both hands to try to dislodge them from the ball. After that let them try to pull the player off the ball with both hands and finally let them do what ever they have to do, short of dangerous behavior, to try and get the ball.

Let us stress here that we aren't trying to teach the players to cheat. We are trying to instill aggressiveness and confidence in our ball handlers.

Shielding Drill with a Support Player

The next progression is to add a support player for the ball handler. Start with the same set-up, i.e. a player shielding the ball and a defender trying to take it away. Shielder holds off defender as long as she can and then plays the ball to the support player.

The defender then has to break off away from the shielder. In order to ensure this step you may want to make a rule that after the pass is made the defender has to run to a cone, touch it and come back.

The support player must immediately play the ball back to the original ball handler and the shielding drill starts over again.

After several passes switch everyone up.

Shielding Drill with a Support Player – Progression #1

Continue this drill by adding a second shielder and a second defender. The support player now has to "service" two (2) sets of players. Shielders now have to hold the defender off longer, make decisions on when to pass and when not to. The support player has to hustle more and make decisions on who to support and how.

Again the defender has to break off once the pass is made and come back to defend once the ball is returned to the original ball carrier.

Basic Possession – 50/50 Ball

The following is a simple drill that continues the concept of teaching aggressiveness and *"The Ball is Mine."*

Put two (2) players shoulder to shoulder. Then place a ball in front of them. Start this drill at about half-speed. Player on the left gently taps the ball in front with their *inside* leg and then goes for it. Player on the right steps across the player on the left with their inside leg shielding the ball from their "partner".

Note the player doing the shielding has to use their whole leg to step across and shield. They are not going for the ball in this part of the drill. Switch places often.

Basic Possession – 50/50 Ball – Progression #1

Same initial set up. One player taps ball out in front. Both players go for the ball. The player who did not tap the ball:

- Drops his shoulder

- Gets low

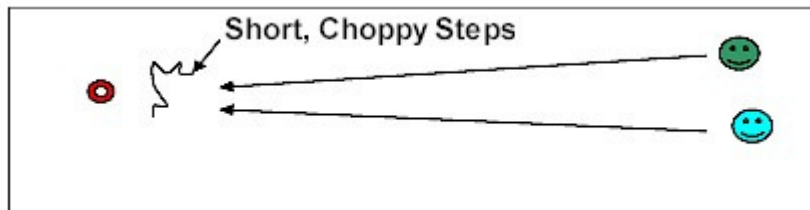
- Moves across in front of his partner

- Gets the ball and returns to the start point with an inside of the foot turn.

Players then switch places and run again. Make sure that they also switch sides so that they are dropping both shoulders. Look for weak points and work extra time on them. For example if a player favors their right shoulder, make them work harder on their left.

Basic Possession – 50/50 Ball – Progression # 2

The following is a two man drill that teaches "cushioning" and turning away from pressure. Set it up as shown below:



Both players race for the ball. The player that gets there first must now control their speed by taking short choppy steps as they approach the ball. They then cut in front of their partner and "cushion" them with their backside preventing them from getting to the ball.

You can make this drill even by either giving one player an advantage so that they reach the ball first or by simply telling them that the player on the right is the "cushioner" and the player on the left is the "cushionee."

Switch sides often so that each player does both and they do it from both sides.

Basic Possession – 50/50 Ball – Progression # 3

The basic progression of the drill above is to not only get to the ball but to control it and turn it **away from pressure**.

Have the player reaching the ball do a pre-arranged turn away from pressure. I.E. have them turn right outside with the outside of their foot. In this case, where the turn is pre-arranged, make sure that the cushionee is trying to get the ball by coming from the opposite side.

Coaching Points:

Get low

Short Choppy Steps

Cushion the player

Turn outside

After several turns at this progression let the players work at it freeform. That is do not pre-arrange the turn, let the player with the ball react to the pressure that they feel on their back and make a decision.

Praise good decision making even if the defender dispossess the ball.

50/50 Ball and a Fair Charge

As we continue this section, it is time to introduce the concept of a "fair charge". For this section, I have excerpted some notes sent to the soccer-coach-I mailing list from Bob Christensen of the Mandan (ND) Soccer Club.

A fair charge is defined as a shoulder to shoulder hit. Referees, in general will look at the player carrying the ball as if they were standing at the center of a clock face. The player is facing 12 o'clock. Opposing players coming at the ball handler from 9 o'clock to 12 o'clock and 12 o'clock to 3 o'clock are generally not going to be called for an illegal charge unless you literally just run the player over. At 3 and 9 exactly you are essentially shoulder to shoulder. A ref will start to look closely if you approach at 8 and 4, and generally, if contact is made between 4 and 8 it will be a foul.

One of the ways to help teach aggressiveness using the tactic of a shoulder

charge is to gather the group for a team run. Give 3-4 players balls, and tell them that the runners without the ball are to shoulder charge to gain the ball. **No tackling of the ball is allowed.** They MUST stay in a tight group. This stresses close ball control in traffic while being bumped (sometimes HARD).

Coaching Points

You will find that there are some players who will not ever challenge hard for the ball. Designate a more aggressive player to get the ball with a shoulder charge, and pass it to the meek player.

Have the meek player get the ball from a more aggressive player on your signal.

Watch the more aggressive players, they can FLATTEN the smaller or meeker players.

Progression of 50/50 – BANG

Set up a scrimmage in what we affectionately call the "pressure cooker". This is a small field (really little more than 2 penalty areas) with full-sized end. Play a "game" called Bang. This "game" is just like a regular scrimmage, but with some important and drastic restrictions.

First, when a player receives a ball, they cannot carry it. They have to shield the ball until they can pass it to a teammate. The only way to advance the ball is to pass it.

Only 1 defender can challenge for the ball, and the only way the ball can be won is to push the ball holder off the ball with a shoulder charge. This really becomes a physical game.

Teaching Aggressiveness – Steal the Bacon

This is a good game to play at almost any age below U12. It is a simple 1 v 1 game where players are divided into two teams. Each player is given a number. The coach calls out a number (or sometimes two) and then throws a ball into the air that the players have to gain control of.

Since we are teaching aggressiveness and shoulder charging, use the same restriction that we had above in BANG, i.e. no tackling. The player must be relieved of the ball with a shoulder charge.

If you have a meek player that never challenges, handicap the better player by either restricting her run at the ball so the meeker player gets there first or by playing the air ball closer to the meeker player so the more aggressive player has further to run.

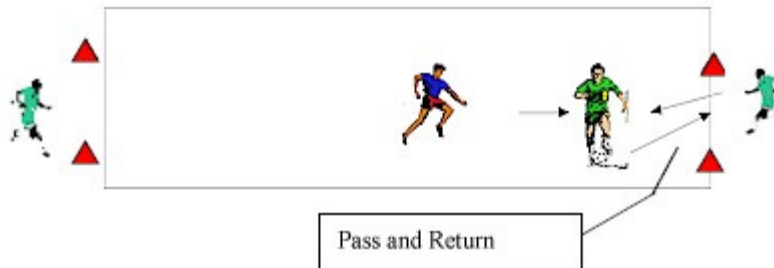
Basic Possession – 1 v 1 Game

The following game incorporates the shielding, cushioning and change of direction aspects of possession detailed above.

Start by making a field about 20 yards long and 15v wide. Goals are placed at each end. Players are placed in each goal. These players cannot leave the goal. Two players and one ball are on the field.

The object of the drill is for the field players to complete 2 successive passes to **either** goalkeeper. They need to shield the ball from the defender and then cushion the defender away from the area where the pass is coming from. If the defender beats the cushion and enters the area they need to change direction quickly and head for the other side of the field.

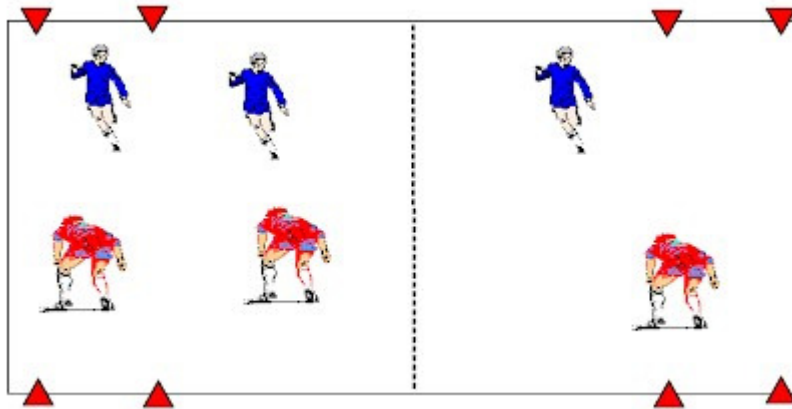
Two complete passes = 1 point and every additional pass beyond 2 in a row is another point.



Basic Possession – Keep Away

The next game also incorporates all of the shielding, cushioning and spin away moves described above. The field in this case is short but very wide. This helps to teach the concept of width.

The game can either be played with four goals that the players have to dribble through or can be played strictly as keep-away where points are given for proper shielding and spin away moves.



Divide the field in half and play 3 on 3. Allow only 2 players from any team within any half of the field. This discourages bunching up. Take the ball away when they forget.

Coaching Points:

Defenders get low and stay low

Defenders do not dive in

Shield the ball, attacker is low and arms are away from the body.

Support player close but not right on top of the player.

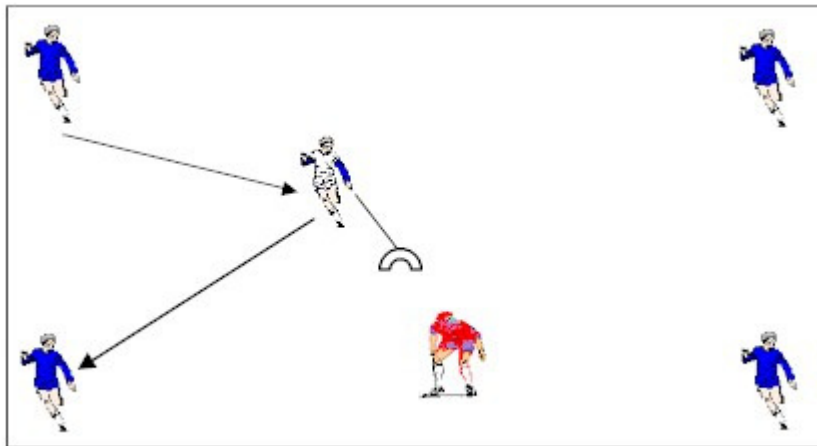
Switch the field often

Discourage just kicking the ball away. If players do this continually, penalize the team by having them perform an exercise like 5 pull back Vees before they can rejoin the play.

Shielding – 4 Corners – Match Related

The following exercise was suggested by a coach, who remains nameless, from the soccer-coach-I mailing list.

This exercise teaches shielding, checking back, blind side runs and aggressiveness



Set up the field as shown with a player at each of the four corners. One player at one corner has a ball. Two players are in the middle, one is the attacker, one is the defender.

Playing Shielding Four Corners

Pass comes from the corner man to the attacker. The attacker has to make a run, or a check to the ball to shake the defender. She then has to control the ball, under pressure, and shield the ball from the defender.

The attacker then has to get the ball to another corner person. She is not allowed to give the ball back to the original passer.

Count how many passes are made before the defender wins the ball. If the defender wins, she passes the ball back to a corner player immediately and the game restarts.

Switch players often. This is an exhausting drill.

Progression of 4 Corners

Put two balls at different corners. Again the player who gives the pass may not receive it back, but now additionally the other player who has the ball in the corner cannot receive a pass. The options are now down to 2 for passes from the center. However the center offensive player, after they have passed the ball to a corner now has two options to receive.

This creates more opportunities for a blind side run and encourages creativity.

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