

The training session

Slide 1

In this session, we focus on the mechanics of a training session. We have already covered key aspects such as proper behavior, our role in the team, the attitude we should adopt, and the fundamentals of soccer, including tactical and technical aspects. We have also explored various training methods and types of exercises, placing particular emphasis on the global methodology we will adopt as our main approach.

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Before delving into the details of the training session, we will open a space to answer some key questions.

Note to the teacher: There are no wrong answers; this is a time for exploration and reflection.

- **Question 1:** What do we understand by training session?
- **Idea:** The training session is a set of interconnected tasks aimed at improving one or more aspects of the game.

- **Question 2:** When do we consider the training session to begin? Why?
- **Idea:** Answers may vary: from preparing the bag at home to the moment in the locker room before training.

- **Question 3:** Which part of the session is most crucial? Why?
- **Idea:** It could be the warm-up, corrections during the session, the coach's talk, etc.

- **Question 4:** What element is the most important in training? Why?
- **Idea:** From attitude and effort to teammates and material, opinions can vary widely.

- **Question 5:** What would be a good exercise to start with? Why?
- **Idea:** Answers may include analytical warm-up, rondos, small-sided games, or even more playful exercises.

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Regarding the training of grassroots teams, we will delve into each of the key points shown on the slide.

I hope these improved versions are useful for the presentation. Do you need anything else?

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Our main objective should be the individual development and improvement of the player, especially when training grassroots soccer teams. It is important to emphasize that although improving the player individually will lead to improvements in team performance, our focus should not be on team performance as such.

Please, let's not confuse this with the importance of having a "team attitude." We have already talked and will continue to talk about the importance of teamwork, being a good teammate, and how collaboration between teammates is crucial to achieving goals. But that doesn't mean the main goal is to improve team performance.

We often find coaches who change their planning with the aim of the team performing better during matches, that is, to win. This is a mistake. Our focus should always be on learning. The more players learn, the more matches they will win, but winning is a consequence, not the goal itself.

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Planning the season in advance is of vital importance, especially in grassroots soccer, as the main goal is learning. We must structure which skills we want players to learn and when.

Don't worry; drawing up this structure won't take long. Here we talk about planning what we are going to train, not how we are going to train. That is, we decide when we are going to work on a technical aspect such as passing or control, or a tactical aspect such as width or depth, but we do not detail what each specific training will be like.

A useful tip is to dedicate each week to training a technical and a tactical aspect, repeating each one at least four times. We often make the mistake of wanting to cover everything, but the secret lies in repetition and consistency.

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Having a specific objective for each session is crucial, as it will help us focus our attention. Soccer is a very complex sport, and many mistakes will be made in each training session. If we try to correct everything instantly, both we and the players will lose focus. Therefore, it is vital to set a clear objective for each session and ensure that the players know it.

Ideally, all exercises in the session will be aligned with this objective. We will plan each

exercise thinking about the technical skill or tactical action we want to develop that day.

It is always possible to include more playful exercises, such as a free game at the end of training, a penalty competition, or something similar.

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When we play a match, the primary focus should always be on learning, not necessarily winning. Players want to win, of course, but it must be understood that winning can be a consequence of good learning, although it is not always the case.

In our next class, where we will talk about feedback, we will delve into how to approach competition. For now, what you should know is that during matches we will focus on the skills that have been worked on during the week. For example, if we have worked on passes, then during the match the focus and feedback will be on passing.

The match serves as a practical exam: we have studied and practiced during training, and now we will see how much we have learned.

In addition, competition is a perfect opportunity to instill values. It is essential to teach players to win and lose with sportsmanship: shake hands with the opponent, apologize if a foul is committed, and get up without protesting. Respecting the referee and the audience is crucial, as we discussed in Class 1.

Competition has a strong emotional component; everyone wants to win. That's why it's essential that we keep a cool head and remember the importance of learning.

A useful tip is to remind them that no one knows what their favorite player's match record was at 10, 12, or 16 years old. What is important at these ages is not the results, but learning and improving in each match.

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The training session is divided into five essential parts that the coach must manage. These are:

- Planning
- Field Preparation
- Pre-Training Talk
- Exercise Execution
- Post-Training Talk
- In the following segments, we will address each of these phases in detail to provide a complete view of the training process.

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Preparation is crucial and usually takes more time, especially at the beginning. For non-expert coaches, it's essential to prepare the session in detail, from the exercises we'll carry out to a deep study of the skill we plan to train. This study allows us to effectively communicate with the players and makes it easier for us to identify potential mistakes, opportunities for improvement, and successes.

TIP: It's helpful to start with an exercise already known by the players and add new rules or elements. This places them in a familiar environment but with additional challenges.

Every now and then, we need to take them out of their comfort zone and propose entirely new exercises.

EXTRA: If we want to be especially meticulous in preparation, we can decide in advance the teams that will be formed in different exercises. This saves time and helps create more balanced teams.

IMPORTANT: It's essential to prepare questions or potential questions to ask players during training. This can be challenging at first due to a lack of experience, but prior reflection on what to ask can help guide players towards the concepts we want them to assimilate.

It's also vital to prepare pre and post-training talks, although we'll cover this later.

IMPROVISATION: Despite all this planning, we must always leave room for improvisation. Often, things don't go as planned: there may be more or fewer players than expected, a player may get injured, or a dynamic doesn't work as expected. In these cases, improvisation is key. However, improvisation should be the exception, not the norm. For the rest of the training, we should have a well-established plan.

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Field Preparation

Whenever possible, it's ideal to prepare all or most of the exercises before the players arrive on the field. This includes marking the playing areas, preparing the cones, balls, and positioning the goals.

We know this can be tricky, especially in grassroots football where teams often have consecutive training times. However, if we have the opportunity, especially if we are the first team to train in the afternoon, we should strive to have everything ready in advance.

The advantage of having everything prepared beforehand is that we can focus on more crucial aspects of training, such as corrections, questions to players, and detailed explanations. In short, the quality of training will be significantly elevated.

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The pre-training talk is a critical moment to set the mood and expectations of the team. This meeting can take place in the locker room once the players are ready or directly on the field, forming a circle around the coach. Let's look in detail at the key elements of this talk.

Set the Goal of the Day:

The first step is to communicate to the players what skill or concept will be worked on in the session. Some might ask, "Who remembers the key points for a good pass?", and use it as an introduction to present the day's topic.

Note: Although we won't delve deeply into collective play in this course, we will provide additional material for you to study at home.

Explain the Exercises:

It's advisable to give a brief summary of the exercises that will be performed. For example, "We'll start with a 4 vs 2 rondo, then move on to a 4 vs 4 game with jokers, and finish with a conditioned match." If possible, sending this information in advance by email or posting it in the locker room helps players come better prepared.

Mood Assessment:

Be attentive to the group's mood. If energy is low, use this time to motivate the team, mentioning the importance of the concept being worked on, or the upcoming match. If the group is too playful or distracted, use words to focus their attention, reminding them they are there to improve.

In Summary:

A good pre-training talk prepares players mentally for the session, lets them know what to expect, and how they should focus their efforts. It also gives the coach an opportunity to assess and guide the team's mood, thus maximizing the efficiency of the session.

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We are at the crucial point of planning a training session: the exercises and how they should be structured. Although each exercise has its specifications and requirements, there are some elements that should be present in most of them to make them effective and meaningful.

Ball: This might seem obvious, but it's essential that exercises are practical and directly related to the game. A ball should be at the center of almost all activities.

A goal: Each exercise must have a clear and defined objective. It could be to improve passing, shooting technique, defense, etc. Without a goal, players and the coach can get lost in the activity without really benefiting from it.

Opponent: Competition is a crucial element for any sport, and football is no exception. Including an opponent in exercises helps simulate real-game situations and improves players' decision-making.

Teammate: While not always necessary, the presence of a teammate can add a layer of complexity and realism to the exercise. It encourages communication, spatial awareness, and teamwork.

These are the foundations upon which exercises are built. By maintaining these elements as a standard, you ensure that your training sessions are both practical and effective.

This is nothing more than a global methodology as we discussed yesterday.

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It's essential to understand that good training is not a random series of exercises but a well-planned sequence that allows for coherent and cumulative development.

From Simple to Complex:

Starting with simple exercises like the rondo allows for a smooth transition to more complicated exercises. It acts as a foundation upon which layers of complexity can be added.

A logical sequence would be: Rondo, large possession (both exercises are conservations), a wave, and ending with a match.

Warm-up:

Why a Rondo: A rondo is excellent for warming up because it engages both the mind and body. In this way, we maximize the time to learn football from the beginning. As we saw, there are many varieties of rondos; we will choose one or create one to work on the training objective from the first exercise.

Number of Exercises:

- **Find the Balance:** It's crucial to find a balance between the number and duration of exercises. We recommend between 3 and 5 exercises per session. An excessive number of exercises can lead to a loss of focus, while too few might not be enough for effective learning.
- **Adaptation:** Each exercise requires an adaptation time. Switching too quickly between different types of exercises can be counterproductive. Players need time to adapt, understand, and ultimately improve their performance in each exercise.

The key here is that each part of the training must have a purpose, and everything should flow logically from the warm-up to the conclusion.

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We will address the types of exercises we suggest incorporating into your training plan, divided into four essential categories:

Rondos and Possession Games: Both focus on ball retention. We start with rondos because, being smaller in size, they serve as an excellent physical and cognitive warm-up.

Waves or Finishing Exercises: These would come after rondos and possession games and focus on improving efficiency in attack zones.

Conditioned Matches: These would be the final phase of the session, to simulate conditions closer to a real match.

If a training session lasts an hour and a half, this would leave us with approximately 20 minutes per exercise, including breaks for hydration, instructions, etc. Although we don't need to follow a strict schedule, this calculation can serve as a good reference.

Additionally, we understand that you might have your preferences or that your players might want to try something new. In those cases, we recommend applying the 90-10 rule: 90% of the exercises should follow our guidelines, and the remaining 10% can be something you or your players prefer, such as penalty shots or set-piece plays.

In this remaining 10%, we could also include exercises that follow an analytical methodology.

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Rules for the Opposite Role: The goal is for players to constantly think. If players only do what the rule indicates, they are not really thinking. In a similar future situation, they might not know how to solve it.

Practical Example:

If you want players to use the width of the field, you can do it in two ways:

Instruct offensive players to occupy the wing areas.

Tell defensive players to avoid the wing areas unless the ball is there.

In this way, the offensive player will need to analyze and understand that the best option is to occupy the side zones since the defenders have restrictions to be there.

Objective: Learning: Design the activity with the learning objective in mind. Reinforce correct behaviors and, if the player makes an incorrect decision, guide them with questions to find the right answer.

Learning Focus Example:

If an offensive player does not occupy the side zones where he could have an advantage, you could ask him: "Is this the best position? Is there another area where you could have more time and space?" This way, you guide him to find the best decision.

Strategic Interruption:

Do not hesitate to pause the game to highlight good or bad examples, especially if they align with the task's objective.

A Single Focus on the Task:

Once the task's objective is defined and the rules that promote that objective are established, your corrections and questions should focus exclusively on that objective.

Situations Transferable to the Real Game:

As we have already discussed, it is vital to use methodologies that can be applied in real game situations.

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The slide shows a video of a 4v2 rondo plus 1 player in another zone, with a zone change element. This type of exercise is especially useful for improving decision-making, passing, control, and tactical aspects such as width, depth, 1v1 defense...

This exercise integrates well into a training sequence and serves as an excellent physical and cognitive warm-up before entering more specific and demanding exercises.

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We will start our session with a rondo as a warm-up exercise. It has been shown to be an excellent way to prepare players both physically and mentally for training. With short distances between players, soft touches, and no sprints, it is ideal to start the day's practice.

Additionally, the variety of rondos available allows us to adapt to the needs of each session and keep players focused. It's not only an effective way to warm up but also maximizes our time to learn and play football. With classic ball-less training, we lose playing time.

If we do the math, it becomes very clear:

Note for the teacher: Make calculations on the board:

How many minutes per training do we dedicate to a classic warm-up? How many trainings per week (including the match), how many weeks a year, and how many years of football?

If we warm up 10 minutes per session and have 3 sessions a week, that's 30 minutes (plus the match, 40). We train about 40 weeks a year; that's $40 \times 40 = 1600$ minutes. Converted to hours ($1600/60$), that's 26.6 hours a year. If we play football from age 6 to 16, that's 266 hours warming up, just moving our arms.

On the other hand, we could have 266 hours of rondo.

Who will be the better footballer? The one who warms up for 266 hours or the one who does 266 hours of rondo?

And for those who might be concerned about the risk of injuries, I want to assure you that there are studies that support the safety of using rondos as a warm-up, as long as basic precautions are followed.

In extreme conditions, we will have to watch what kind of rondo we use, as some may demand more physical effort than necessary.

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Let's delve deeper into the rondo as a pedagogical tool. It's not only an efficient way to maintain ball possession and improve technique, but it's also an excellent exercise to teach basic and advanced football tactical concepts.

There are many rondo variants that can be adapted to various situations and skill levels. And while finding these exercises on the internet is easy, the key is knowing how and when to implement each variant to maximize learning.

In other words, the skill lies not in knowing a lot of exercises but in how they are used to develop players' skills and understanding of the game. As coaches, our goal is to go beyond mere 'doing' and focus on 'teaching'."

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The rondo is a very versatile training tool. It's not only an effective exercise for warming up but can also be adapted to train a wide variety of skills and tactical concepts.

The rondo is especially useful for developing technical skills, such as passing and first touch, but its versatility goes much further. It also allows for work on tactical aspects such as decision-making, off-the-ball play, and defensive organization.

Due to the dynamics of the rondo, players can also practice the transition phase of the game, both in defense and attack. Additionally, the nature of the exercise allows for work on pressure after loss and defense of a specific area of the field.

In summary, the rondo is an exceptionally adaptable training tool that allows coaches and players to focus on a wide range of skills and strategies.

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In today's class, we will expand our understanding of rondos by viewing and analyzing some practical examples. In Class 3, we introduced the basic elements that make up a rondo and even created some examples ourselves. Now, with that foundation, we can delve deeper into how this training tool is applied in different contexts and for different learning objectives.

We will show several examples of rondos, each with its own variants and specific rules. After each example, we will take a moment to discuss what skills or tactical concepts are being trained in that particular rondo.

The goal is for you to recognize not only how to set up a rondo but also how to adapt it to address specific training needs. This analysis will help us all become more efficient and effective coaches.

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In the first rondo, we observe a three against one design. In this exercise, the goal is always to have a passing option both to the right and to the left. As shown in the image, when the ball reaches the player on the opposite side, the player who originally had the ball must move to generate a pass line to the right.

In this rondo, we are primarily focused on creating passing lines, as well as ball control, passing, and defensive timing.

In the second rondo, players earn points if they receive the ball between the cones placed in the center. This exercise works on a collective play aspect: leaving the play zone to receive a pass. Here, the timing of the pass and the "pass to space" are also worked on, as players must coordinate the timing between the teammate's movement and the pass.

The defending player's priority is to protect the center. If a player receives the ball in the center, they earn a "life." This "life" can be used in case the player loses the ball at some point; instead of going on defense, the player uses the "life" and continues participating from outside the rondo.

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In this slide, we introduce a rondo with a transition phase. After completing a minimum number of passes, players have the option to connect with a teammate on the opposite field.

The rule of the minimum number of passes is flexible and can be adjusted according to training needs. The same video shows other examples of rondos designed for seven players. If desired, you can observe these additional rondos and discuss their features.

Note for the teacher: It is highly recommended to watch the additional rondos in the video and discuss them with the students. Try to identify which technical and tactical aspects are worked on in each variant. Reflect on the present rules and think about what additional rules could be implemented to focus training on specific aspects.

It would also be a good idea to draw them on the board, either by the teacher or by the students.

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In this slide, we observe a rondo in which there is a three against one situation. Additionally, there are two players responsible for closing the passing line to the team located in the other area of the field. We are focusing on aspects such as creating passing lines and defending them. This exercise also serves as a warm-up.

If the defending team manages to steal the ball, the roles are reversed: the team that lost possession begins to defend, while the team that recovered the ball takes its place.

The drawing shows that there are two players pressing and one in the middle, while in the video it is the other way around. This highlights the versatility of the exercise. If we consider it too easy for the team with the ball to maintain possession, we can increase the pressure by adding an extra player. If, on the other hand, the space seems too large, as seen in the video, we can reduce the size of the central area, as seen in the drawing.

Note for the teacher: It is essential to be flexible and adapt the exercise according to the circumstances. If we notice an imbalance between the attacking and defending team, we can adjust the details of the exercise to ensure it flows more evenly.

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In this slide, we observe a special rondo that we can call "Double Rondo". It starts with a four against two situation in the central area. Upon recovering the ball, the red team associates with the players on the ends, transforming the exercise into a six against four rondo. In this case, we have four players on the outer sides, two in the middle, and four defending.

Question for the class: What do you think are the key aspects to work on in this rondo?

Note for the teacher: There are various aspects that we can address in this exercise, but one of the most evident is the transition, both offensive and defensive. On the defensive side, if quick pressure is applied after losing the ball, a four against two situation is set up in our favor. However, if the red team manages to connect with the external players, a six against four dynamic is created. Regarding the offensive transition, the idea is to quickly look for the players on the ends once possession is recovered. It is crucial that the players on the sides are always active and offer passing lines constantly.

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In this slide, we present a "Double Rondo" consisting of two different areas, each with a two against one situation. It is crucial to understand that the defending players are restricted to their respective zones and cannot switch from one to another.

Question for the class: Given that it is a two against one situation in each zone, what aspects do you think we are addressing or could address here?

Note for the teacher: It is worth noting that two against one situations are tactical scenarios. In this exercise, we can be in a two against one or one against two situation, allowing us to work on various aspects. These include tactical width (to prevent a single defender from having to cover two attackers) and how to exert pressure on the player with the ball. Additionally, we can also focus on technical skills such as ball control, passing, and the timing of entries, among others.

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In this slide, we introduce a four against two rondo with a transition element. When the players in the middle recover the ball, they must pass it between the four "goals" located in the corners. These goals symbolize a player from the red team, and the goal is to achieve an effective offensive transition when leaving the ball recovery area. Simultaneously, the blue team must prevent the red team from completing those passes. If the blue team recovers the ball, the rondo restarts.

Question for the students: What rules would you add to this exercise? What could happen if a red player manages to pass the ball between the cones?

Note for the teacher: The answers to these questions can vary widely and offer great room for creativity. Some ideas might be that only the player who lost the ball is allowed to press, or that the red players can (or cannot) pass the ball among themselves.

If a red player manages to pass the ball between the cones, we could consider giving them "a life" that they could use later. Another option would be that if the pass is achieved, the two red players become defenders, replacing the player who lost the ball and the one who made the last pass to the player who lost the ball. Invite students to share and explore other ideas.

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Rondos can be customized to focus on various skills and tactical and technical aspects of the game.

Key Points to Emphasize:

Rondos are highly adaptable exercises that allow us to focus on multiple facets of the game, such as technical aspects, tactics, and collective play.

The goal is to design rondos that generate multiple opportunities to practice the specific skill you want to train.

Repetition in decision-making during rondos improves the player's skill in that specific aspect.

The more examples of rondos you know, the easier it will be for you to design your own rondos.

Encouraging creativity doesn't necessarily mean inventing something completely new. Creativity also lies in the ability to take pre-existing elements or "inputs" and combine them in innovative ways to create something new or effective for training.

This would be a good opportunity to show additional examples of rondos and discuss how each one can be adapted to focus on different skills or aspects of the game.

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When designing rondos, possessions, waves, or matches, it is essential to remember two key concepts: simplicity in the rules and preservation of the real game.

Not Too Many Rules: This principle seems counter-intuitive, but it is essential. An excess of rules may seem helpful initially, but the reality is that the more rules there are, the fewer decisions players make. At first glance, it may seem that memorizing a set of rules requires thought, but once internalized, the player simply follows those pre-established rules, restricting their ability to make autonomous decisions.

Do Not Distort the Game: When we establish rules, they should aim to ensure that the skill we want to promote is practiced frequently, but without altering the essence of the real game. Take the example of a match where there are wildcards on the sidelines. If we establish a rule that says we must play with both wildcards before we can score, the game is distorted. Defenders will know what's going to happen, and decisions become predictable. On the other hand, if we say that a goal is worth double if played with one wildcard and triple if played with both, the game remains more open.

Note for the Teacher: It's natural to want to establish rules to guide learning, but it's always crucial to find a balance. Rules should be designed to allow frequent practice of the focal skill, without eliminating the crucial element of the game, which is the player's decision-making. There will always be a certain level of 'distortion' when we impose rules, but the goal is to minimize this as much as possible.

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Note for the teacher: During this activity, it is crucial to provide sufficient time and constructive feedback to all students. Take the opportunity to illustrate some examples on the board. It would be beneficial to include a "not so good" example that contains too many rules or significantly distorts the real game. This way, a counterexample can be offered that highlights the key points of the lesson.

It is advisable for you, as a teacher, to present this less effective example instead of using one of the students' works as a negative example. This way, you avoid potential awkward or discouraging situations for the students.

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In this activity, we present a 10 vs 5 possession exercise with six mini goals that come into play when the ball is recovered.

You will notice that this scenario bears certain similarities to some of the rondos we have explored previously. The main difference here lies in the number of players involved.

This approach allows for a smoother transition between ball possession and finishing opportunities, adding a new nuance to the training we have been conducting.

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As we discussed in the previous class, possessions are derived from the concept of conservation. Although we will not delve into all the elements of conservation that we already reviewed, it is essential to keep them in mind.

A possession game is conceived as an exercise where a group of players, within a delimited area, strives to keep the ball, while another group seeks to recover it. Depending on the circumstances, it is possible to integrate wildcards or even introduce a third team.

Although the primary goal is to retain ball possession, there are other secondary objectives that may vary: taking the ball to a specific area, accumulating points after a series of passes, or after reaching certain zones on the field, to name a few examples. The versatility of these games is vast, with different rules, objectives, and playing areas.

Next, we will explore some examples of possession games. The intention is that, based on these, you design your exercises in the future.

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Let's delve deeper into the importance of working on ball possessions in soccer. As you know, maintaining possession can offer numerous strategic advantages during a match. Let's break this down into some specific objectives.

Overcoming a Line: When we talk about 'overcoming a line', we refer to executing a pass so precise that it allows a teammate to receive the ball behind the opposing defensive line. These types of passes can completely destabilize the opposing defense and create scoring opportunities.

Conquering Space: This objective involves finding a player who, upon receiving a pass in open space, can carry the ball dribbling or driving to conquer territory behind the opposing defense. These types of actions not only advance the ball to dangerous zones but also open space for other players.

Advance or Finish the Play: Here we are looking for players who, due to their position on the field and their individual characteristics, can progress towards the opponent's goal or have a clear opportunity to shoot at goal. This could involve skills such as shooting at goal, one-on-one ability, or even the vision to make a decisive final pass.

Now, I propose a task: Can you think of other objectives that a team might have when maintaining ball possession? Remember that each objective you propose must be specific and applicable to real game situations. This exercise will help us better understand the multiple strategic layers that come into play during effective ball possession.

Ideas: Think about the remaining time of the match, the score, if any player has been sent off by any team...

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In the realm of soccer, ball possession allows you to train a wide range of technical and tactical aspects. However, there is a notable exception: shooting at goal.

Although you could design possession exercises that end with shots on goal, those exercises would move towards a different category, perhaps better described as "real game situations."

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This shouldn't worry you; it's more a matter of how we name things. The primary goal should always be the education and development of players, regardless of how we label a specific exercise.

It's worth noting that there are exercises that fall into a gray area between what we might commonly call a 'rondo' and a 'possession game'. Take, for example, a 5 vs 3 exercise. Depending on the training objective, it could be both a rondo and a possession game. The same goes for a 4 vs 2 that turns into a 6 vs 4.

The line separating these categories is subtle and, ultimately, of lesser importance compared to the fundamental objective: the comprehensive training of players. So my advice is not to get caught up in terminology. What truly matters is whether the exercise meets the educational objectives we have for our players.

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In this part of the lesson, we observe a classic example of a positional game: a 4v4 with three wildcards. This exercise has become widely popular largely thanks to the influence of coaches like Pep Guardiola.

Here we have two teams of four players each, and we also have three wildcards. Two of them are located on the ends of the field, and one is placed in the center.

This exercise is particularly useful for simulating certain positions and roles in a 4-3-3 system. Imagine that the line of four is the base, with the wildcards acting as full-backs. We have two center-backs, a defensive midfielder in the center, and two additional midfielders.

When the defending team manages to recover the ball—and remember that continuity is a key element in these possession exercises—this team moves to occupy the outer positions and takes control of the ball. The team that lost the ball then moves to press and occupy the center of the field.

In this way, we not only practice ball possession but also the rapid transition from defense to attack and vice versa, a crucial element in modern soccer.

Let's examine some variations of this exercise to adapt it to different skill levels. For example, we could choose to defend with only three players to facilitate offensive actions. In this case, we have organized the training by placing players in their natural positions, just as we would in a real match.

One of the great benefits of positional games is that they foster synergies between players that closely resemble real game situations. For example, the center-back would receive the ball from the full-back in a position very similar to how it would happen during a match. This allows for a smoother transition from training to competitive play, ensuring that the skills and strategies we develop here are directly applicable on the field.

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Let's watch this video that shows a possession divided into two spaces, with a wildcard in each of them. We can choose to place the wildcard outside the playing field, where it cannot be pressed, or within the same playing area, where it could face defensive pressure. This choice will depend on the specific capabilities and objectives we have for our players.

Switching zones is allowed after completing a certain number of passes.

Question for reflection: What do you think would be more beneficial? Placing the wildcard in an area where it cannot be pressed or in the same playing space where it will face pressure?

If we pause the video, you will see a list of different concepts and skills that can be worked on during this exercise. Although the objective of the exercise is flexible, we will focus on a specific action for this analysis. That is, with a single activity of this type, we can address multiple facets of the game, both technical and tactical, and both offensively and defensively.

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In this video, we are observing a ball possession exercise that in this case is a three against three with a wildcard, although it could also be adapted to a 6 against 6 with two wildcards. The fundamental rule is to maintain ball possession, and a point is earned every time we manage to make a pass that goes between the two cones located on the field.

What we are practicing here is the ability to direct ball possession towards specific areas of the field and create effective passing lines in those same zones. Simultaneously, we must be attentive to defense, both of the players and certain areas of the field that will require more intense defensive effort.

It is important to note that this exercise, although valuable, is relatively decontextualized compared to real game situations. Therefore, it is essential to integrate it into a broader training program that includes activities closer to the dynamics of a real match.

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In the projection, we observe two very similar tactical configurations. In both, the main objective is to direct the ball towards specific areas of the field; in this case, towards the corners or, in the other variant, towards the center of the field.

You will notice that in the graph on the left, the goal is to wait for the ball within the designated area, while in the diagram on the right, the idea is to receive the ball within the area, but entering from an external position.

We have the freedom to add numerous variants to this basic exercise. Can you think of any interesting modifications we could implement?

Additional note: One technique we could practice is receiving the ball within the area and, with the first touch, redirecting it outward. Another option would be to enter the area with the ball already controlled. It is worth mentioning a common rule in this type of exercise: you cannot add two consecutive points in the same area, which forces us to vary the direction of our attacks.

Slide 40

Here we observe two variants of possession games that incorporate a finishing phase. Although theoretically a "conservation" exercise should not include shots on goal, we have already discussed the importance of not being strict slaves to theory or rules.

In the example on the right, we have a possession game in which, after reaching a specific number of passes—which may vary depending on the skills of the players in question—a change of play to the opposite end is allowed. This gives us the opportunity to practice variability in passes, mixing short sends with long ones. Once this long pass to the opposite end is made, the blue team will go to finish, while the red team will assume defensive functions.

If during the possession phase, the red team recovers the ball, they will try to complete the previously established number of passes and, after achieving it, seek to finish with a shot on goal.

To add an additional layer of dynamism to the exercise, we could include additional wildcards in the possession phase.

In the second scenario, the focus of the possession game centers on the lateral expansion of the game. As in the first example, after a certain number of passes, the team that has met this requirement will be able to move to the direct attack phase on the opposite goal.

Slide 41

Here we observe an exercise that, although labeled as a possession game, could easily be considered a wave; we find ourselves once again in those gray areas between different types of exercises.

In this specific situation, we have a 4-2 defensive formation facing an attack also

structured in a 4-2. The objective here is not only to maintain ball possession but also to look for opportunities to combine plays and finally arrive at a finishing action.

Slide 42

In this slide, we observe three variants of polarized possession games with structural similarities.

In the first representation, we see two formations of four against four. One team defends the red line, while the other protects the blue line. The purpose is to cross the enemy line while maintaining control of the ball.

The second diagram shows two marked fields. When the red team defends, all its players must remain in their defensive territory, granting the blue team total freedom of movement. Here, we focus the rules on the defending team, with specific objectives such as coverages and permutations, especially when we have a defensive advantage due to the established rules.

The objective for the team in possession is to cross the end line with the ball controlled. Crossing the sides grants one point, while crossing the center provides three points. This aligns with our philosophy of prioritizing the attack to the center of the field.

In the third and last graph, we observe a similar design with three scoring zones: three points in the center and one point on the sides. The red team defends one side and the blue team the other. Scoring can be achieved both by connecting a pass to a player located in the designated zone and by driving the ball towards it. Additionally, two gray zones can be seen on the sides, which could be used to implement high-pressure tactics, especially when the opposing team is cornered in a corner or on a side.

Slide 43

Let's explore how to design your own possession games. I will give you some key ideas:

Advantages and Wildcards: Generally, we will favor the attacking team. But if you want to focus on defense, you can use wildcards to balance the game.

Differentiated Zones: You can establish specific areas of the field where only one of the teams has the advantage. This adds a layer of complexity and strategy to the exercise.

Variants according to the Team: Depending on the skills of your players, you can adapt the rules to make the game more or less challenging.

Remember, the most important thing is that the exercises fit the learning objectives you have for your players. So, don't worry too much about the details; let's focus on the comprehensive development of the player.

Slide 44

I propose an interactive exercise to consolidate what we have learned. In pairs, you will design three types of possession games.

The first must have at least two different zones in the field.
In the second, incorporate three different teams.
And for the third, design a polarized possession game.

Once you finish, share your drawings and explanations with the rest of the class. We want to know the dynamics you have thought of, the rules you would establish, and the objectives you pursue with each exercise.

It is an excellent opportunity to apply what we have been discussing and see how you would adapt it in a practical scenario.

Slide 45

In the previous class, we already talked about waves. You will remember that these are exercises in which one team or player attacks a goal and tries to score, while another defends.

The duration of the waves can be adjusted according to the phase of the game or the competition unit we want to simulate. This allows us to work on multiple aspects of the game, from technique and tactics to finishing.

It is crucial to understand the importance of practicing waves. Why? Because these exercises approach real game situations, allowing players to practice in a context that mimics match conditions. Additionally, the dynamics of the waves encourage creativity, quick decision-making, and strengthen both offensive and defensive skills.

Now we will see some practical examples and discuss them in class. Pay attention and think about how you could implement these concepts in your own training or games.

Slide 46

In our next example, we observe a wave situation designed as a three against three. Here we are simulating a ball loss. The player who makes the mistake has to run to the cone before rejoining the defense. This temporarily creates a three against two dynamics in favor of the attacking team, the blue team. If they act quickly, they can take advantage of the numerical advantage; if not, they will find themselves in a three against three situation once the player returns.

When the red team recovers the ball, their goal will be to send a pass that crosses the two cone goals located in the center of the field.

This type of wave allows us to work on various tactical situations, almost all, I would say, as well as specific technical skills. It is an excellent way to practice different strategies and skills in an environment that simulates the real conditions of a match.

In the video, a very similar wave is presented but in a four against four format.

Although the image is not very clear, the idea is the same: a ball loss is simulated, and a player must start from behind.

These examples underline the importance of waves as a pedagogical tool in the training of young soccer players. They allow both technical and tactical aspects to be worked on in an integrated and contextualized way.

Question for the class: how could we simplify this exercise to adapt it to 7 to 8-year-old boys or girls? Considering their skill level and tactical understanding, what changes would you consider necessary to make the exercise more accessible but equally educational for them?

Slide 47

We see here a wave that always starts on the wing, with a two against one. In this example, you start with a player in depth, but you could also start with both players parallel. Your goal is to solve the two against one and then make a center, where you have three offensive players and several defensive players ready to finish.

This design allows you to focus on a wide variety of techniques and tactics. What other aspects do you think you could work on in this exercise?

If you watch the video from minute 3:12, you will find a quite similar exercise, although not exact, because in this case, there are no players ready to finish. Here you use both wings, which adds much more dynamics to the game and is an excellent way to diversify the exercise.

It is crucial to remember two things:

One of your goals should be to keep players in constant motion, minimizing prolonged pauses between exercises.
Although waves are very intense exercises, it is essential that players have time to rest between one and another, ensuring optimal performance.
Do you have any ideas or questions about how you could improve or adapt this exercise?

Slide 48

We see here an example of waves that evolve rapidly. We start with a one against one, but as soon as the ball is lost or a goal is scored, we move on to a two against one. And if the ball is lost again or a goal is scored, the action becomes a three against two. As you will notice, every time you recover the ball, you advance to the next phase. In other words, each segment of this wave represents only one phase of the game.

In summary, what you are seeing here is like a chain of three different waves, each of which has a duration equivalent to a single phase of the game.

Slide 49

In the example we have on screen, we will focus on a specific wave where the goal is to get the ball from the back, starting from the goalkeeper. We are in a 9v9 soccer context, and the red team is employing a high-pressure strategy.

The goal of the blue team is to advance with ball control until reaching the orange zone marked on the field. It is crucial that they do so while maintaining possession and avoiding the pressure of the red team. If the red team recovers the ball, their immediate goal will be to take a shot at goal as quickly as possible.

This exercise brings into play multiple aspects, from technical skill in ball handling to team tactics and quick decisions under pressure.

Slide 50

It's important to remember that some exercises don't fit neatly into a specific category. Just as we discussed the 'gray area' between rondos and possessions, this overlapping zone also exists between possessions and waves.

We could design a wave that incorporates elements of possession; for example, the team in possession must make a certain number of passes before having the option to attack the goal. This type of exercise, although a hybrid, is neither better nor worse than those that clearly fall into a category.

Nomenclature and categories help us organize our thoughts and communicate more effectively, but they shouldn't limit our creativity when designing exercises. An exercise that resides in this 'gray area' can be equally valuable for the development of our players.

In the next slide, we will see a practical example of an exercise that falls into this 'gray area'.

Slide 51

Now let's watch a video that perfectly illustrates this gray area between possession and wave that we've been discussing. In the example, the yellow team starts with the ball and engages in possession. In this situation, there's a two against one on the wing. We can add additional rules to this exercise, such as requiring a specific number of passes before allowing an attack on the goal.

Pay attention to how the objective of the yellow team changes once they overcome the two against one on the wing: they can't attack directly through the center, but must do so through the wing. Now, if the pink team manages to recover the ball, there are two goals located in the midfield where they must try to complete a pass.

This exercise is an excellent example of how we can be creative in designing our training sessions, leveraging elements from both possessions and waves to create a rich learning experience.

Slide 52

In pairs, you will draw three different types of waves. The first will focus on crossing play, the second on 2 against 1 situations in attack, and the third on maneuvers to get the ball out of the field or a specific zone.

Once you have your exercises designed, share them with the rest of the class. Explain the dynamics of each exercise, the rules you've set, and the objectives you aim to achieve. This not only allows us to better understand the different types of waves but also encourages critical thinking and creativity in designing training exercises.

These types of exercises not only reinforce technical and tactical skills but also test the adaptability and decision-making abilities of the players.

Slide 53

We're going to talk about conditioned matches, that is, games in which we introduce one or more specific rules with the aim of promoting certain skills or behaviors we want to see developed. It's crucial to find the right balance between rules that encourage what we're looking to train and the natural flow of the game. We don't want our rules to make the game lose its essence and become something too far removed from a real match.

A tip: instead of imposing strict rules that force players to display a specific behavior, we could opt for a points system. For example, if we're working on finishing, we could give extra points for each goal scored from a shot outside the box. In this way, players will be more inclined to try what we're training, but without feeling they're being forced to do so.

Remember that additional rules are tools to focus on certain aspects of the game, but they shouldn't overload the dynamics or make it unrecognizable. Conditioned matches are effective when used with balance and sensibility.

Slide 54

We're going to discuss how to design effective rules in conditioned matches to promote certain skills. For example, if we want to work on crosses and first-touch finishes, as well as changing the game side:

Bad practice: "To score, we must play with both wings before crossing into the box and can only score after a cross."

Good practice: "If we score a regular goal, it's 1 point; if the goal comes after a cross, it's 2 points; and if we've played with both wings before the cross, it's 3 points."

Another example would be if we want to practice playing in width:

Bad practice: "Attacking players must be open on the touchline when we have the ball."

Good practice: "When we don't have the ball, we close in towards the center of the

field. We can mark a zone on the sides where entry is not allowed unless the ball is there."

The key here is to be flexible and creative with the rules, but without making the game lose its essence. Remember, it's more effective to incentivize the behaviors we want to see rather than force them.

We focus the rule on the opposing team to the one we're looking to improve. We offer additional reinforcements to promote the desired behavior. Keeping this in mind when setting rules ensures we guide the game in the direction we want, without distorting its nature.

Slide 55

In this conditioned match, the only rule applied to the defending team is that they can only enter the side areas once the ball has entered there. The expectation is that the attacking team recognizes the advantage of opening the game through the wings. By doing so, they'll have more time and space to advance, cross, or restart the game by playing backward.

When the red team attacks, it will be the blue team that cannot occupy the side spaces until the ball gets there.

Slide 56

In this case, the conditioned match focuses on the defensive balance of the defensive line. The specific rule states that if the ball is on one of the flanks, the defender on the opposite flank must occupy a central position and maintain an equidistant distance between the entire defensive line and midfield.

Slide 57

This conditioned match is played with the defending team in a low block, which means they must defend closed in their own half of the field. The only rule here is that the defending team must maintain this low block.

We see the same exercise both in the drawing and in the video.

Slide 58

This conditioned match is played three against three, with a focus on individual marking. It's a high-intensity physical game. That's why we see a group of substitute players waiting for their turn.

The playing time is limited to about two minutes or until two goals are scored, for example.

The dimension of the area will be adjusted according to the skills and age of the players.

As I have pointed out on other occasions, the initial process is one of trial and error. If you observe that the game is too easy or difficult, don't hesitate to adjust the number of players to balance the dynamics, without the need for major alterations.

Slide 59

In pairs, I invite you to design three different situations that occur in a real match. The first will focus on crosses into the box; the second, on controlling the ball with the first touch; and the third, on the wall pass or "one-two".

Once you have your designs, share with the rest of the class the dynamics, rules, and specific objectives of each one. This exercise not only stimulates creativity but also allows us to discuss the different ways to address specific aspects of the game in real situations.

The goal is for these exercises to resemble real game situations as closely as possible, to ensure that the skills practiced are directly applicable to a match.

Slide 60

To conclude this series of exercises and conditioned matches, I want to emphasize the importance of creativity and adaptability. Don't be afraid to experiment with new exercises or modify existing ones to adapt them to the specific needs and objectives of the team.

When designing or choosing an exercise, remember some key points:

- There should always be a ball involved. This keeps the exercise relevant and specific to the sport.
- Set a clear objective for the exercise. What skill or set of skills do you want to develop or improve?
- Include an opponent in the exercise to add a level of challenge and realism.
- Ideally, there should also be a teammate involved, to encourage communication and teamwork.
- And finally, try to maximize player participation. We want everyone to be active and engaged, but without forgetting the importance of rest in high-intensity exercises.
- The effectiveness of any exercise is magnified when integrated thoughtfully within a broader training program. So, go ahead, don't be afraid to try, fail, and learn in the process. This is what we ask of the players, ask it of yourselves as well.

Slide 61

Post-training talk

It's time to put knowledge on a more conscious level. The players have been experimenting with the exercises we've proposed.

At the end of the training, on the field or in the locker room, we will have a reflection moment where we will guide the players through.