

## Evolution of a One Touch Passing Drill – Jeff Young Comments by Gary Rue and Dennis Mueller

Over the years in which I have been a youth soccer coach I have watched several teams struggle with a one touch passing drill. The concept behind the drill is excellent, but the execution is not. The drill involves one touch passing with movement, communication and awareness of other players and the space. I thought I would share our experiences in working with a 14 and under premier girls team.

Many coaches will probably recognize the drill as described below. The players are numbered from one up. Starting with one ball the first player one-touch passes the ball to the player with the next highest number. The player with the highest number would then pass the ball back to one and the drill continues.

After passing the ball players are expected to move out of the space but return when they are to receive a pass.

Two problems occur: (1) movement and (2) passing skills. Players look to minimize movement causing the space to become congested. Players also "want" to pass to the feet rather than space.

One additional point. Although this is a one-touch drill, players commonly used two or three touches. Done properly, one touch is all that is needed, but we have generally overlooked additional touches in order to help them deal with the concepts of space.

Our initial attempt split the team into two groups. Each group had a single cone. After the pass was made the passer had to touch the cone. Touching the cone created some movement, but we encountered the following problems.

1. Passes were made to the feet and never to space;
2. Many passes were 2 to 5 yards long;
3. Poor quality passing, which lacked pace and direction;
4. Receivers did little to help the passers;
5. Receivers allowed the ball to stop;
6. The groups remained in relatively small areas rarely using the surrounding space.

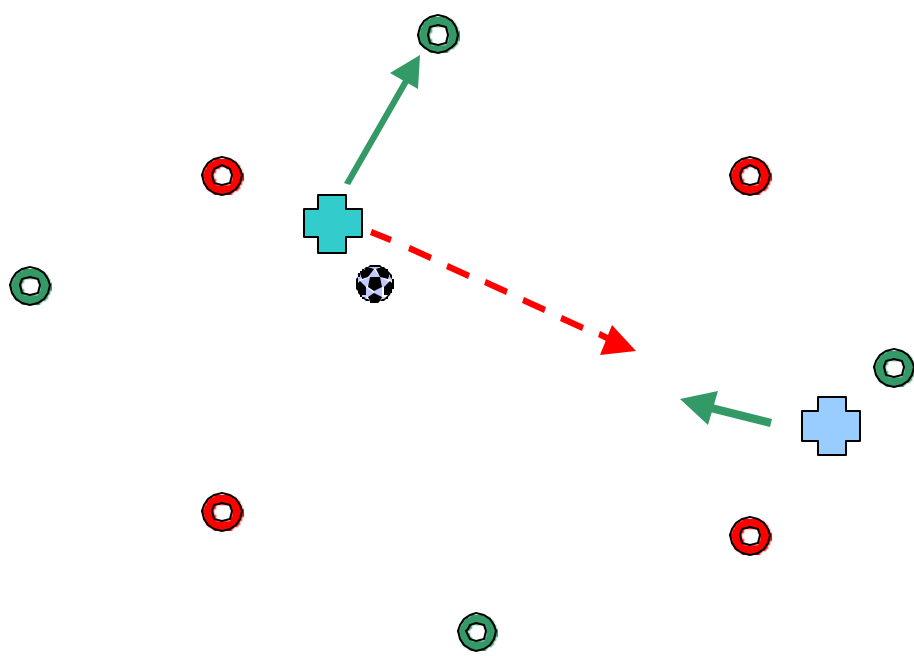
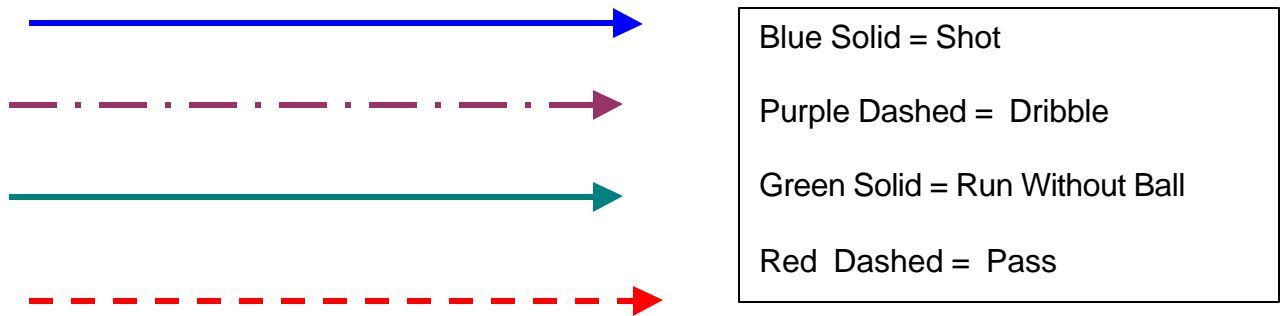
Our next step was to increase the movement of the players to increase space (problems 2 and 6 and indirectly problems 3 and 4). After several attempts

movement was increasing and players were comfortable with the drill. Communication between passer and receiver was well established. We combined the two groups and added another ball. There were now two cones for the team and players had to touch one of the cones after they made a pass. By increasing the numbers we felt that this would increase the space.

The use of space and movement improved slightly, but 2 to 5 yard passes or poor quality passes were still the norm.

To increase the use of space again, we modified the drill once more. This time we set out four cones in a 20 yard grid. We added four additional cones (different colour) about midway between the corners of the grid and about 5 yards outside the grid.

The following convention is made.



Now players had to pass and receive the ball inside the grid and then move to touch the cone outside the grid. Passing distance increased immediately and much more space was created.

Now was the time to remove the cones and enforce two concepts that we had talked about previously (problems 1, 4 and 5).

(1) Players were told that they could not allow the ball to stop or stop the ball themselves. Players had to be fully aware of where the ball was going to be, not where it was.

(2) Players had to make the "easy" pass or one touch pass. The onus was on communication between the players, movement of the receiver to a space that allowed the passer to make an "easy" pass and the passer to be aware of the field.

This last variation lasted all of five seconds before the ball stopped and another five seconds before players forced themselves to make the difficult pass. At this point I stopped the drill and we discussed the problems players were having making the easy pass to space and awareness of where they were on the field.

To make a one touch pass the passer had to push the ball in the direction they were facing when they received the ball. The receiver had to move to that space to create a situation where they would be able to make an easy pass.

Additional discussion focused on what the passer had to do once they had made the pass. Communication would have to be extended beyond the immediate passer and receiver.

Also, in a continuous one-touch exercise, I would think you would want the players passing to feet and not to space. A pass to space draws the player out of shape and causes the next player to readjust. I do like the move away after the pass requirement to keep the play from being too stationary and stagnant.

One thing that was not mentioned originally, but was brought up by one of the reviewing coaches was that the receiver often traps herself by not facing the field. This is a concept that seems so obvious it has always amazed me how players don't get it naturally, but they don't.

Simply put the receivers, who will become the passer upon reception, often find themselves facing the direction from which the ball is coming and if this a nearby boundary, they are left with few simple 1-touch options (except the obvious return pass which is not permitted in this drill).

The way out of this trap is two-fold, first always strive to be in a position to receive the ball that has them facing the rest of the field as much as possible

second to demand that the pass they are receiving be played into the space between them and the field, NOT to feet, or worse, behind them.

Even if you don't demand movement, this drill will breakdown if the players are not passing to the space just inside of the receivers.

To illustrate that point, try starting with 6 or more in a 10 yard circle and demand they make 1-touch passes and pass the ball so that the ball moves clockwise to the nearest neighbor. It will not be long before a pass is made to feet or to the outside of the receiver. That receiver will then have a tough time of it to make a good pass. The player's ability to play the ball well with the back leg will probably determine how well they do in making a good string of passes even after they know that they must pass to the inside space.

Whether it is a technical breakdown (they can't make good passes with the back leg) or a tactical breakdown (they don't get that the pass must be made to setup the next pass) should become obvious from this simple drill after you tell them the pass must be made to the inside.

The other clue is if it is technical, you should hear lots of "sorries" following bad passes, those who don't "get it" won't even know they messed up and put the next player in a difficult spot.