

Possession Soccer - Increasing the Speed of Play

Introduction

The previous sections discussed ways for individuals, and then small groups, to achieve possession of the ball, and keep it, even with their back to the play and under pressure. This section amplifies on this skill to explain the team concept of possessing the ball and increasing the speed of play.

First I think we have to define what we mean by Possession Soccer and Speed of Play.

Possession soccer has several components, the **ability** and the **will** to pass the ball with minimum touches, the ability to shield and possess the ball when under pressure and the use of negative space (passing the ball in the direction of your own goal line) as was discussed in the previous section.

Attributes of possession style players are:

- good passing technique and enjoying passing the ball
- pass quickly (one or two touch)
- pass in the direction they are facing (when they receive the ball)
- use short passes more often than long
- passes are on the ground
- tend to switch fields (playing away from the source of the last pass)
- dribble only to possess or to find passing space
- do not panic when under pressure, able to maintain possession

These players usually have good field awareness and know where they are going with the ball before they receive it.

A possession style player tends to be very conservative and puts priority on ball possession. A possession style player needs to be constantly reminded to go forward with the dribble and the pass when opportunity presents itself and as we discussed in the previous section, turn the ball and go to goal. Too often the easy and quick pass are opted for over a more aggressive option, even though the option has an excellent chance of success.

In addition to “**Possession**”, a lot of us have heard the term “**Speed of Play**”. But what is speed of play? Speed of play can be described as the combination of physical abilities and mental sharpness that leads to correct decision making on the field and then proper execution of that decision.

Speed of play has many components. Physically, it is affected by our first touch on the ball. It is affected by how well we prepare for the second touch. From the

mental side, it is affected by the type of pressure that is applied and how we react to this pressure. It is affected by our situational awareness of the field, i.e. the decision process that is made by the player as to when to turn and take on an opponent, when to drive up the field, when to lay the ball off, etc. etc.

How many times have we seen the ball bounce back and forth between teams like a Ping-Pong ball? How often have we seen our backs clear the ball, right to an opposing player, when they are under little to no pressure? How many times have we seen our players turn into pressure simply because they did not check over their shoulder?

How many times have we seen our youngest just kick the ball into the opponent's shins? How many times have we seen our players **slow down** and try to decide who to pass to instead of checking for their options before the ball reaches them?

In this section we'll try to show you ways to increase your players awareness of the field and to quicken their decision making process. We'll start with very simple exercises and gradually increase the complexity.

The drills and exercises in this section have been shown to work with 8 year olds right up through premier level teams. Remember to try to keep your exercises age and skill appropriate. If it isn't working, go on to something else or make the exercise simpler.

Possessing the Ball – Increasing the Speed of Play

The basic concept to increasing the speed of play is to gradually increase the pressure and complexity of the drill. As these two factors increase, more and more field awareness is required to execute the drills. As was discussed in the previous section technical excellence is as a basic prerequisite. Players must know how to pass, one-touch, receive, turn, etc. When they get proficient, these skills will be almost instinctive.