

Dear Coach Fantastic,



My team has very skilful individual players but unfortunately our support play is letting us down. On too many occasions players are left with no options to play the ball and end up losing possession. Have you any suggestions to assist me in training to combat this?

(Paddy, Mayo)

Hi Paddy

Support play is key to the success of any team. The more options a player has the less likely she is to lose possession. When we refer to depth in either attacking or defensive play we are talking about support play and good depth ensures that the player on the ball has support all around and can play the ball forward, back or to the side. It is essential that your players understand what you mean by 'support play' before introducing activities to focus on this.

In order to develop support play, it is necessary to organise your session with activities that include team mates and opposition. These drills and games should be within an achievable distance and have players supporting at appropriate angles and speed, depending on how much pressure there is on the ball. The best method of developing support play is initially to use a simple drill to get your players thinking about the timing of their runs and also the angle that they are running towards their team mate. The next progression would then be with the use of games, from modified, through small sided and finally full sided games.

Modified games will allow you to focus on a specific aspect of play and force players to make decisions on where and when to move in a real 'game' situation. Small sided games will then be an extension to this and will allow players to encounter challenges similar to those found in full sided games but all players will be in possession more often. Games such as 'Backs and Forwards' are an effective method of developing positioning and ensuring support play utilised on a frequent basis as the ball is play for all players more regularly and forwards need to be in support at all times to try and get scores while defenders need to play the ball back to the centre by supporting their colleagues. Ultimately you need this support play to transfer in a full game so once the earlier progressions have been achieved, it is vital that players play full sided games in regular positions to get used to their colleagues style of play.

There is a sample of two games included in the coaching corner to assist you in getting support play introduced to your team.

I hope you find this useful.

Coach Fantastic