

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

Dear Coach Fantastic,

My under 15 team have been training together for a number of months but now have a break in games and I would like do some other activities with them outside training, have you any suggestions?

(Mary, St Patrick's)

Hi Mary

Activities outside training can really assist with building team cohesion and ensuring team work is a key element for your squad. There are many organised activities available from bowling to adventure centres through to attending events or matches. It is important that a team of that age is encouraged to have role models so it is a good idea to bring them along to some of the county games and, if possible, introduce them to the girls from the team. It will also be a beneficial bonding session. Many adventure centres offer a variety of activities for any age group with many of these aimed at team building. It is a good idea to price around for these as some activities can be expensive.

There are many activities that you can organise free or at minimal cost also. Team building activities should be age appropriate and there are many resources available with details in books or on websites. Many coaches use fund raisers as team building activities also so you could incorporate both. An example of this is a 'Kickathon' where all your team get sponsored to keep kicking footballs for a set time. They get to work together whilst also making money for the team.

If your club is near a mountain or the beach you could do some activity there also. This will be free and a great outing for the whole team. Training can be adapted to take place on the beach if necessary and provides the well earned break you are looking to give your girls and they will really enjoy their session in a different environment.

The most important thing to remember when organising activities outside training is to keep them fun. These are the ideal opportunities for your team to bond and meet each other outside of football activity.