



PLAYING FOREIGN OPPOSITION



Why facing teams from another country can be one of the most valuable parts of a soccer tour

Playing unfamiliar opposition gives young players a completely different challenge from their normal league games. Different teams may play at a different tempo, use different formations, defend differently or approach the game with a style the players have not experienced before.

That forces players to adapt, communicate and make decisions for themselves rather than relying on what feels familiar.

There is also something special about representing your club against a team from another country. Players exchange handshakes, shirts, photos and experiences with young people who share the same passion for soccer.

The result matters on the day, but the real value comes from experiencing a different way of playing the game and taking those lessons home.

At Total Football Experience, every tour is customised around the team, including the level and number of matches. We work to arrange suitable opposition so players are challenged appropriately while still getting the opportunity to experience a different style of soccer.

Then, if you have room, add a small line underneath:
Find out more: www.totalfootballexperience.com

DEFENDING FROM THE FRONT

A4 SESSION PLAN | YOUTH SOCCER



PRESS
WIN
ATTACK

Theme:
High Pressing & Winning the Ball Back

Duration:
60 Minutes

Players:
12-16

Age:
U12-U16

1. SESSION OBJECTIVE

Improve the team's ability to press from the front, force play into predictable areas, and win the ball back quickly in advanced positions.

2. KEY COACHING POINTS

- **Recognise pressing triggers:** poor touch, backward pass, slow pass, pass to wide player.
- **Press on an angle** to show play one way.
- **Nearest player presses;** teammates cover and screen passing options.
- **Stay compact** and connected behind the press.
- **Communicate** early and react together.
- If the press is beaten, recover quickly and reset.

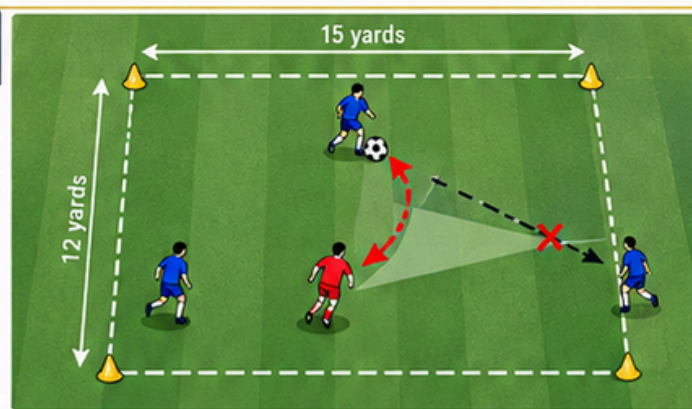
1. WARM-UP PRESSING ANGLES (10 MINS)

Organisation

12x15 yard area. Players work in groups of 3 or 4. One defender closes down a receiver while teammates adjust to cover passing lanes. Rotate roles regularly.

Coaching Focus

Angle of approach, body shape, quick reaction, forcing play one way.



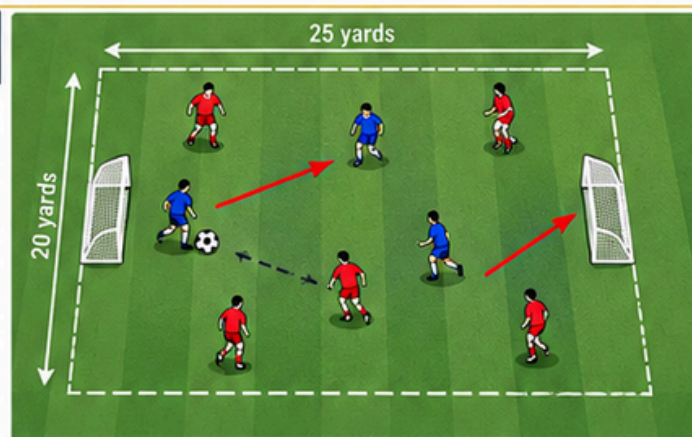
2. SMALL-SIDED HIGH PRESS GAME (20 MINS)

Organisation

Area 25x20 yards. 4v4 + 2 target goals. Team out of possession presses high and tries to win the ball in the attacking half. Score by winning possession and finishing quickly.

Coaching Focus

Press together, lock play to one side, support the first defender, quick transition after regain.



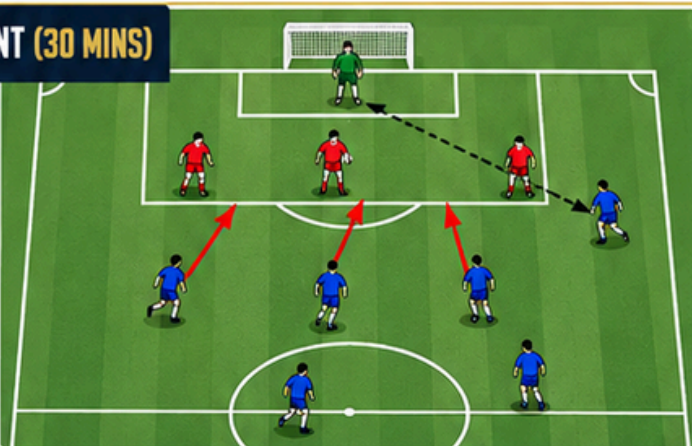
3. CONDITIONED GAME – DEFEND FROM THE FRONT (30 MINS)

Organisation

Half-pitch game, 6v6 or 7v7 with goalkeepers if available. Restart with the defending team building from the back. Award 3 points for a goal scored within 8 seconds of regaining the ball in the attacking half.

Coaching Focus

Recognise cues to press, back up the press, remain compact, recover if beaten, attack quickly after regaining.



COACH REMINDER: Good pressing is a team action, not a solo run.

Designed as a one-page printable session plan.

SHOULD YOUNG PLAYERS SPECIALISE IN ONE POSITION?

As young players develop, it can be tempting to decide very early that someone is a defender, midfielder, winger or striker. But at recreational, grassroots and competitive youth level, experiencing different positions can be hugely valuable.

Playing in different areas of the field helps players see the game from different perspectives. A defender who spends time in midfield may understand passing options better. A striker who occasionally plays at the back may develop a greater appreciation of movement, space and defensive pressure.

It can also reveal strengths that coaches, parents and even the player may not have noticed before. Of course, as players get older they may naturally begin to settle into positions that suit them best. But during the development years, flexibility can help create more rounded, adaptable and confident players.

Before deciding what position a young player is, give them the chance to discover what they can become.



Parents on the Sideline: Support, Don't Coach

Matchday should be a positive experience for young players, and parents can play an important part in creating that environment. Encouragement, applause and positive support can help children feel confident and enjoy the game, but the coaching itself should be left to the coaches.

When a player hears instructions from the coach, a parent and perhaps other adults on the sideline at the same time, it can quickly become confusing. A well-meaning shout of “shoot,” “pass,” “get rid of it” or “drop back” may actually stop the player from thinking for themselves and making their own decisions.

Young players need the freedom to read the game, try things, make mistakes and learn. That process is a big part of their development.

Parents can still make a huge difference by encouraging effort, bravery, teamwork and enjoyment. Let the coach provide the instructions and let the player experience the game.

Cheer the player. Trust the coach. Let the game teach.

“Let kids play and have fun: don't put pressure on them.”

Jorge Messi, Lionel Messi's father

(when asked what advice he would give parents of young players)

What Makes a Good Teammate?

Being a good teammate is about much more than playing well.

Good teammates communicate positively, encourage others and keep working hard even when the game is difficult. They celebrate each other's success and help teammates recover quickly when mistakes happen.

Effort matters too. Players notice who keeps running, tracks back, supports the ball and does the less glamorous jobs for the team. A strong teammate also shows respect, for coaches, officials, opponents and the people around them.

Every player will have good games and bad games. What matters is how you respond, how you treat others and whether you help make the team a better place to be.

Good teammates don't just improve the team, they improve the experience for everyone.



Should Young Players' Training Be Mostly Conditioned Games?



Not entirely. Technical development starts from the very beginning, but the way you teach it should change with age.

For roughly **U6–U8**, the priority is ball familiarity: lots of touches, dribbling, turning, stopping, simple passing and shooting. Activities should be short, playful and game-like. Small-sided games are important, but so is giving every child plenty of individual contact with the ball.

From around **U9–U12**, technical detail can increase. This is a key age for first touch, passing quality, receiving, turning, striking the ball, 1v1 ability and using both feet. Conditioned games then give players the chance to apply those skills under pressure.

From **U13 upward**, technical work still matters, but it becomes more closely linked to position, decision-making, speed of play and tactical understanding.

Technique gives players the tools. Conditioned games teach them when and why to use those tools.

If training is only conditioned games, players may make lots of decisions without getting enough repetition to improve the skill itself. If training is only isolated technique, they may become comfortable with the ball but struggle to use those skills in realistic situations.

The best youth sessions usually blend both: lots of touches, followed by lots of opportunities to use those touches in games.



Planning a Soccer Tour: Where Do You Start?

Planning a soccer tour can feel like a big job, but it becomes much easier when you break it into a few simple decisions. Start with the basics: when you want to travel, how many nights you are considering, the age and level of the team, and roughly how many players and family members may travel.



Next, think about what you want the tour to include. Competitive matches, training sessions, professional games, stadium visits, sightseeing and team experiences can all form part of the itinerary.

Once those priorities are clear, the tour can be built around your team's dates, budget and goals. The key is to start the conversation early. You do not need every detail decided just enough information to begin shaping the right experience for your group.

<https://www.totalfootballexperience.com/planning-your-soccer-tour-to-england>

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Feedz is an AI-powered platform designed to make player feedback fast, personalized, and impactful. Coaches simply record a quick voice note, and Feedz instantly converts it into a structured, professional report for players and parents, saving hours each week while improving engagement and performance. Harry Maguire of Manchester United & England is an Investor & Co-Founder. www.feedz.club/



1000 TOUCHES

1,000 Touches is a simple daily ball mastery programme designed for young soccer players who want to improve their touch, control, coordination and confidence with the ball. Using short, repeatable activities that can be completed indoors or outdoors, players work towards approximately 1,000 touches of the ball in just 20–30 minutes.

<https://www.totalfootballexperience.com/1000-touches>

THE FINAL WHISTLE

Thanks for reading this issue of Wider Game FC.

The aim is to share useful ideas, practical advice and opportunities for everyone involved in youth soccer — from players and parents to coaches, referees and club officials.

If you found something useful, please feel free to share the newsletter with someone else in the game.

Wider Game FC — Ideas, insight and opportunities from across the wider game.

