

Progression 2:

Advancing the Ball

Here are six tools to enable young players to defend effectively and transition to attack.

1. First touch: preparing the ball

It's time to stop teaching our players to "trap" the ball. Instead, teach them to "prepare" the ball for their next touch. A player seeking to control the ball, rather than pass or shoot, should be taught that their first touch is to attack the space toward the opponents goal or touch it to space away from defenders. Playing the ball to yourself in this way accelerates the play, improves possession, and immediately begins the attack. Perhaps most important, it's the key to making the shift from kick-ball to True Soccer. That first "sweet" touch is critical.

2. Come back for the ball and turn

Rather than running straight for your opponent's goal, target players (typically front players and midfielders) can be taught to run back toward their teammate with the ball into the space conceded to them by defenders. And when the ball is received, they should either turn – in one fluid motion – to attack the goal, or prepare the ball for their next touch back away from a defender who is applying high pressure. Don't forget to teach the passer and nearby teammates to shout, "man on!" or "turn!"

3. Shielding, spin turn

A player hemmed in by defenders and without an immediate pass available must be able to screen or shield the ball and hold it almost indefinitely. And when trying to change direction with a defender applying pressure, the ball carrier can do a "spin turn" showing the defender her back rather than trying to move the ball across in front of the opponent. To turn to the left, begin by turning to the right and, with two or three quick touches, dribble/turn so your back is to the defender, spinning 180 degrees around to the left. The move is almost always safe and by starting to one side and turning quickly to the other, the defender is often left behind.

4. Playing to space (not to feet)

In teaching passing, our tendency is to encourage players to pass the ball directly to a teammate's feet. And while that's still effective in very tight spaces, the *most* effective pass in maintaining possession and beating defenders is to pass the ball to the space near your teammate (and away from or even behind the opponent). This allows your teammate to collect the ball on the run with less pressure. Watch how possession and penetration improve!

5. Changing fields

For young players taking on young defenders, there may be no Power Tool more effective than changing the point of attack. Players in the midfield (overlapping back players, withdrawn attacking players, and of course midfielders) can thoroughly upset defenses by driving the ball to teammates on the opposite side. The best way to do it is with a low, driven ball struck with the instep.

6. Overlapping runs

Overlapping isn't just for fullbacks, and it isn't just for advanced players. It is essential for even the youngest players if a team wishes to outnumber opponents on attack. And it's simple to teach: players "overlap" by coming up from behind (or looping around) a teammate with the ball – and running to the *outside*. When the runner takes the space to the outside, the ball can be played in the space ahead of her ... and then the passer too can loop outside to receive the next pass! Defenders are confronted with 2 on 1, attackers capture the forward space conceded to them by defenders, and the ball is quickly and safely advanced up the field. If the ball is lost, the counter attack begins from the wide part of the field, furthest from danger.

That's the progression for Advancing the Ball for young and old. Abstract ideas including group and team tactics reduced to concrete directions even the youngest players can picture and apply. Technique and speed will improve with your help. Make these ideas come to life and hear your kids praised as a "great little team!"