

Philosophy:

We try to keep things as simple as possible yet do these simple basic skills very well. Our practices focus on passing, shooting and moving. We shoot almost every practice because it is such a hard skill to master (and it is fun). We also work on set plays almost every practice, especially corner kick offense and defense. Our style is very direct. We do not play a lot of side-to-side motion. We tend to use speed and quickness to get to the penalty box to get shots and then crash the net for rebounds.

Throw-ins:

We instruct our players to throw the ball in along the touchline until the thrower is near the opponent's penalty box. The defender on that side of the field throws the ball in so that the midfielders are in the offensive mode. Once the throw-in is near the penalty box the throw is then directed toward a target players head that tries to flick the ball on to another player crashing through the penalty area. Midfielders take throws that are deeper than the penalty box (top of the box). The same target is used to flick the ball on to another crashing offensive player.

Free Kicks:

We take our time setting up free kicks. These are an opportunity to score. From long distances we try to loft the ball into the penalty spot area with players running onto the ball. The ball sent in should be driven so that the defenders do not have time to adjust to the flight of the ball. We treat the penalty area as a pinball machine. The ball will bang around with the large numbers of players in such a small space. We try to target a player's head that will then try to flick the ball to another player crashing through.

Free kicks that are close enough to require a wall are taken right at the heads of the players in the wall. Most high school players will duck or move their head when the ball is coming right at them. This works as an excellent screen for the keeper.

We will also place balls on the ground around the outside of the wall with players running onto the ball in the fashion to get an open direct shot on goal before the wall breaks up.

We have also placed players on the ends of the wall that peel off when the ball is put into play.

Defensive coverage on Free Kicks

We defend free kicks with man to man marking for free kicks a long way from the penalty box. We do not let any players go into the penalty box before the ball is kicked. This gives our keeper more room to attack a lofted ball.

For free kicks that require a wall we always have the same positions set up in particular parts of the wall. One of the inside mids lines up with the ball and the post. The keeper directs this person where to be. The should be one person set up on the outside of this person to prevent bending the ball around the wall and then two or three inside this person depending on the distance the ball placement is from the goal. If the free kick is in the middle of the field we set up the wall so that the keeper defends his weak side dive with his body and the wall defends his strong side dive. This allows the keeper more time to dive to his strong side. The keeper is able to cover more of the goal by diving to his strong side. We have the rest of the players fill space and usually mark man to man on the best players.

Corner Kicks:

Our corner kick plays are similar to our throw-in plays. We have a short play and a long play. In the short play, the target is standing about 10 yards from the front post of the goal. The target is about 2-3 feet off the goal line. The corner is sent to the target's head that then flicks the ball back to the top of the goal box where players are crashing in. We have three players that crash in to the box. Their spacing is triangular to make sure the full area of the goal box and just outside is covered. The target player has a couple of options with the incoming ball. They can head it if it is head high. They can trap and turn with the ball and attack the near post. They can trap and turn with the ball and pass to the top of the goal box. They can direct the ball back to the person taking the corner kick.

We have a left-footed cross from the right side of the penalty box and a right-footed cross from the left side of the penalty box. We like to have the ball spinning toward the goal.

We target the midpoint between the top of the goal box and the penalty spot for longer corner kicks. This is desired because if the ball is hit short or long it is still in a dangerous area to defend.

Practice activities:

Corner Kick Defense Drill

Two defenders on posts front and back post, Keeper in net. The rest other 8 players should be spread throughout the box. One striker should be just outside the penalty box. The other field players that are not in the drill stand about twenty yards from the goal line in an arc around the box. One player should be at each corner flag with balls. On the whistle the ball is served in from one corner flag. The target should be half way between the penalty spot and top of the goal box. The defending players must clear the ball before it contacts the ground. Clearing the ball for another corner kick is OK, but it is better to clear the ball up and out of the box. The lone striker out of the box should angle to the side the ball is cleared to advance the ball out. The other players that are not in the defending part of the drill try to score when the ball is cleared. They have to get open and shoot immediately. If the ball lands on the ground during the first serve the defending team must do a half lap. If a goal is scored the defending team must do a full lap. After several kicks from both corners the offensive players switch with defensive players and the drill continues. Make sure that when the ball is cleared from the box and the striker has possession that the keeper gets the defenders off the posts and up field.

Corner Kick Offense Drill (Pre-game, Long, Short)

Pre-game

There are several variations we do for corner kick drills. In our pre-game warm ups we have three lines of players just outside the penalty box. There are two players at the corner flags with balls. The ball is served in while one player from each line staggers their run into the box. They should make a triangle between the penalty spot and top of the goal box. Two players are low and one is high. The ball is served in from alternating sides. The forwards try to head or volley the ball out of the air without the ball touching the ground.

Long

There are players with balls at each corner flag. Two groups of players are positioned just outside the arc. There should be 5 players in each group. There should be one player in front of the keeper. The group of 5 should huddle close to each other. While in the huddle they should decide on what run they will make. Each time this is done the players should make new runs. This is very important that they change their runs because it is much harder to defend. One player should make a near post arcing run. The second player should make a far post arcing run. The third player should make a run to the penalty spot. The

fourth player should make a run into the goal box. The fifth player should run to the top of the arc. About 80% of balls cleared during a corner kick are cleared to the top of the arc, so it is vital to have a person end their run at that spot. Repeat the drill from the other side of the field with the other group. In a game you would also add the far side defender to make a run to the top corner of the penalty box. There should always be at least 1 more defender at the midfield compared to the offensive players at the midfield.

Short

The same basic version is done for the short play as the long play except there is a player about 10 yards from the near post about 2-3 feet from the goal line. This is the target player for the corner kicks. This player does the same thing as in the throw-in plays described on page one. This player can head the ball on, turn and attack, turn and pass or send the ball back to the player sending the ball in. Make sure to alternate sides that the corner kicks are taken. There should now be only 4 players in the group at the top of the penalty box. Make sure that one player stops their run at the top of the arc. Make sure that when the target player turns or heads the ball that they do not send it towards the keeper. The ball should be directed to the top middle of the goal box or just outside the goal box.

Throw-in Drills (Long, Short) Into the penalty box.

We have the player that has the longest throw take these. You should have a couple of players practice this.

Long

The player throwing the ball in should target the throw as close to the penalty spot as possible. There should be a player that is the target that will flick the ball to a couple of other players that are crashing in behind the target player. The target player should run towards the thrower and then flick the ball to the crashing players. Make sure to not flick the ball towards the keeper. You want the ball to go away from the keeper. Make sure to have one player make a run to the top of the arc. The ball tends to end up in that spot. There should also be a player making a run on the far side of the penalty box to make sure that no balls run completely through the penalty box.

Short

The same formation as the long throw above but now the target player is closer to the thrower.

Free Kick Drills

We usually run the free kick drills at the same time we practice setting up walls. We place the ball near the penalty box, set up the wall and then have one or two players take the free kick. We have one offensive player on the wall. One or two players are at the wall. The first steps over the ball and continues towards the inside of the wall. The second takes the shot aiming at the head of the wall. A second version is to step over the ball and have the second player push the ball to the outside of the wall where the player standing at the wall peels off to take the shot as the ball moves past the wall.