

ELITE SOCCER

COACHING PRACTICES FROM THE WORLD'S
LEADING MANAGER

**Be ready for
the new season**
Training practices
from the game's
top coaches

THE PROFESSIONAL FITNESS PLANS

**STRENGTH
AGILITY
FITNESS
TECHNIQUE
ENDURANCE**



**GARY
WALKER**

MANCHESTER UNITED
STRENGTH

**Pre-season
strength and
conditioning**



**SCOTT
MILLER**

FULHAM
AGILITY

**Four types of
pre-season
agility**



**TOM
LITTLE**

HUDDERSFIELD TOWN
FITNESS

**Endurance
and football
fitness**



**ANTONIO
GOMEZ**

F.C. CARTAGENA
TECHNIQUE

**Technique
training**



**ALEX
ARMSTRONG**

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY
ENDURANCE

**Muscular
endurance
programme**

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THE PROFESSIONAL FITNESS PLANS

Top fitness and conditioning plans from the best in the game



Welcome to a special issue of Elite Soccer, one that showcases some of the best pre-season fitness plans, as used by a selection of the game's most innovative club coaches.

This 2012/13 fitness edition is designed to help amateur and aspiring coaches improve their players' abilities, particularly in the period leading up to the start of the new campaign.

We have showcased a series of plans and a range of specialisms – strength, agility, fitness, technique and endurance – using the insight of training ground experts from Manchester United, Fulham, Sheffield Wednesday, Huddersfield Town and FC Cartagena.

While these sessions vary between four and six weeks in length, the intention is that you can select which components you feel work best for your team.

It all adds up to an all-encompassing and original blueprint for players' pre-season development, and one we hope you'll enjoy.

Best regards,

Howard Wilkinson

Howard Wilkinson

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GARY WALKER

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MANCHESTER UNITED

STRENGTH

Gary joined Manchester United during the 2007/2008 season and within three years had become the club's Head of Strength and Conditioning.

His role involves identifying players' physical strengths and weaknesses, and devising gym-based programmes to develop their robustness, strength and power in order to aid their on-field performance.

Gary is an accredited strength and conditioning coach with the UKSCA and NSCA and holds the FA Fitness Trainers' Award.



SCOTT MILLER

PAGE 8

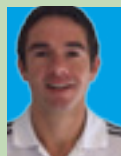
FULHAM

AGILITY

Scott Miller is a former professional footballer who is first-team fitness coach at Barclays Premier League side Fulham.

Having studied towards the end of his playing career, Miller moved to London in 2006, becoming first-team fitness coach at the west London club the following year.

His role involves overseeing the fitness of all first-team players. That involves working closely with manager Martin Jol and match analysts, in producing a comprehensive football programme.



TOM LITTLE

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HUDDERSFIELD TOWN

FITNESS

Dr. Tom Little is a Fitness Coach with over 13 years experience in professional football. He specialises in utilising football drills for simultaneous

improvements in technical and fitness components, and designed 'Soccer Fit', a search engine and session planner for football fitness drills.

He currently works for npower Championship side Huddersfield Town, and consults for Pro Sports Apps and the New Zealand Football Federation.



ANTONIO GOMEZ

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FC CARTAGENA

TECHNIQUE

Antonio Gomez has worked as sport scientist and fitness coach at English clubs Liverpool, Sunderland, and Ipswich Town, incorporating fitness workouts

into a variety of soccer training programmes.

His premise has always been to explore the link between fitness levels and decision-making, with the emphasis usually on working with the ball.

Antonio is currently employed at Spanish Club Championship side FC Cartagena, specialising in rehabilitation and injury prevention.



ALEX ARMSTRONG

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SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY

ENDURANCE

Alex Armstrong is an experienced soccer coach and current Director of Performance at npower Championship side Sheffield Wednesday.

Armstrong joined Southampton in 1996 as Head of Sports Science, moving on to Wolverhampton Wanderers in 2000, before spells in the States and at Cardiff City, as first-team fitness coach. In March 2012, after six years in south Wales, he moved to Sheffield Wednesday, where he is now responsible for attaining optimum physical output from the club's players.

Strength & Conditioning

Gary Walker Manchester United

Overview

Strength and conditioning in the athletic development of soccer players is important for two reasons - it improves physical performance and may reduce the likelihood of injury occurrence.

Elite players perform over 1,000 changes of activity, each characterised by acceleration and deceleration of differing velocity. Physical competencies that players require include high levels of strength, power, speed and agility to perform explosive movements such as kicking, maximal sprinting, turning, tackling, dribbling and jumping.

It is likely that these crucial actions influence the many one-on-one playing duals on the pitch and ultimately are the decisive actions that decide the outcomes of matches, and that's why this programme is so vital.

It's important that before a player begins a resistance training programme, he is screened for a number of functional movement competencies. Any movements that are not correctly performed should be addressed before they are done with added resistance. These corrective exercises and stretches may form a 'pre-habilitation programme' for players.

**Weeks 1 to 4 – Strength & Injury Prevention
(Sessions 1 and 2)**

**Weeks 5 and 6 – Power Transition
(Sessions 2 and 3)**

Session 1 Whole Body Strength (Weeks 1-4)

How do I set it up?

Using a gym, set up equipment for each circuit before players arrive. We will always ensure we schedule this session at a separate time to the on-field football session to maximise training adaptation (for example, field session in the morning and gym session in the afternoon).

What do I get the players to do?

Following a dynamic warm-up, divide the squad into pairs of equal strength. Each pair starts on one exercise. Pair three groups together to make a group of six.

Each group works fully through each of the four circuits (see next page), then rotates to the next one. Complete two or three sets of each for a total body strength

workout. A total of 24 players can work simultaneously.

So in pairs, player A performs the exercise, then player B. When one player works, the other rests. Players repeat the circuit for the desired number of sets, then move to next exercise, resting for two minutes between circuits.

How long do I run it for?

Perform the circuit twice per week for four weeks (see table below). Start with two sets of each exercise in week 1, then three sets of each exercise for weeks 2 to 4.

In weeks 1 and 2, start with six repetitions of each exercise. If the exercise is single limb, perform six reps for each arm, leg or direction. Begin planks at 20–30 seconds and progress.

In weeks 3 and 4, reduce to five reps of each exercise and increase resistance accordingly, subject to player technique proficiency.

Example Pre-Season Strength & Conditioning Schedule (to be planned around match schedule).

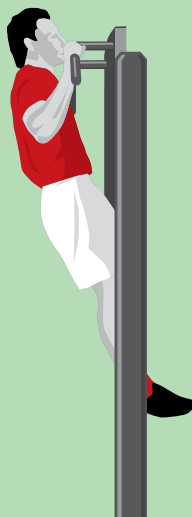
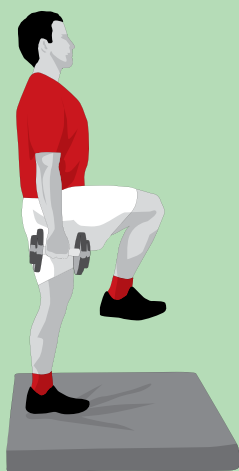
	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1	Whole Body Strength (2 Sets)		Injury Prevention Circuit (3 Sets)		Whole Body Strength (2 Sets)		
Weeks 2 to 4	Whole Body Strength (3 Sets)		Injury Prevention Circuit (3 Sets)		Whole Body Strength (3 Sets)		
Week 5	Power Transition (2 Sets)		Injury Prevention Circuit (3 Sets)	Power Transition (3 Sets)			
Week 6	Power Transition (3 Sets)		Injury Prevention Circuit (3 Sets)	Power Transition (2 Sets)		First match of the season	

WALKER STRENGTH

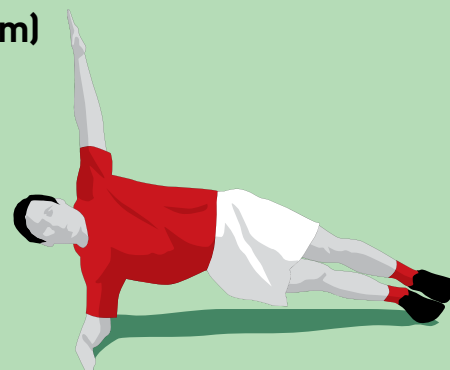
Circuit 1: Back Squat – Alternate DB Bench Press – Front Plank



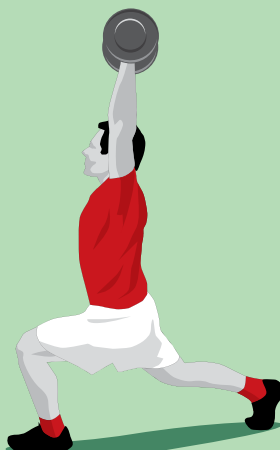
Circuit 2: DB Step Up – Pull-Ups – Side Plank (Left arm)



Circuit 3: Single Leg RDL – Bent Over Row – Side Plank (Right arm)



Circuit 4: Single Leg Glut/Ham Bridge – Lunge Shoulder Press – Core Rotation



WALKER STRENGTH

Session 2 Minimal Equipment Injury Prevention Session

(Weeks 1-6)

How do I set it up?

This session requires limited equipment, so can be performed

on a pitch and acts as a great pre-session warm-up. It can be performed as a stand-alone strengthening session if you do not have access to a gym facility.

What do I get the players to do?

The players work in pairs at the same time, so two 'set-ups' of

each exercise station are required. Players then work around each station without rest until they have completed the circuit. A 2-3 minute rest is then taken before the next circuit begins.

How long do I run it for?

We perform the session once or twice

a week throughout pre-season, although it can be used more frequently if you do not have gym access as a warm-up for football sessions.

Time permitting, do three sets of 10 reps for each exercise (or five per limb). Alternatively, a set time can be dictated by

the coach (30 seconds per exercise would suffice).

Increase the number of repetitions, the time spent on each exercise or the complexity of exercise throughout pre-season. For example, use multi-directional hop 'n' holds to challenge the players further.

Single Leg Squat



T Press-Up



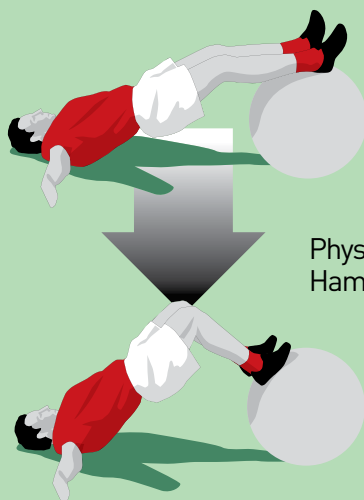
Single Leg Hop n' holds (forward)



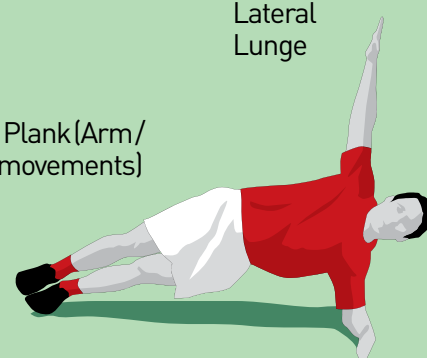
Lateral Lunge



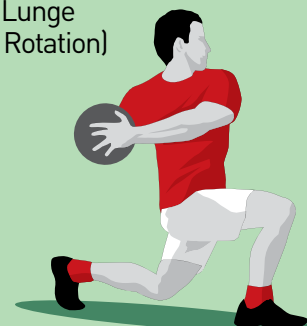
Physio Ball Hamstring Curls



Side Plank (Arm/Leg movements)



Forward Lunge (with MB Rotation)



Bosu Single Leg Balance



Double Leg Hurdle Hops (stick landing)



Front Plank (Arm movements)



WALKER STRENGTH

Session 3 Power transition

(Weeks 5 and 6)

How do I set it up?

This part of the sessions requires the team to return to the gym. Again, set up equipment for each circuit before players arrive. If you do not have gym access, the

power exercises can still be performed on the pitch. For instance, after the warm-up, perform 1b and 1c, and after the desired number of sets have been completed, perform 2b and 2c (see table below).

Check that you have a safe area to perform plyometric

(training muscle elastic strength and explosiveness to enhance performance). And as this programme requires players to perform explosive activities, it should be undertaken when the players are fresh - preferably on the lightest 'on-field'

training days during the week.

What do I get the players to do?

Following a dynamic warm-up, the player works through the exercises 1a to 1c for a desired number of sets. The player then works through 2a to 2c, before finishing with exercise 3a.

Pre-season improvement target

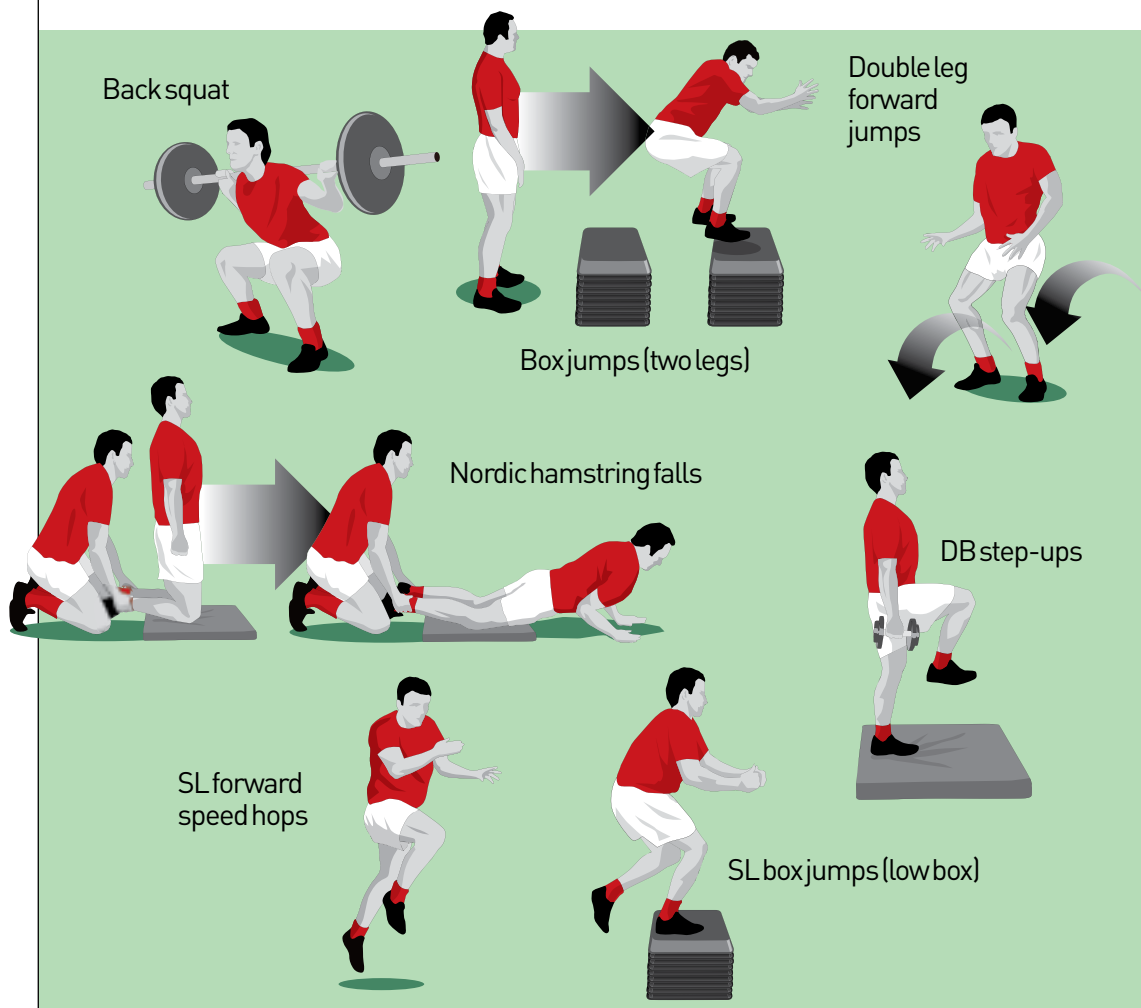
Players should be able to make considerable strength gains in all exercises during the six-week pre-season programme. Following the end of pre-season, players should be assessed to identify their individual off-field conditioning goals that will be focused upon during the competitive season.

Additional notes

There are a number of (repetition maximum) tests that can be done in the gymnasium, but we tend to monitor strength gains by recording the resistance loads used during each session.

Leg power can be assessed by performing a CMJ (counter-movement jump) on a contact mat or force platform, with a player's hands on their hips to isolate the legs. If you're looking to compare a score against that of a professional soccer player, a good CMJ score for comparison with professional soccer players is 50cm, when performed with hands on hips.

If you do not have access to such equipment a standing long jump - measured with a tape measure - is also useful. Single leg hops for distance (three or five hops) can also be used to identify single leg power, whilst assessing for asymmetry between right and left legs.



Exercise	No. Reps	Rest
1 a). Back squat	5	30-45 sec
1 b). Box jumps (two legs)	5	30-45 sec
1 c). Double leg forward jumps	8 x 2 sets	3mins then repeat
2 a). DB step-ups	5 each leg	30-45 sec
2 b). SL box jumps (low box)	4 each leg	30-45 sec
2 c). SL forward speed hops	5 hops each leg x 2 sets	3mins then repeat
3 a). Nordic hamstring falls	6	2mins

Note 1b and 2b - Ensure that the player jumps explosively and maximally (to the greatest height possible) and up onto the box, before stepping down safely. If boxes are not available, have the player jump as high as he can in the air off one or two legs, mimicking a header.

Note 1c and 2c - The following coaching points should be emphasised:

1. Land on front 2/3rds of the foot
2. Alignment of hip, knee and ankle
3. Minimise ground contact time
4. Point toes to the sky when in the air (dorsiflexion - movement which decreases the angle between surface of the foot and the leg)
5. Jump as high or as far as possible
6. Chest and head up
7. Coordinate arms for additional propulsion

Agility

Scott Miller Fulham

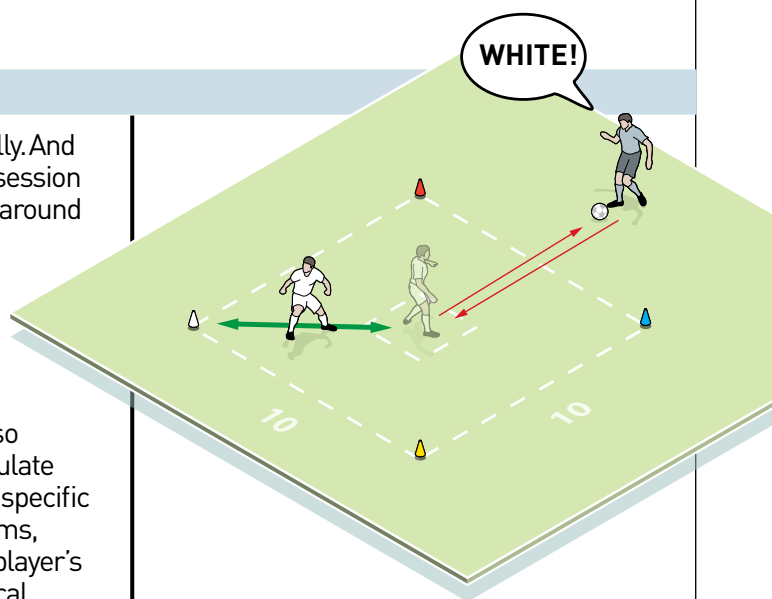
Overview

Agility plays a huge role in the overall performance of any individual. It is directly linked to strength and speed, and in defence or attack, is crucial in a dynamic league such as the English Premier League.

Research indicates that it's the number one physical attribute that predicts successful physical performance.

As I come from a football background my knowledge and understanding of the game helps me deliver bespoke and focused insight to the players here at Fulham. My aim is to showcase what I believe is the most comprehensive football fitness programme, aimed at preventing injury and improving players physically

and technically. And because the session is structured around basic team training, it not only enhances the individual's agility, but also helps to stimulate and overload specific energy systems, increasing a player's overall physical capacity.



Agility fitness schedule

Weeks 1-4 – Two selected exercises per week, to be decided by the coach.

Exercise 1 Technical Agility with the Ball

This exercise can typically be included as part of a warm-up. It is aimed at developing both the agility and technical ability of the player.

How do I set it up?

Using a touchline as a line guide, we place three mannequins 1.5 metres apart in a triangular formation – see diagram.

What do I get the players to do?

We run this in groups of three – one player working and two other players each serving the ball. So served from the left mannequin to the back of the triangle, a designated skill is performed and the ball returned. This skill is determined by the server.

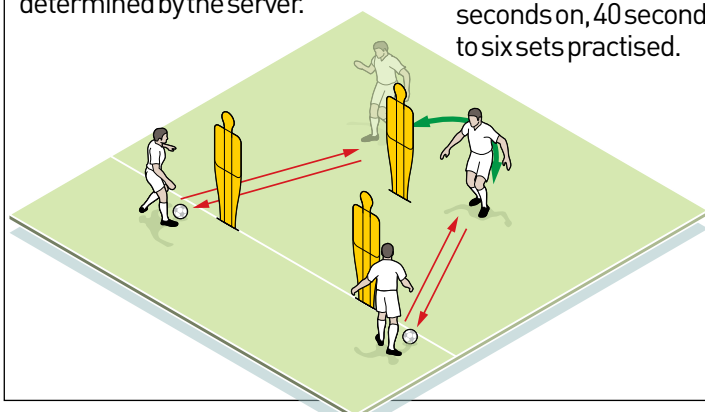
This can be:

- one-touch return
- two-touch return
- volley
- half volley
- header
- into go out
- out to go in

The move is replicated on the other side, and we rotate players regularly.

The exercise can be progressed by using just one ball, with all three players involved. And by insisting that all the skills demonstrated are performed in one set, we can strengthen the decision-making process whilst improving agility.

The 'work to rest ratio' is recommended as 1:3 – namely 20 seconds on, 40 seconds off, with up to six sets practised.



Exercise 2 Reactive Agility with the Ball

This is a one-man practice performed with a coach or server. In terms of pressing the ball, this exercise provides the most effective and demanding simulation.

How do I set it up?

Refer to diagram 2.

What do I get the players to do?

The player in the square plays a one-two with the coach or server. As the ball is passed back, the coach shouts out a colour. The working player must accelerate to the relevant cone with the same body shape and distance used for closing down or pressing an opponent in a match situation. He then returns to centre of square as quickly as possible, ready to play a new one-two with the

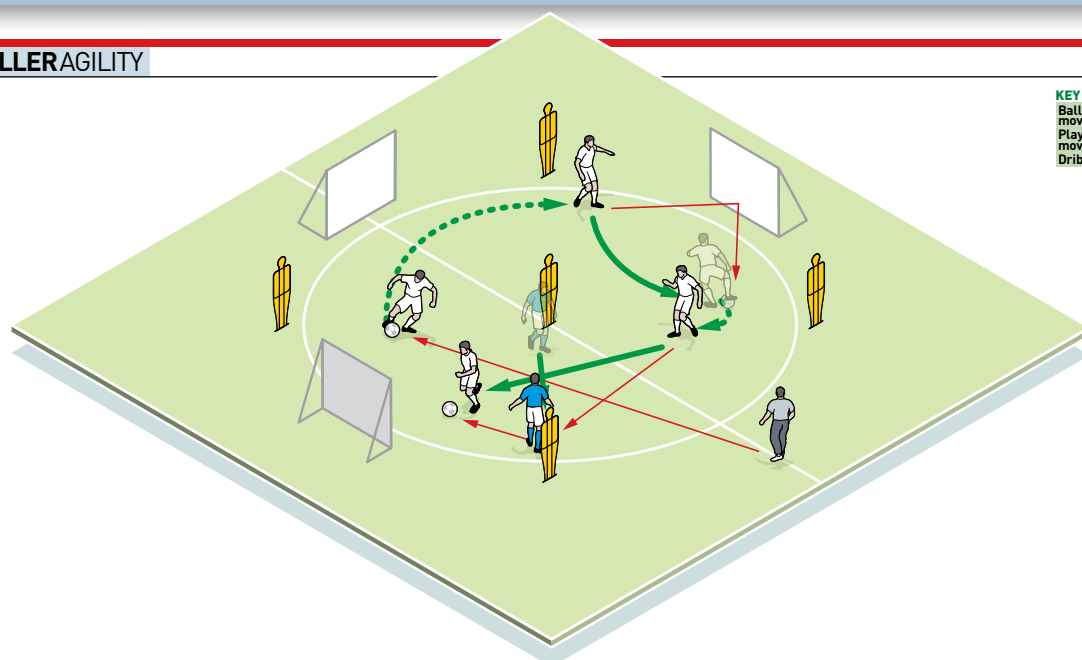
coach, and so on.

The exercise can be progressed by insisting that the ball is passed twice. A straight pass is made at first, before the working player peels off at an angle to return the second pass. Once this is done the colour of the cone is shouted, then repeat as above.

To further develop the phase and improve reactive agility, continue with the above methods, but introduce new colours, or remove the colours and replace with numbers. This will require the player to be additionally alert to changing situations around him.

The 'work to rest ratio' is again roughly 1:3 – 10-20 seconds on, 30-40 seconds off, with up to six sets, dependant on the overall intensity of main training session.

MILLER AGILITY



KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble

Performance assessment

Due to the nature of the specialism, there is no objective way to benchmark or track the session's influence. However, by obtaining subjective feedback from the player you will be able to identify improvement.

The key targets for improvement are how much quicker, stronger and more accurate a player can make himself through the pre-season schedule.

Exercise 3 Football Specific Agility with and without the Ball

This is a great exercise for movement and finding space to receive the ball. It requires an understandably high level of agility.

How do I set it up?

We set this up with one or two players per group – see diagram.

What do I get the players to do?

The exercise begins with the working player providing an angle off a mannequin to receive the ball. Upon receiving on the half-turn, he must control the ball and dribble towards a bounce board. He plays a one-two, receives the ball back, turns, and moves back in the other direction.

Now coming back, the player once again must make a decision, adding turns and

improvising with the ball. He has the option of utilising the coach in a one-two.

The exercise can be progressed by involving two players. Replicating the same exercise as above, the pair work together – when player 1 has the ball, player 2 is out of possession and must accelerate to a mannequin, providing an angle for a pass.

The 'work to rest' ratio remains 1:3, with the same conditions as above.

Exercise 4 2v2 + (4) Functional Agility

This is a competitive possession practice that uses neutral players.

How do I set it up?

Refer to the diagram – this exercise uses the space in and around the centre circle, with teams split into two – 2v2 in the central 20x20-yard square, plus one neutral player on each outer edge.

What do I get the players to do?

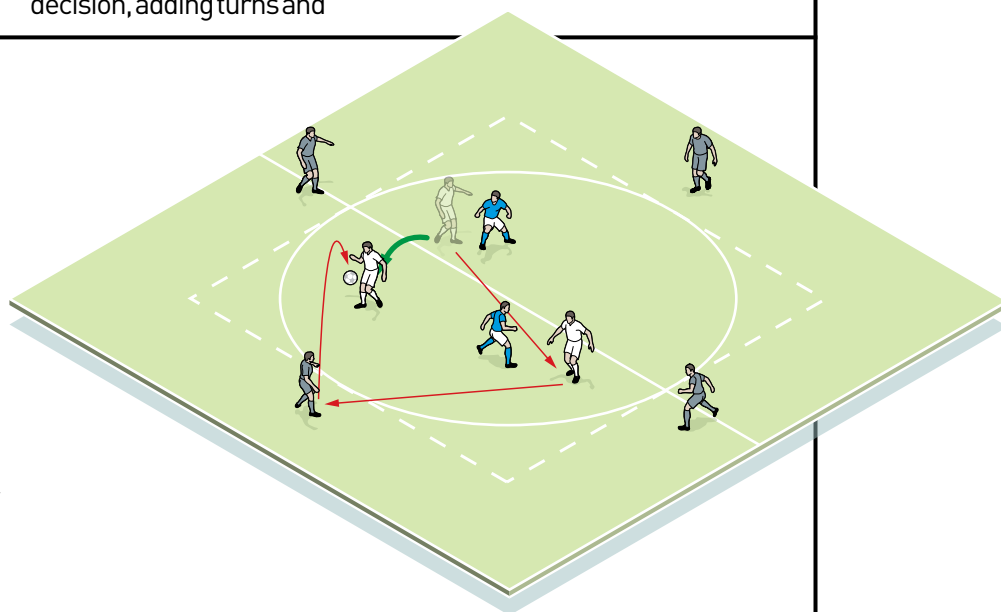
The aim is to keep possession of the ball in the 2v2 situation for as long as possible. There is no limit on touches inside the square, though players on the outside are restricted to two touches. Outer players must flight balls

back into the 2v2 area, and can only play to another outer player once before play must go back into the middle.

The ability to create space through agility and movement is key to this exercise, whether that

be in possession or not.

The 'work to rest' ratio remains 1:3, although the timing is rigid with a strict 20 seconds on, 40 seconds off, and a maximum of six sets.



Endurance and football fitness

Tom Little Huddersfield Town

Overview

Metabolic responses suggest that football is basically an endurance event with skills superimposed within it. Distances are not that demanding but the intermittent and sporadic nature of efforts - which include inefficient multi-directional movements and anaerobic activities such as shooting and jumping - cause high levels of fatigue. Improving endurance will allow players to maintain and recover from high intensity efforts, whilst maintaining skills and reducing the chance of injury.

With so many components to work on in football, it is optimal to train fitness and technical elements together using football drills whenever possible. Modern analysis has allowed us to categorise drills into certain endurance categories, and those categories are best applied at different times during pre-season.

The program presented here is for 18 outfield players with 2 goalkeepers.

	Extensive Endurance drills		Lactate Threshold drills		VO2max drills	
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Football drill	Normal Game, 7- to 10-a-side, between penalty areas	Normal Game, 7- to 10-a-side, between penalty areas	5-6 a side, 50x30 yards	5-6 a side, 50x30 yards	Line Score 3-4 players per team, 30x20 yards	Line Score 3-4 players per team, 30x20 yards
Duration	3x15mins, less than 3mins rest	3x20mins, less than 3mins rest	6x5mins, less than 3mins rest	6x6mins, less than 3mins rest	6x3mins, 2mins rest	6x3mins 20 secs, 1min 30secs rest



Weeks 1 and 2 Extensive Endurance Drills

These drills have a moderate intensity and are therefore suitable for long durations. They allow players to play for longer periods, building up stamina through pre-season. Technically, they are also suitable for training match specific tactics, such as shape and pressing.

How do I set it up?

Split the players into teams of 7 to 10 a side. For the example given we use 9-a-side on a penalty box to penalty box pitch.

What do I get the players to do?

Use standard rules. Ensure that balls leaving the area are fed back in quickly, with a high tempo and constant support for players in possession. We can vary the drill by adding touch, zone, passing or shooting restrictions, or by instructing players to go man-to-man. Finish by performing a steady state running moderate fartlek for similar total times..

Weeks 3 and 4 Lactate Threshold Drills

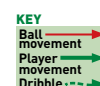
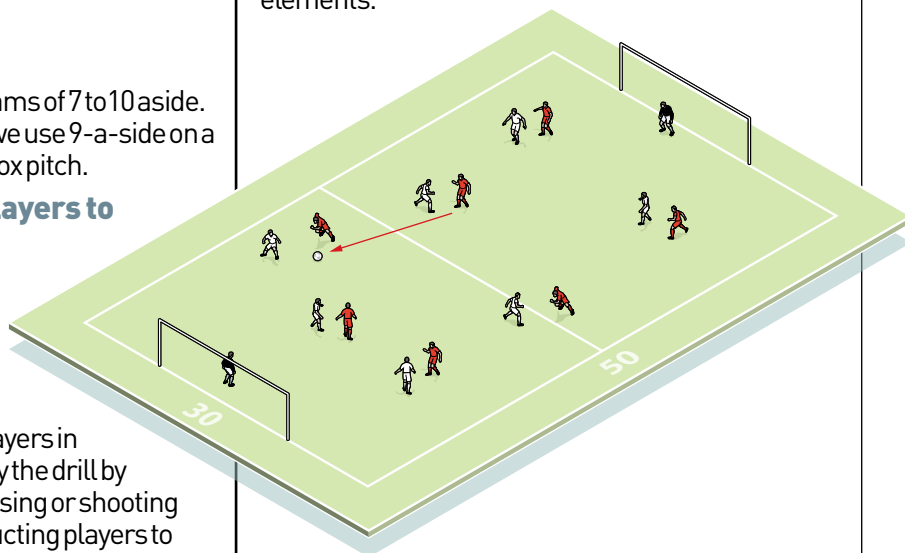
These drills involve a moderate to high intensity, and are best performed at intervals below 20mins. Lactate Threshold training improves the tempo which players can sustain throughout a match.

How do I set it up?

Pick three teams of 6-a-side. Two teams play 6-a-side while the other performs a technical drill or a running drill of a similar intensity. Rotate the teams through the drills for the given repetitions (normally 2-3 rotations through).

What do I get the players to do?

We play a 6-a-side game (plus two keepers); standard rules in a 50x30-yard area. Again, touch restriction, rule alterations and zonal can emphasize required technical and tactical elements.



LITTLE FITNESS

Weeks 5 and 6 VO2max drills

These drills involve a high intensity, which can typically only be sustained for up to five minutes without the tempo dropping. They are a very powerful training tool which improves many areas of football fitness, in particular recovery after a sustained high intensity period. Technically, they are great for pressing and all elements of skill development as they involve constant involvement in play.

Rep	1	2	3	4	5	6
Pitch 1	1v2	1v3	3v5	3v4	4v5	2v5
Pitch 2	3v4	2v5	1v6	1v5	2v3	1v4
Pitch 3	5v6	4v6	2v4	2v6	1v6	3v6

How do I set it up?

Split the group into teams of three or four players. The example shown is for six teams of 3-a-side. Set-up three pitches – 30x20 yards and have two teams play on each. Rotate teams as shown in the table above for a total of six repetitions each.

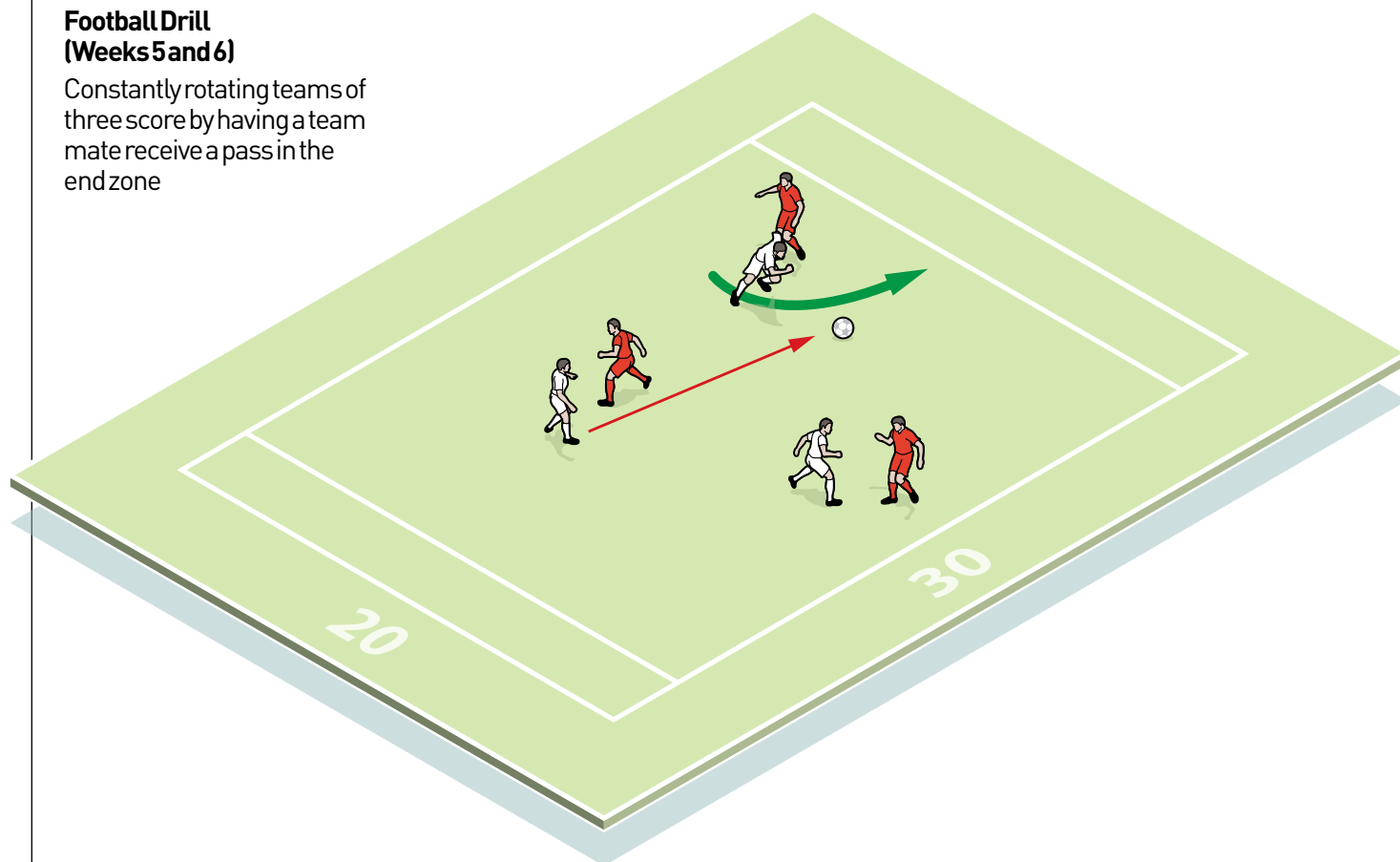
What do I get the players to do?

The aim for each team is to stop the ball in their opponents' end zone. When defending, the emphasis is on good angles and distances, with the premise to give away as little ground as possible by advancing quickly.

When attacking, the emphasis is on good supporting positions and scoring as quickly as possible. We can vary the drill by adding touch restrictions or by instructing players to go man-to-man. Adjust the number of pitches to suit the size of your squad.

Football Drill (Weeks 5 and 6)

Constantly rotating teams of three score by having a team mate receive a pass in the end zone



KEY
 Ball movement →
 Player movement →
 Dribble - - - →

Performance assessment

Several tests are available for assessing endurance levels and can be researched separately – the most popular probably being the Yo-Yo test, because of its specificity to football performance.

A reasonable score for the Yo-Yo Intermittent Recovery Test is ~1,000m. Targets for improvement will depend a lot upon the initial training state of the players. Endurance is a fitness component that is relatively easy to

change and improvements in the Yo-Yo test distance of 20-30% are achievable. Changes in physiological measures like VO2max are more moderate at 5-15%.

Technique training

Antonio Gomez / Fitness coach, FC Cartagena

Overview

Technique training is becoming more important in football with every passing season. It's important to consider this training alongside the specific demands of football, particularly the elements of speed and power.

After all, the ability to create and problem solve different situations during matches is one of the best indicators of a player's performance and potential.

We would recommend ball control and game situations to be used in warm-ups and cool downs to maximise the time spent on technical aspects of the game.

Technique training schedule

Weeks 1-4 – We run all four exercises in every session, although the parameters of the exercise change with each passing week.

Exercises 1, 2 and 3

Week 1: 4 sets for each pair. Each set is 3 reps of 30secs, with 15secs rest in between
Total of working for 6mins, resting for 3mins (2/1 ratio)

Week 2: 4 sets for each pair. Each set is 3 reps of 45secs, with 15secs rest in between
Total of working for 9mins, resting for 3mins (3/1 ratio)

Week 3: 4 sets for each pair. Each set is 3 reps of 1min, with 20secs rest in between
Total of working for 12mins, resting for 4mins (3/1 ratio)

Week 4: 5 sets for each pair. Each set is 3 reps of 1min, with 20secs rest in between
Total of working for 15mins, resting for 4mins (3.75/1 ratio)

Exercise 4

Week 1: 3 sets for each pair. Each set is 3 reps of 1min, with 30secs rest in between
Total of working for 9mins, resting for 4mins 30secs (2/1 ratio)

Week 2: 3 sets for each pair. Each set is 3 reps of 1min 30secs, with 30secs rest in between
Total of working for 13mins 30secs, resting for 4mins 30secs (3/1 ratio)

Week 3: 3 sets for each pair. Each set is 3 reps of 2mins, with 40secs rest in between
Total of working for 18mins, resting for 6mins (3/1 ratio)

Week 4: 4 sets for each pair. Each set is 3 reps of 2mins, with 40secs rest in between
Total of working for 24mins, resting for 8mins (3/1 ratio)

Exercise 1

Possession technique game (4v1s)

A game that helps attackers practise technical play with the benefit of a strong overload.

How do I set it up?

In a 14x7-yard area we construct two 4v1 scenarios, as shown in the diagram. This game actually only uses six attacking players, because the two central players are part of both 4v1s. Each attacker must stay close to his allocated cone.

What do I get the players to do?

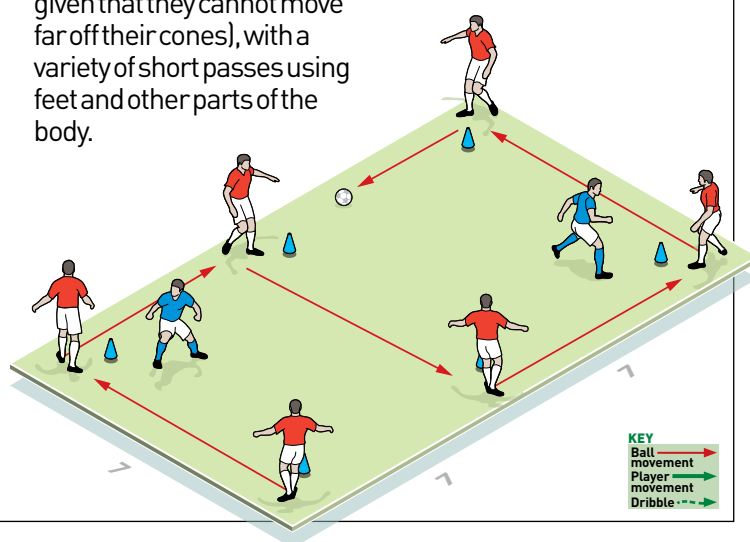
The first 4v1 in the lower half is played with attackers allowed a maximum of two or three touches, to be decided by the coach. There is also a minimum number of

passes that must be played – between four and six – before the ball completes its path to the two attackers at the top of the area. When the pass is completed, a new 4v1 begins, with the intention of the ball coming back in the opposite direction.

The two defenders work individually, looking to intercept as many passes as possible.

With eight players active, we look to complete four rotations in every set so that each player plays in each position once.

The focus for attackers is good ball control, smart movement (albeit restricted given that they cannot move far off their cones), with a variety of short passes using feet and other parts of the body.



Exercise 2

Possession technique game (4v2s)

A change of player numbers increases the difficulty for attackers looking to retain possession.

How do I set it up?

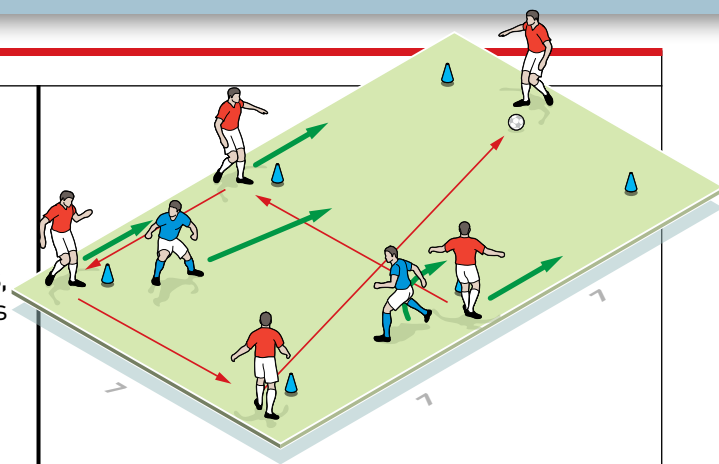
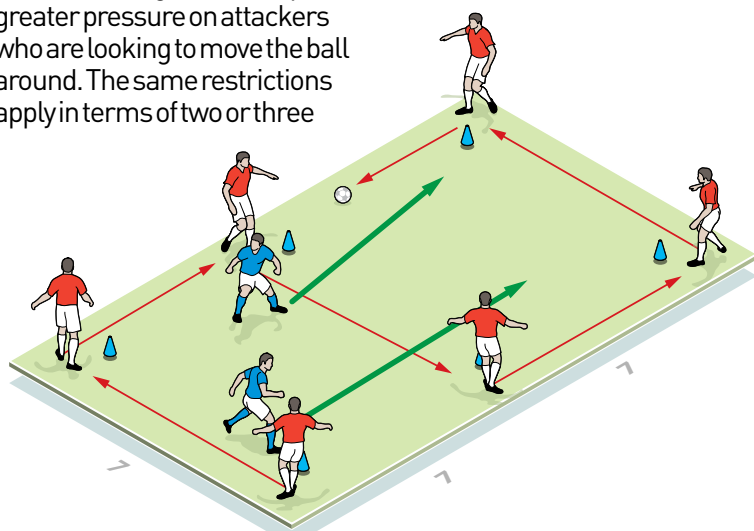
Set up as in exercise 1, except player numbers are now 4v2 and 4v2. However, the two defenders both begin in the same half, so we still have a total of eight players.

What do I get the players to do?

Defenders now work as a pair, beginning in the same half, and connecting as a unit to put greater pressure on attackers who are looking to move the ball around. The same restrictions apply in terms of two or three

touches maximum for attackers, with between four and six passes being completed before the ball is worked to the two team mates at the top of the area. When this happens, defenders must move together into the top half, working together once more in order to press attackers in a 4v2.

Again, rotate players so that each man plays in each position once.



Exercise 3

Possession technique game (4v2+1)

Now a lone floating attacker faces a new possession challenge.

How do I set it up?

Set up in the same area as previous exercises, except now it's 4v2 plus one lone attacker. This lone man replaces the two attackers at the top of the area.

What do I get the players to do?

The use of one lone attacker means that when the ball is transferred, he is relying on three team mates to switch into the live half of

the area so as to begin a new 4v2 move.

The only player not to move into that half is he who made the switch pass. Instead, he must stay in the same position ready to receive a pass when the move comes back the other way.

Touch and pass conditions exist as before, and we will ensure again that all players rotate in the practice.

Exercise 4

Possession technique game 6v3+1

Another change of player numbers produces a new challenge, and in a bigger area.

How do I set it up?

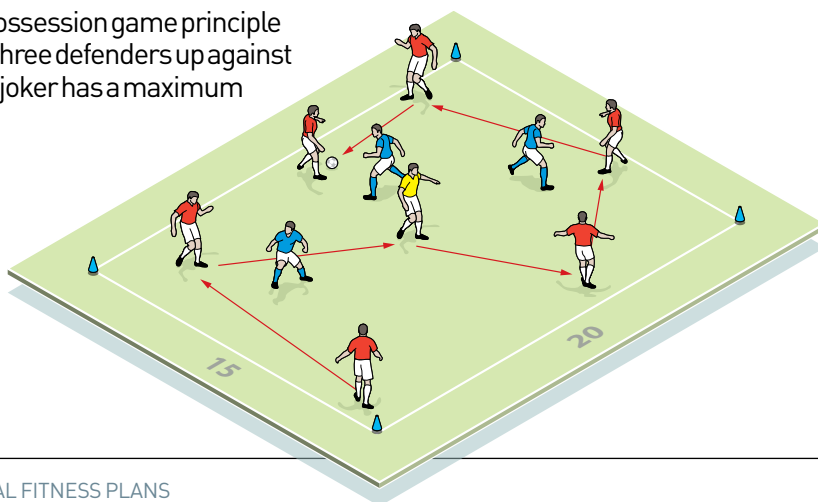
For the final exercise, we use four cones to create a larger 20x15-yard area. The game is 6v3 plus a 'joker', set up as shown in the diagram.

What do I get the players to do?

Using the same possession game principle as before, we put three defenders up against six attackers. The joker has a maximum

number of two touches, and plays for the team in possession.

The challenge for either team is to score a 'goal' – the reward for making 20 consecutive passes. Again, rotate players so that each man plays in each position once.



Performance assessment

The strongest indicator as to a team's performance is in the number of times possession is turned over. The more defenders practise their technique in short, medium and long passes, plus switch play combinations, the less likely they are to be tackled or have a pass intercepted. We should also be looking for a visible improvement in decision-making.

A professional player will probably complete the exercises with the minimum touches and without losing a ball in the time periods stated. That's the top level to aim at for ambitious players.

Muscular endurance programme

Alex Armstrong Director Of Performance, Sheffield Wednesday

Overview

This is a 25-day training plan, ideal for coaches who do not have long pre-season lead periods, but who have a concerted period of time with which to shape, condition and kick-start their

players' fitness ambitions for the new campaign. The focus is on all-round muscular endurance.

This plan offers a complete solution, in that it takes the coach through warm-up (and cool down exercises),

a detailed training schedule which features circuit training, running and weights programmes, plus core stability and proprioception exercises.

Muscular endurance programme schedule

The table below represents a definitive day-by-day guide to constructing and advancing a training plan over a short yet disciplined pre-season period. The individual exercises mentioned are expanded upon in the pages that follow.

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
			DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4
			Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 1 Circuit training 1 Cool down	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 2 Circuit training 2 Cool down	Rest day	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 3 Cool down
DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11
Warm up Proprioception Core stability Circuit training 3 Weights Cool down	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 4 Circuit training 4 Cool down	Rest day	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 5 Cool down	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Circuit training 5 Weights Cool down	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 6 Circuit training 6 Cool down	Rest day
DAY 12	DAY 13	DAY 14	DAY 15	DAY 16	DAY 17	DAY 18
Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 7 Cool down	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Weights Circuit training 7 Cool down	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 8 Circuit training 8 Cool down	Rest day	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 8 Cool down	Warm up Proprioception Core stability Run 9 Cool down	Rest Day
DAY 19	DAY 20	DAY 21	DAY 22	DAY 23	DAY 24	DAY 25
Warm up Core stability Circuit training 9 Weights Cool down	Warm up Core stability Run 9 Circuit training 9 Weights Cool down	Rest Day	Warm up Core stability Run 10 Circuit training 10 Weights Cool down	Warm up Core stability Run 10 Circuit training 10 Cool down	Rest day	Rest day

ARMSTRONG ENDURANCE

WARMING UP

No discussion of fitness training would be complete without the mention of warming up. Research shows that, post warm-up, subsequent exercise is performed more efficiently as far as oxygen utilisation and cardiovascular work is concerned.

Warming up properly will raise the body and muscle temperature, which increases blood and oxygen flow to the muscles, as well as improving their contraction and reflex time. It also reduces the danger of inadequate blood flow to the heart owing to any sudden abrupt exercise, particularly in high-power events, and provides a period of psychological preparation associated with increased arousal and readiness. A comprehensive warm-up programme can also decrease the potential of injury during football.

Flexibility

Besides the cardiovascular aspect of warm-ups, we must also consider the need for flexibility. Flexibility is the mobility of the joints and the stretch ability of the muscle and attaching tendon. It should be self evident that before taking part in any activity, we should put all the joints and muscles involved through a full range of movement. Flexibility therefore becomes an integral part of any warm-up routine.

PROPRIOCEPTION

Proprioception is the body's awareness of its position. For example, when you are in possession of the ball, and you are looking up to play a pass, your perceptive skills allow you to keep control of the ball without looking where it is. Proprioception informs you of the position of your feet to the ball.

Complementary to that, having a high degree of proprioceptive control is recognised as a major factor in injury reduction and prevention. Therefore any exercise to improve this should be included in your daily programme, and a few minutes a day can make a huge difference.

What do I get the players to do?

Pulse Raising exercises

These include jogging, alternate skipping (diagonal, forwards, backwards, plus high skipping with raised arms), high knees (and knees up at the back), jumping and landing, plus small 70-90% intensity sprints.

Mobility exercises

We perform each group four or five times, as follows:

Ankles... flexion/extension of the foot

Calves... right foot over left (alternate) and stretch

Quads... Bring foot to backside, push the hip out

Hamstrings... One knee bent, the other straight out and sit back

Hips... half squats, forward lunges

Trunk... lateral flexion, rotation

Shoulders... circulating arms

Arms... above head reaching or across the body

Neck... slowly tilt head forward/back/side/rotate

Dynamic stretches are encouraged at this stage.

Specific Exercise

Finally, we perform movements that will take the muscles and joints to be used during your session through their full range of motion and activity. The full warm-up process should last no more than 15 minutes.

What do I get the players to do?

Balance on the Ground

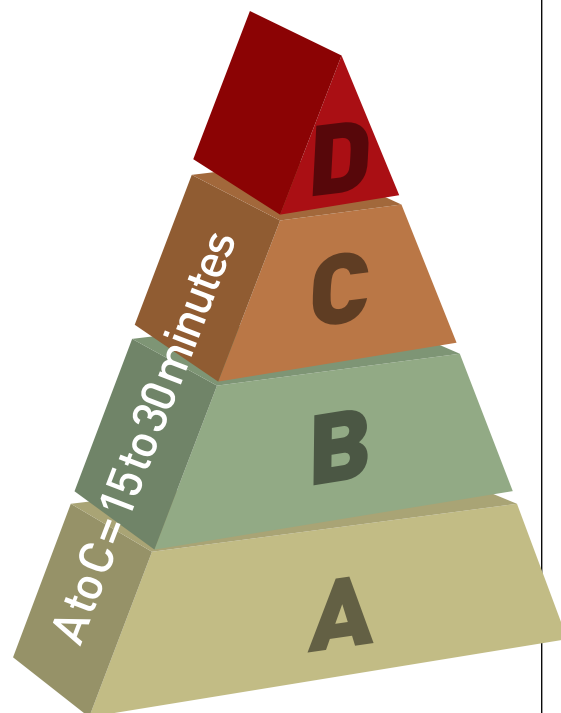
Attempt to balance on one foot for 15-20 seconds, then rest for 10-20 seconds. Practise the following variations:

- Left and Right leg
- Arm out in front of body
- Arms crossed
- Knee bent
- Other leg swinging
- Bounce and catch a ball
- Pass ball around body

To progress, players repeat with their eyes closed (apart from 'Bounce and catch the ball').

A warm-up model

This diagram depicts the general phases that your warm-up should follow. The characteristics of each phase are described. (Remember to include a full Cool Down session after activity)



A - This involves activities such as gentle running and skipping, gradually increasing the heart rate.

B - This involves the stretching and mobility of the major muscle groups. The neck, back, hamstrings, calves, hips, groin, quads, shoulders, arms are useful guidelines. Stretching should be performed without jerking. Each stretch should be short (4-6secs) but very frequent.

C - Warm-ups are never intended to cause fatigue so care should be taken at this stage. Good warm-ups involve sport specific exercises that prepare the body for the type of training about to be performed. Balls, equipment and simple drills should be incorporated.

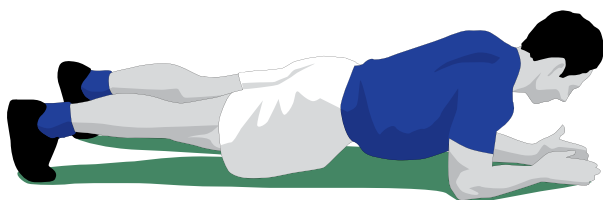
D - The activity you are warming up for.

ARMSTRONG ENDURANCE

CORE STABILITY EXERCISES

The aim of these exercises is to develop a basic level of lumbar and pelvic stability by working the front, rear and side muscles of the trunk.

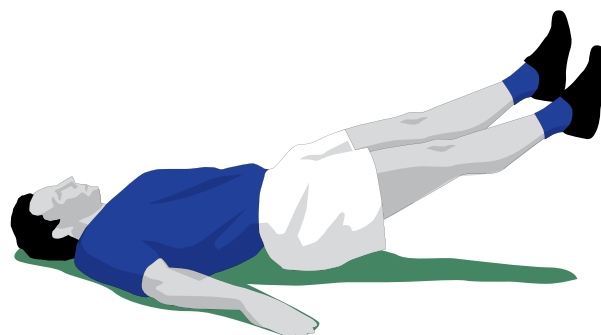
What do I get the players to do?



The Plank

This is a common exercise that requires good abdominal strength. It targets the rectus abdominis and obliques. The player must hold a straight body position, supporting on elbows and toes. He braces the abs and sets in the neutral position once he is up. Sometimes this requires a pelvic tilt to find the right position. The aim is to hold this position, keeping the upper spine extended, for an increasing length of time up to a maximum of 60secs. Then perform two or three sets, keeping the shoulders back and the chest out whilst maintaining the neutral lumbar position. This makes the exercise considerably more challenging.

To progress this, use an exercise ball or lift one leg just off the floor.

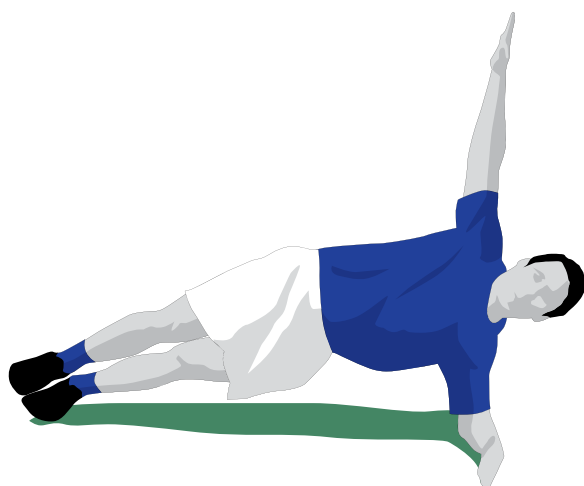


The Gluteal Bridge

Research suggests this exercise has great benefits for the lower back.

The player needs to lie on the floor with his knees bent. Tell him to squeeze his gluteals, then push his hips up until there is a straight line through knee and hip to the upper body. Shoulders remain on the floor. Beware of raising too high or of flaring the ribs, which pushes the back into hyperextension. The player holds the position, starting with five sets of 10 seconds, then progressing to two or three sets of 60 seconds.

To progress, the player can extend one leg carefully ahead of himself and hold the position without dropping or tilting the pelvis.

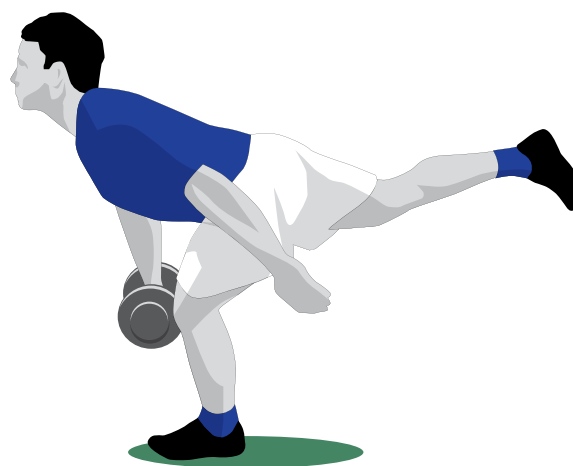


The Side Plank

This is an effective exercise for obliques and quadratus lumborum (a key lumbar stabilising muscle). Research also shows this to be an excellent exercise for the lower abdominal muscles.

The player needs to lie on one side, ensuring the top hip is 'stacked' above the bottom hip. Push up until there is a straight bodyline through the feet, hips and head. Hold the position, increasing the length of the hold up to a maximum of 60secs. Perform two to three sets, keeping the elbow under the shoulder to avoid upper body strain. Lower under control and repeat on the opposite side.

To progress, raise the top leg in the air and hold it in the abducted position.



'The Bird dog' or 'Superman'

This exercise is recommended as being safe and effective, and requires co-contraction of the abdominal wall muscles to stabilise the pelvis.

The player starts with the hands below the hips. Tell him to set his low back into neutral and to brace abs slightly. Slowly slide back one leg and slide forward the opposite arm. Ensure that the back does not slip into extension, and that the shoulders and pelvis do not tilt sideways. Hold, increasing the duration up to a maximum of 20 seconds. Slowly, he should bring his leg back and swap sides. Perform sets of between five and 10, alternating sides after each hold.

ARMSTRONG ENDURANCE
CIRCUIT TRAINING

Exercise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Press ups	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps
½ Sits	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps
½ Squats	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps
Wide arm Press Ups	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps
Crunches	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps
Full Squats	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps
Narrow arm Press Ups	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps
Side sits	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps
Burpees	20 reps	25 reps	30 reps	35 reps	40 reps	45 reps	50 reps	55 reps	60 reps	65 reps

Circuit training enables us to run through a number of individual exercises, which build in intensity with each repetition over the course of the 25-day period. In basic terms, for each additional circuit phase, an additional five reps are added. Refer back to the table on the first page for how to run this element in the greater context of the overall plan.

RUNNING PROGRAMME

Exercise Number	Total time (mins)	Running Intervals (mins)	Jog intervals (mins)	Repeat
75% of Maximum heart rate				
1	28	4	3	4 times
2	28	4	3	4 times
3	28	4	3	4 times
4	24	4	2	4 times
5	24	4	2	4 times
6	24	4	2	4 times
→85% of Maximum heart rate				
7	24	4	2	4 times
8	20	4	1	4 times
9	20	4	1	4 times
10	20	4	1	4 times

The Running programme uses similar running times, albeit with shorter rest periods. In addition, exercises 7-10 (inclusive) need to be performed at a higher intensity – 85%+ of maximum heart rate, compared to 75% previously. Refer back to the table on the first page for how to run this element in the greater context of the overall plan.

WEIGHTS PROGRAMME

	Sets	Reps	Weight increase			
Exercise			1	2	3	4
Power Clean	3	6	40kg			
Squats	3	6	40kg			
Arm Curls	3	6	30kg			
Lunges	3	6	40kg			
Bench Press	3	6	60kg			
Front Squat	3	6	30kg			
High Pulls	3	6	40kg			

Starting with a uniform weight programme, the progression over the next three sessions is judged on the abilities and performance of each individual player. Refer back to the table on the first page for how to run this element in the greater context of the overall plan.

COOLING DOWN

A cool down can be viewed as the opposite to the warm-up, where there is a gradual decrease in intensity. It is an extremely important aspect

of training and matches. Stopping suddenly after a hard exercise allows waste products to remain in the blood and muscles (for example lactic acid). This

can lead to cramps, stiffness and discomfort over the next few days. This could prevent you from performing at your optimal level on a subsequent day. A sensible cool down

(i.e. a slow 400m jog) can reduce these effects greatly, and it can also be advisable to perform some static stretching (10-15 seconds) to enhance lactate removal.