



The “Everton Way”

Playing forward through the midfield by **Ewan Allan, Everton FC**



Developing tactically versatile players is a must at the top level.

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In today's soccer, the successful teams are the ones that can act and react with tactical flexibility. That's why Everton FC puts a strong emphasis on training its players to build a solid and versatile attack, from defenders to midfielders to attackers. The practice games presented in this article are part of the club's complete training program, known as the “Everton Way.”

To achieve successful combination play, first you have to provide proper technical/tactical training in passing, receiving and controlling the ball.

Accurate passing

In addition to the purely technical skills (i.e. both-footed passing using a variety of techniques, with foot and body correctly positioned), getting open and showing for passes are also extremely important:

- Move away from your opponent and open up playing space.
- Create passing options (at least two, ideally three) for the player who has the ball, and coordinate your running paths.
- Coordinate your coverage of the field, with passing options in all directions and all players actively involved.

- Create passing options both near the ball and far away from it.
- Set up your attack with back passes, stay spread out while moving forward and play well-aimed long passes.
- Only pass to open teammates who are making eye contact and ready for action.
- Maintain an open position when showing for the ball so you can see the entire game.
- Pass with the appropriate amount of force so your receiver can either control the ball or lay it off directly.

Quick controlling

Receiving the ball is rarely mentioned in today's soccer. Ball-oriented defense formations have become so good at closing down space that it's almost impossible to receive passes in a controlled and deliberate manner. Therefore players must be capable of controlling the ball with their feet, thighs, chest or head and taking it directly forward, whether it's on the ground or in the air. This requires them to be oriented before they get the ball. A body fake executed while controlling the ball provides a head start and opens up more playing space. Receivers should look over their shoulders to locate opponents and use the foot farther away from them to control the ball (both-footed play).

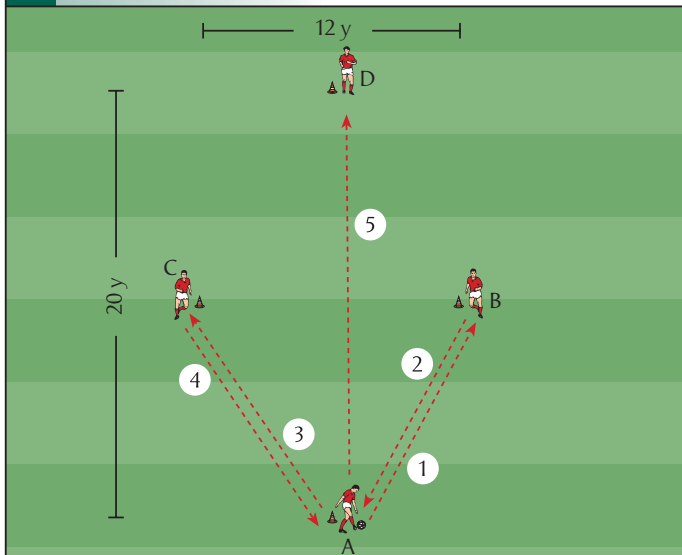
Internalization

The technical/tactical skills involved in passing, receiving and controlling the ball must be internalized by players in the course of their training. This is achieved by playing the relevant exercises and practice games repeatedly. As the movement sequences become familiar, they are internalized more and more rapidly. The following practice is designed to encourage players to play forward and through the midfield.



THE “EVERTON WAY”: PLAYING FORWARD THROUGH THE MIDFIELD

1 Combination play 1



Setup

- Set up four cones in a diamond shape (20 x 12 yards).
- Each player stands at a cone.
- Player A has a ball.

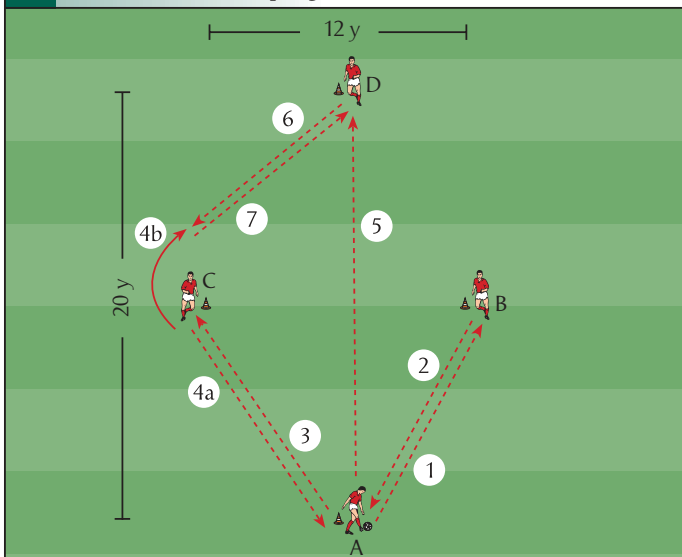
Sequence

- Player A passes to B.
- B passes back to A, who passes to C.
- C passes back to A, who passes through to D.
- Repeat the passing sequence from the opposite end, with D as the starting point.

Variations

- Rotate players so they gain experience on each position.
- Each player uses two touches.
- Players B and C have one touch; A has two.
- Each player has one touch.

2 Combination play 2



Setup

- Setup is the same as in Exercise 1.

Sequence

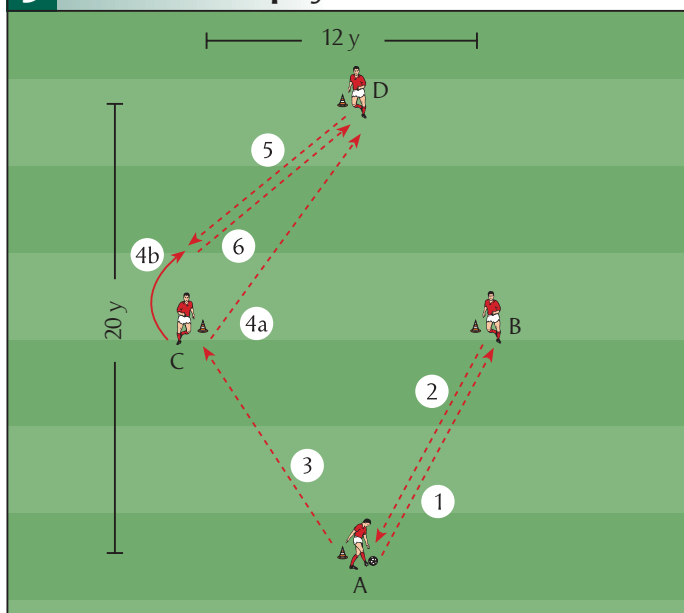
- Player A passes to B.
- B passes back to A, who passes to C.
- C passes back to A, who passes through to D.
- C turns and runs around the outside of the cone toward D.
- D passes to C, who passes back to D.
- Repeat the passing sequence from the opposite end, with D as the starting point.

Variations

- Rotate players so they gain experience on each position.
- Each player uses two touches.
- Players B and C have one touch; A has two.
- Each player has one touch.

FLANK PLAY IN THE FINAL THIRD

3 Combination play 3



Setup

- Setup is the same as in Exercise 1.

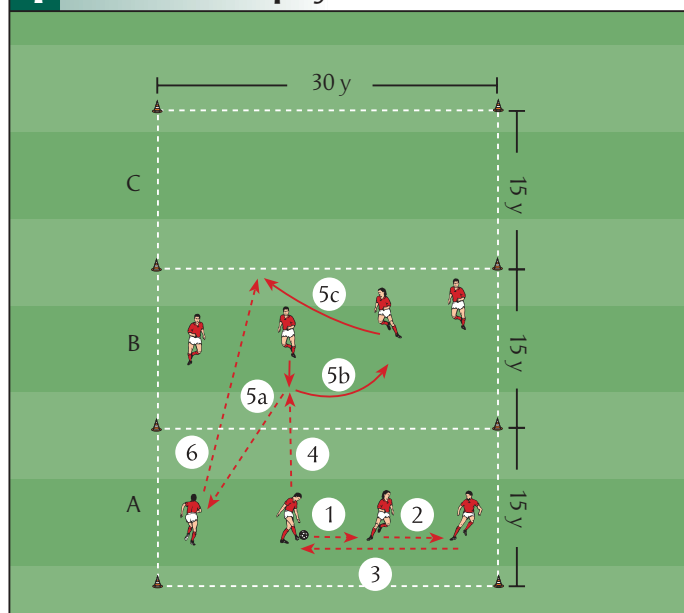
Sequence

- Player A passes to B.
- B passes back to A, who passes to C.
- C uses the outside of the front foot to pass to D (around the corner).
- C turns and runs around the cone toward D.
- D passes to C, who passes back to D.
- Repeat the passing sequence from the opposite end, with D as the starting point.

Variations

- Rotate players so they gain experience on each position.
- Each player uses two touches.
- Players B and C have one touch; A has two.
- Each player has one touch.

4 Combination play in the field



Setup

- Set up a 30 x 45-yard field.
- Divide the field into three zones.
- Position four players in Zone A and four in Zone B.

Sequence

- Players in Zone A act as a back four and pass randomly to each other.
- After at least three consecutive passes, they pass into Zone B.
- Players in Zone B make movements to create space. They play one of the three combinations from Exercises 1–3.
- When the combination is completed, players in Zone B move into Zone C to act as the back four. Players in Zone A replace players in Zone B, and the sequence starts over in the opposite direction.

Variations

- Each player uses two touches.
- Each player has one touch.
- Introduce your own game-related situations.

INFO

Evertonway.com is a brand-new website that — through the use of hundreds of video clips, audio commentary, diagrams and editorial walk-throughs — reveals the entire Everton Academy coach-

ing philosophy, which focuses on an extensive technical program. The site also covers strength and conditioning, recruitment, physical therapy, sports psychology, education and welfare.