The killer pass

The killer pass requires good vision and good movement off the ball. This session is aimed at getting midfielders to dictate play, sending a ball into space for attack-minded team mates to run onto. It is very match realistic where balls are played in behind the defensive line.

How to play it

- Set up as shown, on a 40x20-yard area. In the example, we're using two teams of six including keepers – four players from each team in a central 4v4, and a defender in each of the end zones.
- A keepers plays out to his defender. The ball must move through each of the three zones.
- Defenders can pass or dribble into the middle zone.
- Attackers, meanwhile, can only move into the opposition end zone to get on the end of a pass. Once the pass has been made, a second attacker is allowed into the zone - the idea being for attackers to time their runs to get on the end of passes into the end zones.
- Play for 10 minutes.

Technique and tactics

- Players must try to recognise when to play forward and when not to.
- They must spot when to support behind and when to support in advance of the ball, when to run and when to pass, all the time trying to limit touches, thus speeding up play.
- The angle of attack will change depending on the runs from supporting team mates. Look for forwards dropping off to receive, plus good combinations with supporting players.
- And make sure you pick up on the role of the defending team, especially the lone defenders who will face a lot of 1v1s. Are they in the correct positions for marking and intercepting the ball?

Advancing the session

- Make the session more challenging by preventing the second attacker from moving into the end zone. Alternatively, allow the defending team to retreat players into the end zone once an opposition attacker has laid a pass into it.

David Clarke
Head Coach, Soccer Coach Weekly
Gates - choice

How to play it

- Set up four gates as shown on a 15x15-yard playing area.
- In the example shown I’ve used eight players, but you can set up a different number of gates to suit as long as it’s two players per gate.
- The players from one team must stand in the gates, while those on the other team dribble around the area.
- Dribbling players must communicate with the players in the gates, and have various choices:
  1. The player can dribble and make a take-over movement, then wait in the gate
  2. He can pass into the gate man and tell him to turn and move off, before replacing him in the gate
  3. He can perform a simple one-two with the player in the gate
- Ensure players mix up their instructions so as to keep the warm-up fresh and unpredictable.

Technique and tactics

- Players must communicate with each other, with loud and clear instructions.
- Dribblers must pass the ball as they would want to receive it.
- Receiving players in the gates must be alert at all times.

Dribbling players move towards the gates and prepare to communicate with the player in front of them

Here the receiving player must turn and move away, being replaced by the dribbling player

In this instance, players make a quick one-two

GET TEAM MATES TALKING TO ONE ANOTHER!

Michael Beale
Premier League Academy soccer coach

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Two-ball soccer

This small-sided game will improve your players’ ability to keep the ball as a team. To succeed, they will need to support each other, communicate effectively and pass the ball accurately.

It will also improve their ability to play with their heads up and press their opponents quickly and effectively.

It’s suitable for players between the ages of eight and 14.

How to play it

• Create a playing area measuring 30x20 yards – in the example shown I’ve used a 5v5 set-up.
• Each team is given one soccer ball.
• Both teams attempt to maintain possession whilst, at the same time, looking to capture the other team’s ball.
• When a team has possession of both balls, the game is stopped and the team in possession is awarded one point.
• The captured ball is returned to the team without possession and the game restarts.
• Play for five minutes, or until one of the teams has scored 10 points.

Advancing the game

• If your players struggle to maintain possession of the ball, add a neutral player who supports either team, or add two ‘safe zones’ - small coned off areas where a player under pressure can take the ball and remain there for up to five seconds without being tackled.
• You can also increase the intensity of the game by reducing the size of the playing area.
• Similarly, reduce the number of touches.
• Try making it three-touch for younger players, two- or even one-touch for older players.
• You can also add two more balls. Now each team must try to steal two balls.
• Award a point when one team possesses three balls, and two points when they have all four balls.

Techniques and tactics

• Players must organise properly because smart teamwork is at the heart of this game.
• They must look around them and be quick to assess when to support their team mates in retaining possession and when to close down looking to steal possession from the other team.
Giant-killing

We all love a good cup upset, and with the FA Cup in full swing, there are plenty of opportunities for lower-ranked teams to make a name for themselves.

One of the sides I coach had to play an outfit two divisions above them in the cup last week. And when I broke the news, they all groaned.

However, I told them not to worry about the opposition. Instead, they should think about playing their best and putting in maximum effort throughout the game. I wasn’t going to be bothered about the final score and nor should they.

But I couldn’t help feeling a sense of excitement as I plotted our tactics and team shape with the manager. Like all the teams I coach we play good attacking soccer, and we’re unbeaten this season.

What struck me in thinking about the whole notion of ‘giant-killings’ is that while we do see shock results with impressive frequency, there are also a number of times when teams from a higher division coming back near the end of matches to kill off the ‘upstarts’? This can be down to any number of reasons. Firstly, the lower league teams have been playing in top gear for most of the match and mistakes begin to show. Tiredness comes in so their opponents find the last 10 minutes a lot easier.

In addition, the lower league teams begin to sit back, trying to protect their lead by playing deep. That allows their opponents to attack from much higher up the pitch.

Higher league opponents might also bring out ‘the big guns’ if they are losing in the last 10 minutes. Maybe they’ve been saving star players for the league games?

I often see underdogs pegged back, and I was fearful the same thing might happen to us.

I therefore devised a simple yet really focused way of trying to prevent it. I decided I’d make substitutions in the last 10 minutes to get tired players off, and wouldn’t fall into the trap of making my players sit back to defend a lead. Simply, my instruction would be “get the ball into the opposition half and keep it there!”

And if the ball couldn’t go into the opposition half, then at least getting it into touch would be smart. And finally, we’d try really hard to win the ball back rather than just stifling attacking threat. It sounds simple but if your team has the ball the opposition cannot score.

And the result? Well, we triumphed and are through to the next round of the cup!

Why not apply these simple ideas to your side when you need to keep opponents out late in the game?

Will my drill work?

Here’s a seven-point checklist that will help you decide if a drill or game is going to work with your players before you try it at a training session.

1. Ask yourself if the drill is appropriate for the age of your players.
2. Ask yourself if it too easy or too hard.
3. Ask yourself if you can use this drill with all of your squad.
4. Ask yourself if you can use it with odd numbers of players.
5. Ask yourself if the drill is competitive.
6. Ask yourself if the drill is ‘soccer-like’.
7. Ask yourself if you can make it harder or easier if you are required to.
Four-goal game

Teams win the match by scoring in each goal.

**How to play it**

- Create a playing area as shown.
- The game works best with two teams of four players.
- You, the coach, begin by passing the ball to any of the players.
- The receiving player and his team mates must combine, attempting to score in all four goals.
- The team out of possession must attempt to win the ball – if it does so, the players form their own attacks.
- When a goal is scored, you restart with the ball.
- If the ball leaves play, there are a few restart options:
  1. The coach passes a new ball onto the pitch
  2. The players take a roll in
  3. The players take a throw in
  4. The players make a pass in
  5. The players dribble in
- There are no offsides.
- The first team to score in each of the four goals is declared the winner.

**Technique and tactics**

- Teams must be positive and ambitious, shooting at goal at every opportunity.
- The game also requires good spatial understanding, particularly when a team has already scored in one, two or three of the goals. They must then work the ball to different parts of the playing area.
- Adopting a stubborn defensive mindset when possession is lost is also important.
**SCW Surgery**

**This week**
Yeba Egele
Tottenham

**Q** My keeper often feels he should take the blame for defeats because he is the one who let the goals in. How do I convince him it’s not his fault?

**A** I’ve coached teams for several years now so it comes as no surprise to me to hear that your goalie has blamed himself for letting a goal or two in.

Youngsters have such a strong sense of ‘team’ that if they think they’ve made a mistake that has resulted in a loss they take it very personally, even when it’s a perfectly normal goal that’s been conceded.

I get them over this by explaining that the rest of the team has a collective responsibility to stop the other team shooting at our goal. So if a shot does come in that the goalie can’t save (or even if he really does mess up by dropping it over the line, for instance) it’s not his fault.

I also have a short video clip of some famous goalkeepers making silly mistakes. If I need to, I can show it to my goalie as reassurance that even the best keepers in the world sometimes have a day to forget!

I’m sure your goalie has made far more good saves than mistakes. Make sure he knows he is appreciated and that being goalie is the toughest job on the team!

**TACKLED: Results**

Here’s the result of the poll we ran in Soccer Coach Weekly 292. We asked if you felt youth soccer players really replicated the actions of their Premier League idols.

- **YES** 17%
- **NO** 83%

**PUT IT TO THE VOTE:** Which of our guest coaches do you agree with? Visit our Facebook page or email your thoughts to David Clarke at david.clarke@coach-soccer.com

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**Tackled: No ‘I’ in ‘team’?**

**At young ages, should the focus of youth soccer be on the individual or on the team?**

**THE INDIVIDUAL**

Stuart Morley
Willesden Under-11s

“Players have very little concept of team work until they are much further into their soccer development. After all, we’ve all seen five-year-olds chasing around a pitch after the same ball!”

At young ages technical skill and development is the most important thing. Kids are learning the tools of the trade, so it must therefore follow that the emphasis should be on teaching players how to do the basics – how to control, how to pass, how to shoot, how to tackle. These aren’t team mechanics – they are purely individual concerns.

**THE TEAM**

Anthony Brady
Park Vale, Stoke

“The most basic element of soccer – passing a ball – is worthless without the involvement of team mates.”

While individual skills must of course be harnessed and fine-tuned, the whole point of youth soccer (and competitive team sport, for that matter) is that players of all ages and abilities are learning how to adapt within a group environment. On a social level, this is how we turn individuals into communities, and it’s absolutely vital that we convey those types of messages at the earliest opportunity possible.

I sometimes feel coaches don’t realise how influential and defining those early years of a child’s life can be, and it is those messages they pick up now that can resonate throughout their formative years.

The team environment in sport is also about looking after and looking out for team mates. Soccer is only really a vehicle for that, but an extremely powerful one.

The most basic element of soccer – passing a ball – is worthless without the involvement of team mates. We must teach players as teams from the youngest age possible, otherwise their perception of how the game works is starting off on the wrong foot.

Ask any player if he gets more satisfaction from dribbling the ball around opposition players by himself of linking up with his team to share in a group move, and I’m sure he will tell you it’s the latter.