

The concept of triangles

How to teach combination play in triangles for U10 players

by Sam Snow, technical director, US Youth Soccer

Children in the under-10 (U10) age group are just starting to conceptualize the game of soccer. This is because of where most eight- to ten-year-olds are in their cognitive development.

The ability to think abstractly and to better understand time and space relationships is just beginning to emerge at this age.



Photo: Manni Klar

Thinking into the future

One example of the difficulties involved in teaching tactics at this age level is the simple wall pass. “Pass the ball to the teammate slightly ahead of you, then run into the space beyond him and the opponent, and then your teammate will pass the ball back to you.”

To an eight-year-old, this idea is difficult to comprehend. Why? The tactic requires both attackers to think three steps ahead into the future:

- Step 1 is the first pass.
- Step 2 is the off-the-ball run.
- Step 3 is the return pass.

Now, players in the U10 age group can do the wall pass tactic, but it’s hit-and-miss with them. They’ll get it right sometimes,

but other times the run or the passes will be too early or late, or the passes will be too slow or fast, or one player will read the moment for the wall pass and the other one won’t.

By the time they’re in the final stage of the age group and about to move on to the U12 level, these players are getting better at seeing tactical moments in the game. We need to be aware of these steps in their development to now teach them an even more difficult concept.

The triangle shape

Having a triangle around the ball, whether attacking or defending, is a crucial tactical shape. However, it requires three players to read the game the same way at the same

time. That means seeing into the future and understanding space. The use of space will influence the distances and angles between the players in the triangle, and also between them and the ball. So we can begin to teach the triangle shape to the U10 age group—but we need to be patient.

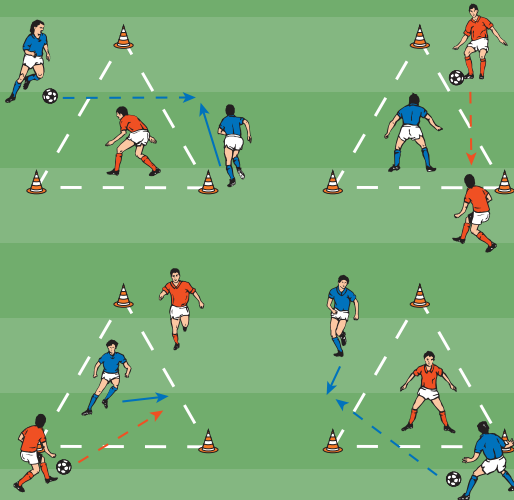
On the following pages you’ll find a training session for 12 players, designed to teach them how to use the triangle shape when attacking. This session can be used at any stage within the U10–U14 age level with varying emphasis appropriate to players’ stage of development.

One possible warm-up activity could be passing in pairs in a grid, with constant variations in distance and angle between partners, plus occasional dynamic stretching.

Concept of triangles

TRIANGLE TRAINING SESSION

2 v. 1 keep-away



Setup

- Using cones, mark out four 7 x 7 x 7-yard triangular grids.
- Position two attackers (with one ball) outside each grid and one defender inside.

Sequence

- The defender stays inside the grid and tries to intercept passes through it.
- The two attackers may move around the grid but not go into it.
- Attackers earn points by passing through the grid.
- If the defender intercepts a pass, he switches places with that attacker.

Variation

- Vary the size of the triangles.

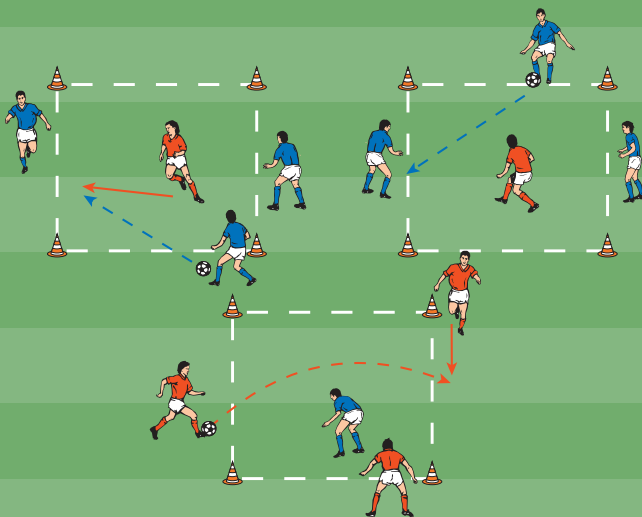
Coaching points

- Movement for support angles
- Timing of passes
- Fakes

Coaching questions

- How do you show for the teammate with the ball?
- How close or far away should you be?

3 v. 1 keep-away



Setup

- Set up three 10 x 10-yard grids. Position three attackers (with one ball) outside each grid and one defender inside.

Sequence

- The three attackers may move around the grid but not go into it.
- Attackers earn points by passing through the grid.
- The defender stays inside the grid and tries to intercept passes through it. If successful, he switches places with the passer.

Variations

- Vary the size of the grids.
- Add a second defender.

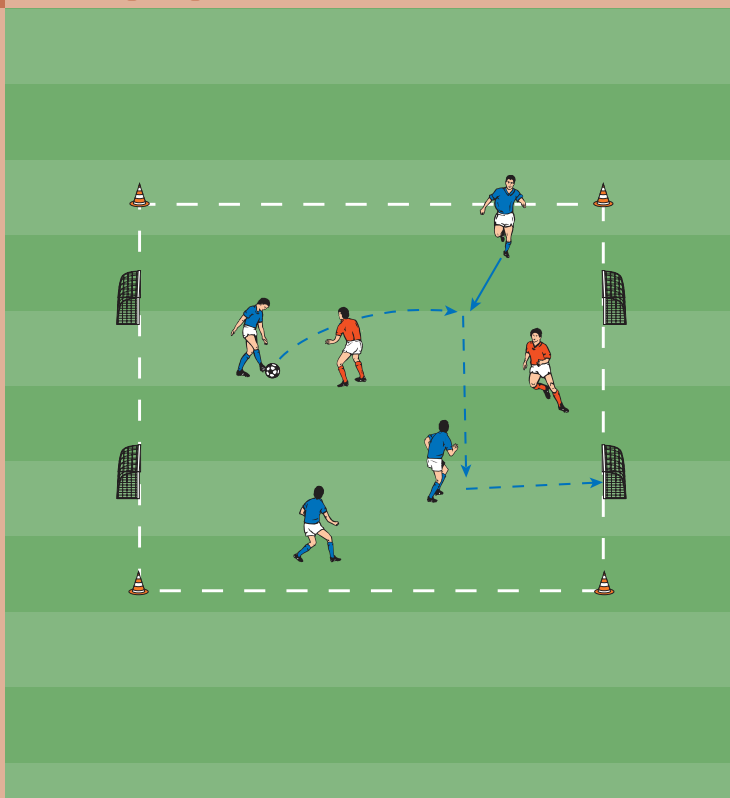
Coaching points

- Movement for support angles
- Timing of passes
- Fakes
- Assessment of pressure on ball carrier and corresponding adjustment of distance

Coaching questions

- Can you move early to receive a pass?
- Should you move while the ball is moving?
- Does the passer have open passing lanes to both teammates?

Four-goal game



Setup

- Set up two 20 x 25-yard grids with two small goals on each of the long sides (only one grid shown).
- Divide players into two teams of two (defenders) and two teams of four (attackers).
- Every three minutes, one of the defending players switches with one of his opponents.

Sequence

- Teams play 4 v. 2 in each grid, with each team attacking two goals.

Variations

- Teams play 4 v. 3.
- Teams play 4 v. 4.

Coaching points

- Looking for and creating passing options
- Group shape (consistently creating triangles)

Coaching questions

- Can you give the player with the ball passing options on both sides?
- Can you run to support while the ball is moving?
- How do you figure out where to run before the ball is passed?

Concluding match



Setup

- Mark out a 20 x 40-yard field with a goal on each of its long sides.
- Divide players into two teams of six including goalkeepers.

Sequence

- Teams play 6 v. 6 according to US Youth Soccer modified rules for the U10 age group: smaller penalty area and center circle, penalty mark closer to endline, 6 x 18-foot goal, size 4 ball, 25-minute halves, no offside calls, no goalkeeper kicks into opposition's penalty area, players eight yards from ball on set plays.

Coaching points

- Reading the game
- Group shape: consistently creating triangles on goalkeeper kicks (shaded areas at left) and throw-ins (not shown)

Coaching questions

- Reinforce previously asked questions.