Training the FC Köln way

Part 5: Motivational training for mental regeneration at the end of the season

by Klaus Pabst, *Success in Soccer* associate editor, and Marcus Kühn, U15 coach, 1. FC Köln

By now, 1. FC Köln's U15 players have 42 weeks of intensive training under their belts: nine weeks at the start of the season, nine more after fall break, 11 after Christmas break and 13 between Easter break and summer. With the hardest part of the season now behind them, it's time for coaches Marcus Kühn and Martin Bülles to dial down the intensity and switch over to something more fun: motivational training.

Getting motivated

The primary purpose of motivational training is to give players a chance for mental regeneration, since they have to work so hard and take in so much information during the regular season. Motivational training is always scheduled for the last week before the fall, Christmas and Easter breaks, plus the last two weeks before the summer break.

Activities include a variety of tournaments and shooting competitions that are not as mentally demanding for players. Coaches do keep score, however, and players do an intensive warm-up beforehand as usual.

Tournaments

Tournaments can be conducted with two to six teams varying in size between four and eight players each. FC Köln's U15 players are frequently joined by the U14 team for motivational training, allowing coaches to conduct bigger tournaments with larger numbers of teams.

Although fun is the focus of motivational training, these tournaments can have other benefits as well, which should not be overlooked. Therefore, players are encouraged to play hard and given plenty of downtime between games. They also play in formation, with each player fulfilling a specific role.

MOTIVATIONAL TRAINING: TOURNAMENTS

Juventus tournament

Setup and sequence

- Field is twice the size of the penalty box.
- Set up a goal with goalkeeper on each endline.
- Divide players into two teams: Four players from each team play 4 v. 4 while the rest sit out.
- At the coach's signal, the players on the field are replaced by their teammates on the sidelines. Which team can score 10 goals first?

Variations

- The defending team is replaced when it gives up a goal.
- The attacking team is replaced when it misses a shot (or scores).

Coaching tips

- Make sure players rest so they can play at full intensity when they rotate in.
- Have players choose their own teams of four.
- Periodically announce the score.

YOUTH U14–U18

Info: Athletic testing

To better monitor players' athletic ability and motor development, coaches conduct standardized athletic tests twice a year, beginning at the U12 level. Under the supervision of Erich Kollath of the German Sport University in Cologne and his assistant Lennart Gudella, players are evaluated on their speed and jumping power before the winter and summer breaks. To rule out the effects of weather, these tests are always conducted indoors. Each player does the following activities:

Speed (with timing gates)

- 10-yard linear sprint with timing gates at 5 and 10 yards
- 20-yard linear sprint with timing gates at 5, 10 and 20 yards
- 20-yard double out-and-back sprint with turns at 17.5 and 12.5 yards (turning times recorded)

Jumping power (with force platform)

- squat jump without arm swing (jump height recorded)
- countermovement jump with arm swing (jump height recorded)
- drop jump: jump down and then up (jump height and landing/ takeoff time recorded)

Based on the results of these tests, all players are ranked in relation to their teammates, and each player receives an individual evaluation.

Standardized, objective, valid procedures for testing soccer-specific skills are virtually nonexistent. Therefore, player evaluations in this area are conducted exclusively by means of observation.

Of course, coaches can also use special rules (e.g. limiting touches or dictating certain shooting techniques) to focus on specific aspects of the game. To keep the game moving at the desired level of intensity, coaches should always have plenty of extra balls ready on the sidelines or at the goals.

Shooting competitions

Apart from the concluding game, shooting exercises tend to be every player's favorite part of training. That's why shooting competitions work so well as motivational training activities. Another advantage is that they are less physically fatiguing for players.

Shooting competitions are also good for working on technical concepts. For example, you can have players practice dribbling, passing or controlling the ball before shooting. Coaches should always make sure all techniques involved are executed correctly, and the shot itself needs to be executed with precision: Every shot should at least hit the goal, no matter how intense the pressure may be. Players should also shoot quickly, taking minimal touches beforehand, and train with both feet.

If only one goalkeeper is needed for a given exercise, the other keeper(s) can join the shooters; just be sure to rotate keepers after each round.

Random selection
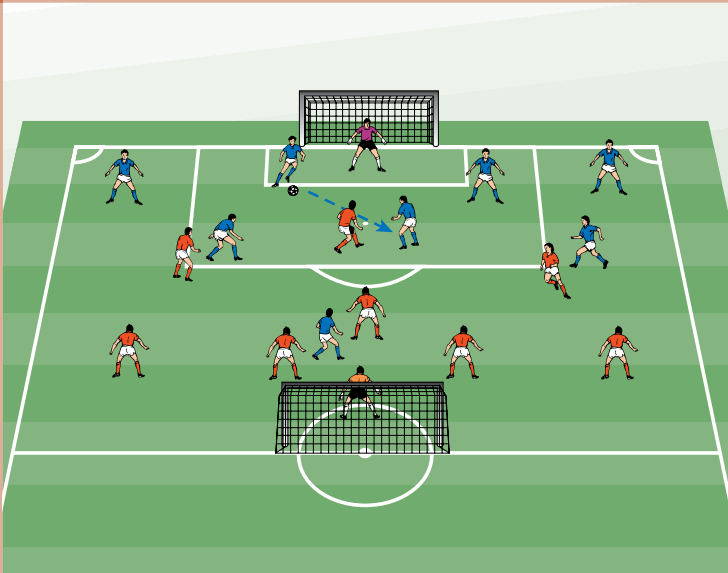
Setup and sequence

- Field is a half.
- Set up a goal with goalkeeper on each endline.
- Prepare 16 cards: eight marked with the letter A and eight with B.
- Form teams by having each player choose a card at random.
- Teams A and B play 8 v. 8.
- After six minutes, stop the game and choose new teams.
- Players score one point for each goal their team scores.
- Which player can score the most points?

Coaching tips

- To keep track of the rankings, write down each player's points after each round.
- Permanently assign one goalkeeper to each team ahead of time.
- Especially weak or strong players may also be permanently assigned to teams ahead of time.

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MOTIVATIONAL TRAINING: TOURNAMENTS

Brazilian tournament 1
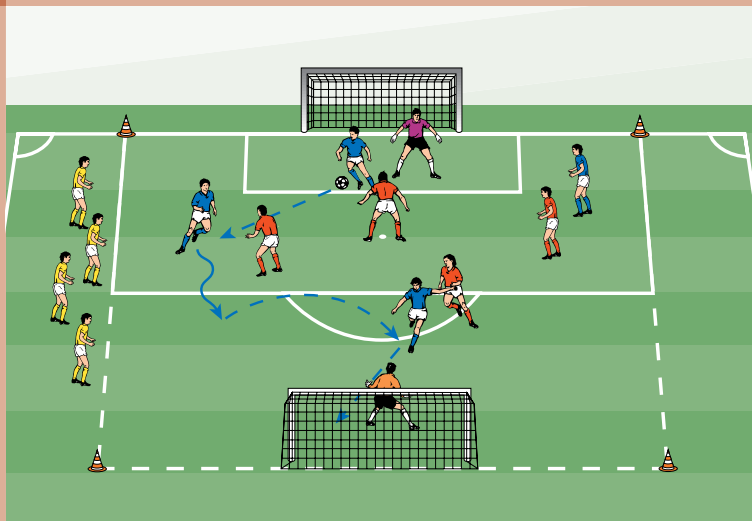
Setup
- Field is twice the size of the penalty box.
- Set up a goal with goalkeeper on each endline.
- Divide players into three teams.

Sequence
- One team sits out while the other two play soccer on the field.

- After scoring, the attacking team immediately launches a new attack in the opposite direction.
- The team that gave up the goal is replaced by the third team.
- The goalkeepers stay in the goals and assist whichever team is on defense.
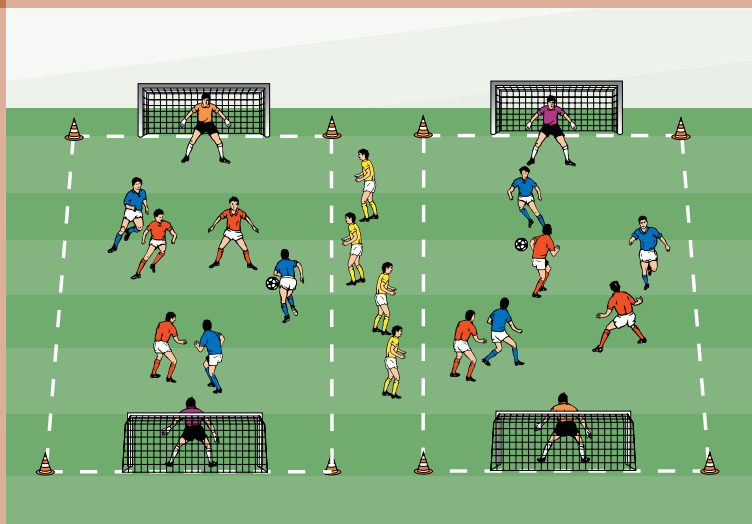- Which team can score the most goals?

Variations
- Goalkeepers rotate along with their teams.
- If players miss an opportunity to score, they are replaced by the third team.
- Divide players into four teams; the two extra teams rotate alternately.
- The first team to score 10 goals wins.

Coaching tips
- Each team should choose a captain to keep track of the score.
- Maximum playing time is four minutes. If neither team scores during this time, the one that has been on the field longer rotates off.
- The third team needs to pay close attention to the game and be ready to rotate into the right half immediately after a goal.
- After scoring, players should start the next attack immediately.

Brazilian tournament 2

Setup
- Mark out two 20 x 40-yard fields side by side.
- Set up a goal with goalkeeper on each endline.
- Divide players into five teams.

Sequence
- One team sits out while the other four play soccer on the fields.

- After scoring, attacking teams immediately launch a new attack in the opposite direction.
- The team that gave up the goal is replaced by the fifth team.
- The goalkeepers stay in the goals and assist whichever team is on defense.
- Which team can score the most goals?

Variations
- Goalkeepers rotate along with their teams.
- If players miss an opportunity to score, they are replaced by the fifth team.
- The first team to score 10 goals wins.

Coaching tips
- Each team should choose a captain to keep track of the score.
- Maximum playing time is four minutes. If none of the teams scores during this time, the one that has been on the field longest rotates off.
- The fifth team needs to pay close attention to the game and be ready to rotate into the right half immediately after a goal.
- After scoring, players should start the next attack immediately.
- If not enough goals are available, you can use mini goals, cones or poles (with or without goalkeepers).

Promotion and relegation

Division 1   Division 2   Division 3
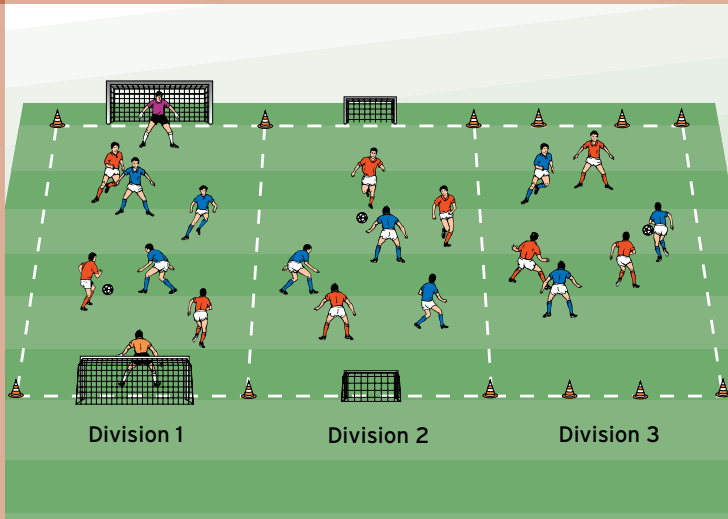
Setup
- Mark out three 20 x 40-yard fields side by side: Division 1, Division 2 and Division 3.
- Set up goals on each field's endlines: standard goals (with goal-keepers) for Division 1, mini goals for Division 2 and goal lines for Division 3.
- Divide players into six teams and assign two to each field.

Sequence
- Teams play soccer on each of the fields for five minutes.
- Winning teams are promoted to the league above; losing teams are relegated to the league below.
- Teams score three points for a Division 1 win, two for a Division 2 win and one for a Division 3 win, plus a bonus point for each goal scored.
- Which team can score the most points?

Variations
- Each team sends one player onto the field. The next two take the field whenever the ball goes out or a goal is scored. The first team to score five goals is promoted.
- Each team sends two players onto the field. The next four take the field whenever the ball goes out or a goal is scored. The first team to score five goals is promoted.

Coaching tips
- Put the weakest teams in Division 1 and the strongest in Division 3 to begin with.
- Let the first round be a practice round; wait until the second round to start keeping score.
- Record each team's score after each game.

Human stopwatch
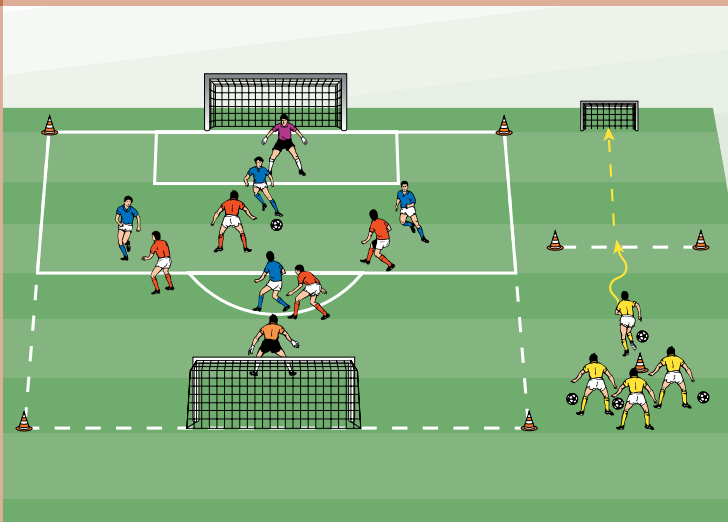
Setup
- Field is twice the size of the penalty box.
- Set up a goal with goalkeeper on each endline, plus a mini goal beside the field.
- Set up a starting cone 20 yards in front of the mini goal, and mark out a shooting line in the middle.
- Divide players into three teams.

- Two teams take the field while the third lines up at the starting cone with one ball per player.

Sequence
- Two teams play soccer on the field.
- The third team functions as a human stopwatch: Players take turns shooting at the mini goal.
- As soon as the third team scores 10 goals, it replaces whichever team has been on the field longer.
- Which team wins the most matches?

Variation
- The third team replaces whichever team is trailing (or whichever team has been on the field longer, if the score is tied).

Coaching tips
- Adjust the distance between shooting line and mini goal to fit players' ability level.
- If players are scoring too often on the mini goal, move the shooting line farther away or increase the number of goals required.
- Each team should choose a captain to keep track of its wins.
- Call out the number each time the "stopwatch" scores so the players on the field know how much longer they have to play.

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MOTIVATIONAL TRAINING: SHOOTING COMPETITIONS

One-goal competition
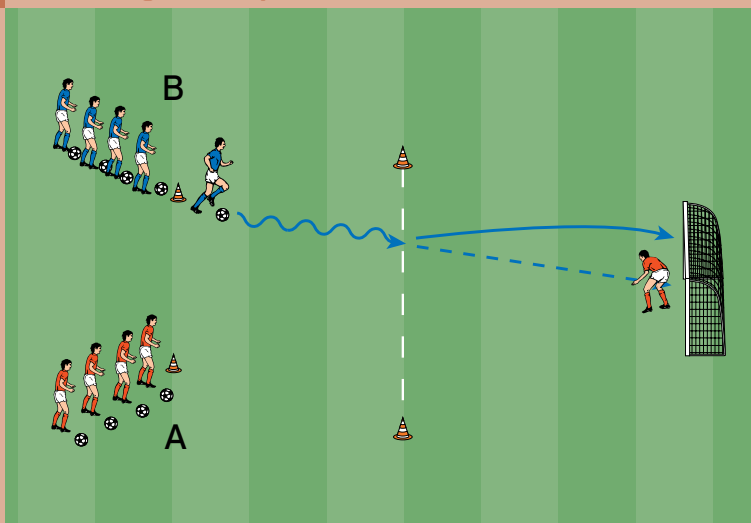
Setup
- Set up two starting cones 25 yards in front of a goal with goal-keeper.
- Mark out a shooting line 15 yards in front of the goal.
- Players line up in two teams at the starting cones, with one ball each.
- The first player from Team A stands in the goal.

Sequence
- The first player from Team B dribbles to the shooting line and shoots, then immediately rotates into the goal.
- As soon as Player B shoots, the next player from Team A starts dribbling.
- Which team is the first to score 10 goals?

Variations
- Players play the ball forward, shooting from the shooting line on the second touch.
- Players throw the ball up in the air and volley from the shooting line on the first bounce.
- Players drop-kick the ball forward, shooting from the shooting line on the first bounce.

Coaching tips
- Players should run to the goal immediately after shooting, then turn and get ready for the next shooter.
- Shots played from in front of the shooting line do not count.
- Adjust the distance between shooting line and goal to fit players' ability level.
- Stand between the two teams and call out the score periodically.

Two-goal competition
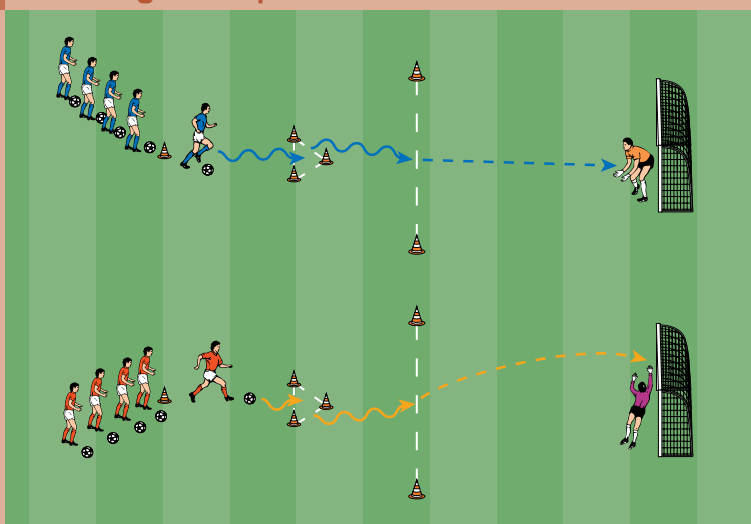
Setup
- Set up two goals side by side, 10 yards apart.
- Set up a starting cone 25 yards in front of each goal.
- Mark out a shooting line 15 yards in front of each goal.
- Using cones, mark out triangles (each side 1.5 yards long) between shooting lines and starting cones.
- Divide players into two teams plus goalkeepers.

- Teams line up at the starting cones with one ball per player; goalkeepers stand in the goals.

Sequence
- The first player from each team dribbles into the triangle, does an assigned fake and shoots from the shooting line.
- The next player starts dribbling as soon as the first one shoots.
- Which team is the first to score 10 goals?

Variations
- In the triangle, players throw the ball up in the air, receiving and controlling it before shooting.
- In the triangle, players drop-kick the ball up in the air, receiving and controlling it before shooting.
- A player stands in each triangle and shows for a pass from the dribbler, receiving and controlling it before shooting.

Coaching tips
- Assign fakes players already know.
- Shots played from in front of the shooting line do not count.
- Adjust the distance between shooting line and goal to fit players' ability level.
- Shots played with the weak foot count double.
- Stand between the two teams and call out the score periodically.

Info: Tournament formations
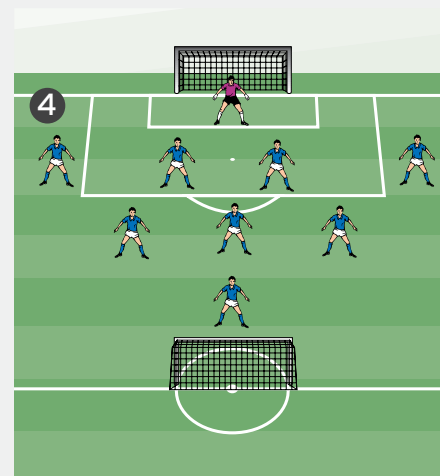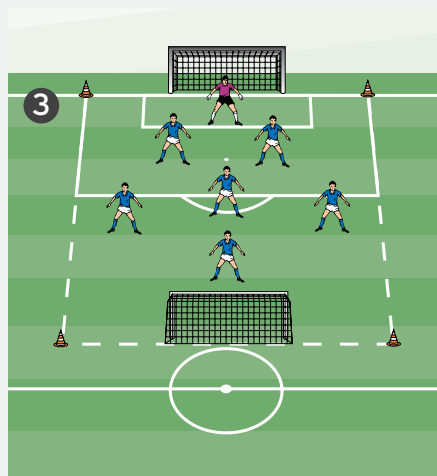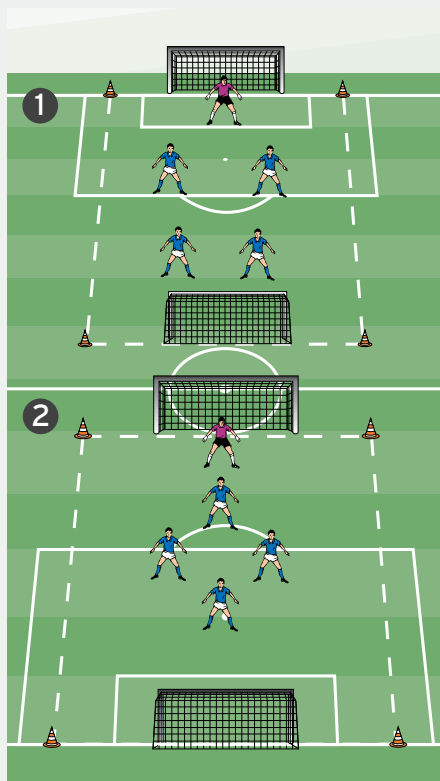
All tournaments are conducted with teams of four to eight. Formations are chosen for maximum field coverage in all directions, allowing players to play effective combinations. They also correspond to formations from the 11 v. 11 game.

4 v. 4 tournaments: ❶ 2–2 formation ❷ 2–2 formation with midfield diamond

6 v. 6 tournaments: ❸ 2–3–1 formation

8 v. 8 tournaments: ❹ 4–3–1 formation

1 v. 1 competition
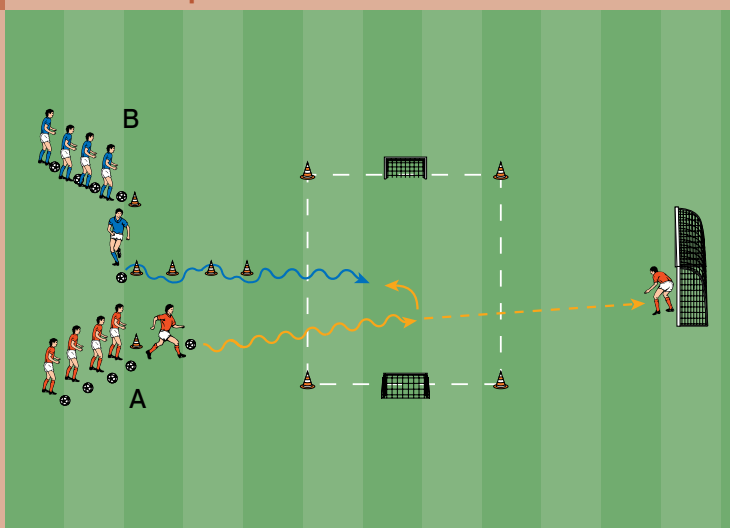
Setup
- Place two starting cones 30 yards in front of a goal with keeper.
- Fifteen yards in front of the goal, mark out a 10 x 20-yard field with mini goals.
- Using four cones, mark out a slalom course between the starting cones and the field.
- Players line up in teams at the starting cones, with one ball each.

Sequence
- The first player from Team A dribbles onto the field, shoots at the standard goal and then turns to defend.
- The first player from Team B dribbles through the slalom course and then plays 1 v. 1 against A to score on A's mini goal.
- If A wins the ball, he can attack on B's mini goal.
- Each goal is worth one point.
- The last team to score in 1 v. 1 play is the next to shoot at the standard goal.
- Which team is the first to score 10 goals?

Variations
- Players throw the ball up in the air and volley from the shooting line on the first bounce.
- Players drop-kick the ball forward, shooting from the shooting line on the first bounce.
- After shooting, A receives a pass from B and becomes the attacker.

Coaching tips
- Players score points for shots on the standard goal as well as on the mini goals.
- Players must shoot at the standard goal from inside the field.
- Stand between the two teams and call out the score periodically.
- Each 1 v. 1 lasts until a goal is scored or the ball goes out.