

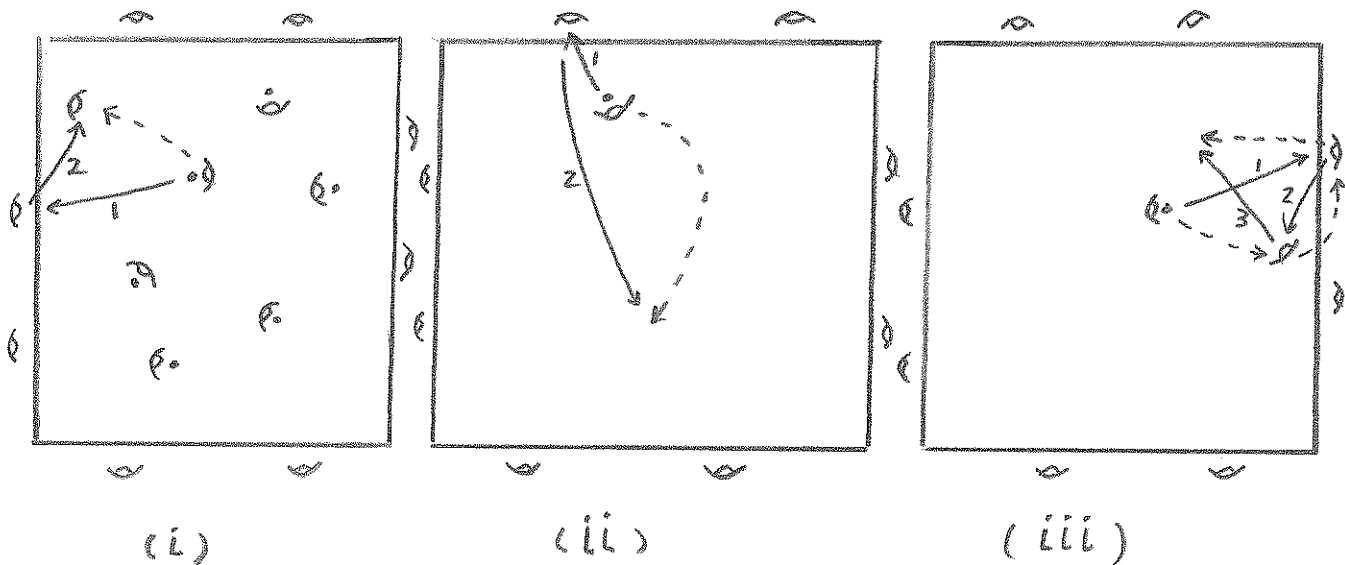
## TRAINING ELITE PLAYERS – HOW TO CHALLENGE SELECT LEVEL PLAYERS

Once players acquire a strong technical foundation and are seeking challenges that can elevate their performance, they need to learn to play in tight areas under high levels of pressure from opponents. Practice sessions should focus on game related activities in small areas relative to the number of players, with the emphasis on learning how to create and exploit space, how to receive the ball under pressure, in other words, how to improve speed of play.

Coaches should choose activities that force them to make quick decisions, control the ball with one or two touch, and play quickly. When young players are pressured, their first instinct is to play it long over the top into space, and chase. Aspiring players who want to improve their speed of play need to train to possess and penetrate through gaps in opponents' units, receive and turn in tight areas and combine quickly to advance through opponents rather than just kick long and chase. Below is an example of a practice plan to improve players' speed of play:

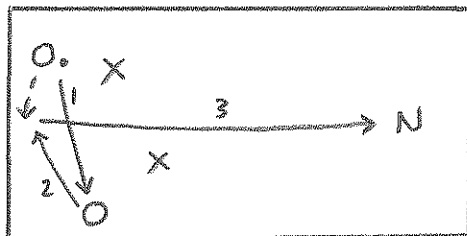
### WARM UP: GRID WORK ON PASSING AND RECEIVING

Team split into two groups. One group inside grid with a ball per player and second group positioned around perimeter of grid. Grid size depends on number of players but should be at least 30 by 30 yards. In the first progression, the inside player passes to an outside player and takes up a new support position at an angle with body open to the field and receives a pass back and controls the ball with his front foot while facing the inside of the grid (not the side lines of the grid). In the second progression the inside player passes to an outside player and spins away with a bent run and receives a pass into space within the grid. In the third progression, the inside player passes to an outside player and takes up a new support position similar to the first progression but this time the outside player makes a wall pass with the inside player by running into the grid and the inside player takes his place on the outside. In the fourth progression, the players decide which combination they want to do and mix it up in a random sequence.



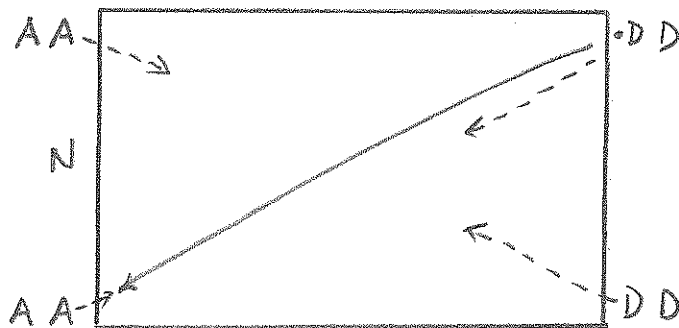
### 2V2 PLUS 1 POSSESSION

Groups of 5 per grid 10X20 yards in size. They play 2v2 plus a neutral player who plays with the team in possession, which makes it a 3v2 game. The teams play keep-away possession. If the defending team wins the ball, play is continuous as they keep it away from the other team, using the neutral player to help in possession. Players learn to support each other, when to split the defenders, and when to play to feet and how to move after making a pass. When to play one touch and when to hold the ball.



### 2v2 PLUS 1 TO END LINE

Groups of 9 in a grid 15-20 yards wide by 20-25 yards long. Players arranged as shown. Defender serves one of the attackers and two defenders step into grid to defend while two attackers step in to control the ball and score by taking it across the defenders' end line. If defenders win the ball, they counterattack by bringing it across the attackers' end line. One neutral attacker remains behind the end line to support the attackers but cannot get inside grid and cannot defend the line. Attackers get a point for crossing the end line. Defenders get 2 points for winning the ball and getting it across the other end line. If ball goes out of bounds no one gets a point. Players return to their original positions until one team wins by getting 10 points first. Then switch roles for the teams. Progress by allowing the neutral player to step inside the grid but when he steps inside, one of the other two attackers must take his place behind the end line, otherwise the goal doesn't count since you can never have more than two attackers in the grid.



**5V5 TO END LINES**

Two teams of 5 play in a formation of 3 defenders and 2 forwards and positioned as shown in a grid 25-30 yards wide by 40-50 yards long. Coach starts each attack by serving the ball to a defender. Each team tries to score by bringing the ball across the opposite end line. Each time ball goes out of bounds or a team scores, the players retake the original positions and coach serves a new ball. Players learn when to play square and when to split the opponents with a penetrating ball. Attackers learn how to stretch the field, create gaps between the opponent's lines and exploit the gaps by receiving and turning quickly in those gaps. Defenders learn when to step up and join the 2 attackers and when to stay back and support from behind the ball. Players learn how to create angled passes and be sideways on when receiving balls to feet.

