

Coaching The Step Across

This week we look how the simple step across can give your players ball control. By David Clarke

This is the most basic shielding move - but probably the most useful. The player simply steps over the ball to put either one or both legs between the ball and an incoming opponent.

What you want to achieve

- Teach your players to end up facing the direction where there is the best chance of finding supporting players.
- Facing the touchline is a very defensive move and generally means your player will end up playing the ball into touch unless that player is skilful enough to kick the ball off of the opponent's legs to win your team a throw-in.
- Remember, the position your player will end up facing will depend on which foot that player is most confident with.

Warm ups

Put the players in pairs so that their arms are linked and they are leaning against one another, and have them try to roll the ball around with their outside foot. Have pairs switch sides, so that they can work with both feet. Have a "sack-race" kind of activity, where the pairs try to walk/hop from one line to another, while controlling the ball with the outside foot. Have one race going forward, one going backward, and two going sideways (l to r and r to l).

How it works in action

Once your players are comfortable with the basic step across, the player needs to know how to use it. Experiment with it in training to give them the confidence to use it in matches.

- Put two players at opposite ends of a small grid. One player passes to the other player, then walks towards the receiver to start shutting him down. Get a small player to shield from a bigger player.
- The receiver steps across the ball to put himself between the opponent and the ball - and end up with his back foot (the foot farthest from the opponent) resting on top of the ball. Once they have this basic idea then its time to make actual contact with the opponent.
- Show your players how their shoulder makes contact with the opponent (get the shielding player to bump into their opponent), transferring weight to their front foot so that their back foot is free to pass/control ball. Return to the grid and allow players to practice making the shoulder-to-shoulder contact. Your players need to hold the opponent on one shoulder get their heads up, look for, and pass to, a team-mate.

Position of feet for the step over

Ball unshielded from opponent



Ball shielded from opponent



Three tips for shielding

- Players must keep the shoulder pointed at the defender at all times.
- You want your player in control of the situation. If a defender is coming in hard the ball must be moved quickly to give time to hold opponents off.
- Tell them not to use hands to push an opponent away. Use arms, shoulders, body and legs to keep an opponent from getting the ball.