



# Drill less, play more!

## Part 2: Match-character training for confident possession by **Hermann Bomers**

In our last article, Hermann Bomers gave us practice games for teaching dribbling at various age levels. This time he focuses on two related aspects of practice and match play: training players to maintain posses-

sion and teaching them to dribble close to the foot. For both concepts he provides specialized practice games for each age and ability level.

### Developing playing ability

A training program consisting solely of drills is not only a poor motivator, it also hinders the development of playing ability. In match play, you can only use the things you've practiced in realistic game situations. This applies without exception to all age and ability levels.

Therefore we need to provide for plenty of touches on the ball, in tight spaces and under constant opposition pressure. We do this by continually varying our practice games in creative ways, and by training multiple concepts at the same time.

First I'll show you play-oriented exercises for maintaining possession under opposition pressure. The second set of exercises is devoted to dribbling the ball close to the foot. In both cases, players must constantly look up from the ball to observe their surroundings, assess the situation and react appropriately.

As in the first part of this series, the three practice games in each section are designed for ages six to 10, 10 to 14 and 14 to 18.



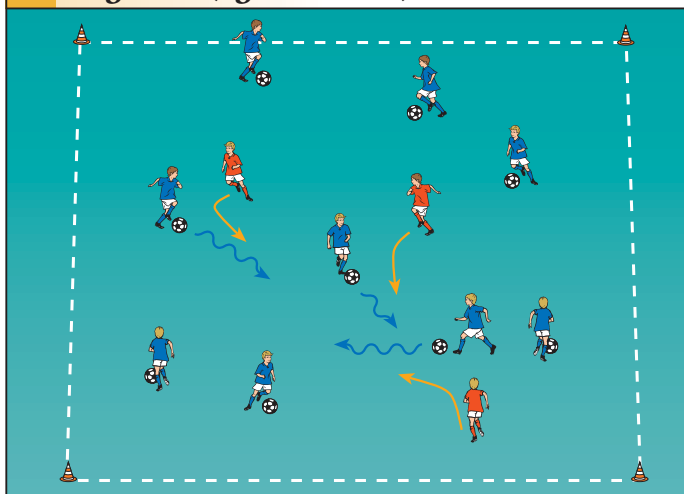
Practice games teach players how to outplay their opponents.

© HEIMKEN



## EXERCISES FOR MAINTAINING POSSESSION

### 1 Tigerball (ages six to 10)



#### Setup

- Players play on a 10 x 15-yard field.
- Three-quarters of them have soccer balls; the rest are “tigers.”

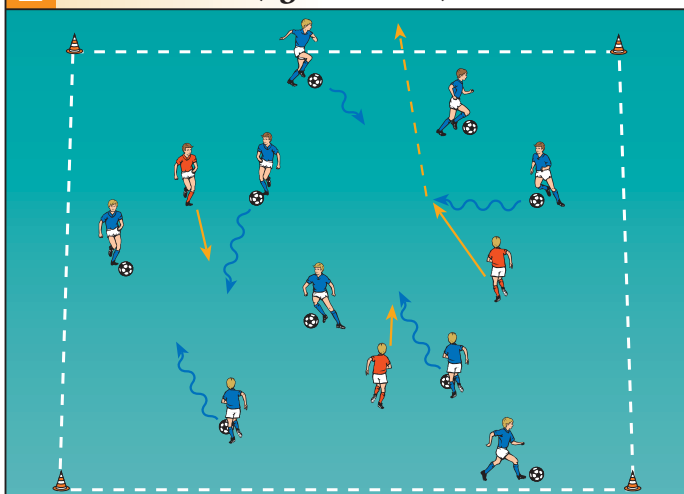
#### Sequence

- The tigers try to win balls. To do so successfully, they must end up holding the balls in their hands.
- The successful tiger then switches roles with the dribbler.
- Dribblers get one point each time they lose the ball.
- Which player has the fewest points after 10 minutes?

#### Note

This exercise is meant to teach dribblers how to shield the ball from their opponents: Put your body between the ball and the tiger, use changes of speed and direction to shake off the tigers, and use fakes to get away from them.

### 2 Ball robbers (ages 10 to 14)



#### Setup

- Setup is as above, except the field is 15 yards square. The players without soccer balls are the “robbers.”

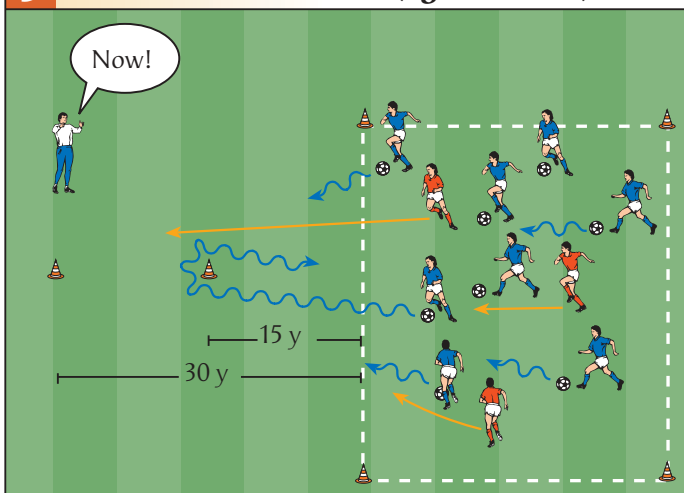
#### Sequence

- The robbers chase the dribblers and try to kick unprotected balls off the field whenever they get a good opportunity (no fouls!). Afterwards players switch roles.
- Dribblers get one point each time they lose the ball.
- Which player has the fewest points after 12 minutes?

#### Note

Dribblers must keep the ball close to their bodies while keeping an eye on the robbers at the same time. That way they can shield the ball on the appropriate side, using fakes to maintain possession and using changes of speed and direction to move into open spaces.

### 3 Dribblers and runners (ages 14 to 18)



#### Setup

- Mark out a 15 x 15-yard field. Mark a line outside the field using two cones placed 15 and 30 yards away.
- All players take the field. About two-thirds of them have soccer balls; the rest are “runners.”

#### Sequence

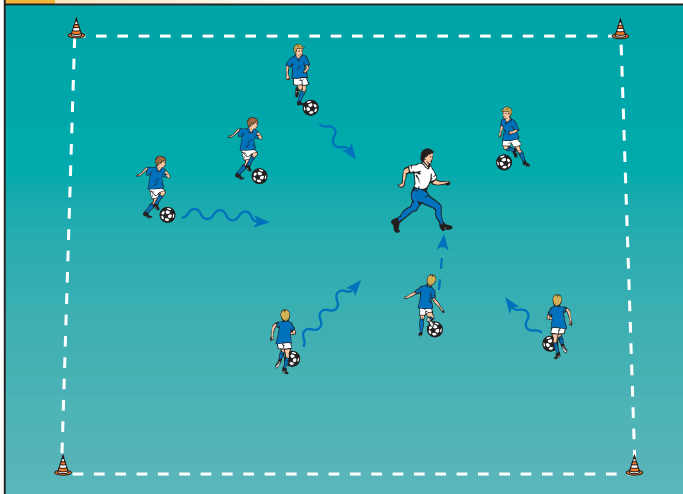
- Runners try to steal balls from dribblers.
- At the coach's signal, all the dribblers dribble around the near cone while the runners run around the far cone.
- As soon as the first dribbler is back on the field, the next round begins, giving runners a new chance to win balls. Hold multiple rounds.

#### Note

Runners should keep dribblers under constant pressure. This makes for an exciting and intense game of running and technique.

## EXERCISES FOR DRIBBLING CLOSE TO THE FOOT

### 1 Shoot the coach! (ages six to 10)



#### Setup

- Players play on an 8 x 8-yard field; each one has a ball.
- The coach runs around on the field at an easy pace.

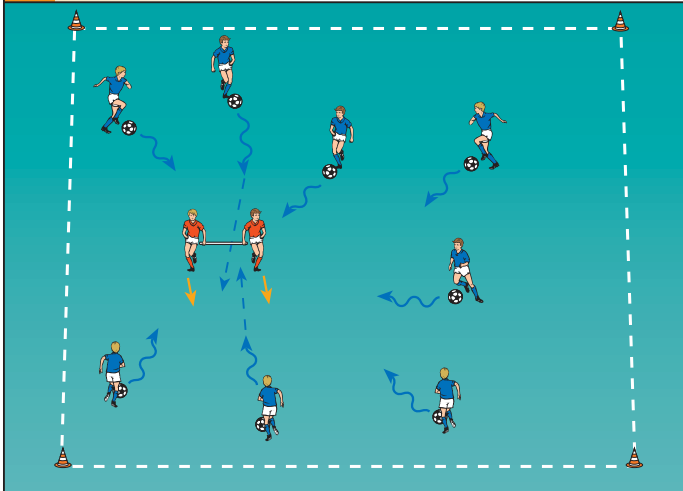
#### Sequence

- Players dribble, following the coach and trying to get into a good position to “shoot” him.
- The coach runs in such a way that players succeed most of the time.  
Variation: The coach dribbles a medicine ball that players have to shoot.
- The winner is the player who can score the most goals in eight minutes.

#### Note

Players are forced to look up from the ball so that they don't lose track of their target. They have to keep the ball close to the foot so they can react immediately to changes of direction. The best shooting technique is to use the inside of the foot.

### 2 Moving target (ages 10 to 14)



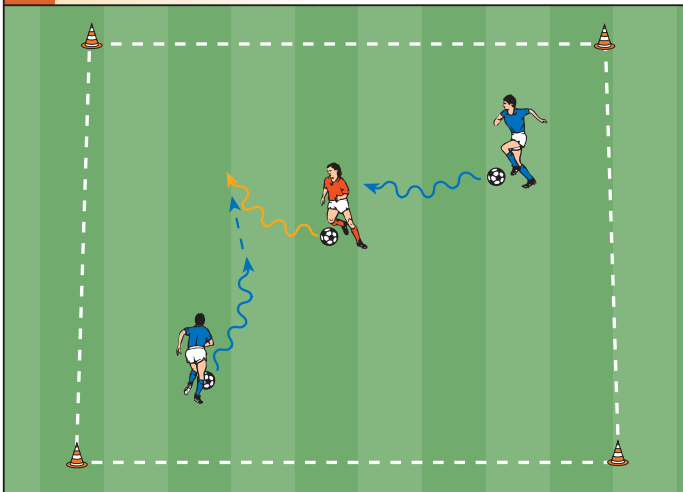
#### Setup

- All but two players get one ball each.
- These two players hold a pole or a taut rope at hip level while running around on the field (15 x 15 yards), acting as a moving goal.

#### Sequence

- Players try to score as often as possible by shooting the ball through the goal.
- The two “goalposts” try to keep them from scoring and are also allowed to kick unprotected balls away. They switch roles with the dribblers every two minutes.
- The winner is the player who can score the most goals.
- Players have to constantly keep an eye on the goal and keep the ball close so they can react to changes of direction. This also protects the ball from getting kicked away. As above, the best shooting technique is to use the inside of the foot.

### 3 Ball tag (ages 14 to 18)



#### Setup

- Players form groups of three; each group plays on a small field (six yards square). Each player has a ball.

#### Sequence

- The two outside players in each group try to hit the middle player's ball with theirs.
- The middle player shields his ball and uses changes of speed and direction to protect it without leaving the field.
- An outside player who hits the middle player's ball becomes the new middle player.
- After eight minutes, which player was middle player the longest?

#### Note

This game (also good for relieving mental stress) requires players to keep the ball extremely close while simultaneously monitoring their opponents.