

HOW TO TEACH SUPPORT

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CAN SUPPORT BE TAUGHT?

The ability to provide support around the ball is one of the deficiencies of the American youth player. Good support requires a 'feel' for the spacing between players as it relates to the distance from the ball and distance from opponents. Support requires awareness of space that is probably partly learned, but mostly innate.

The principle of Support should be given a high priority. We need to address it at every level. The goal of this article is to help our coaches understand the concept, be able to identify good support and bad support and its impact on loss of possession as they watch their team train and play. Once our coaches understand Support, they can try to improve their players' support play and positioning through appropriate activities and instruction.

It's hard to measure how effective teaching support can be since, to a large extent, this skill is innate. Some players are born with the feel for space, some players can be taught, and some will just never learn. But because it is so important for maintaining possession, we need to at least improve the coaches' understanding. If the coaches don't understand Support and its importance, it's unlikely the players will ever learn.

In this session, we attempt to accomplish two objectives: firstly, to identify the key visual cues of support and give these cues buzz words. This will provide coaches a methodical approach, and the tools to identify the breakdowns. It will also facilitate communication among coaches and between coaches and players if everyone is using the same cues and the same buzz words.

The second objective is to get coaches to pay more attention to the relationship between the activity they choose and its effectiveness as a teaching tool for Support. In other words, a coach about to plan a session will ask himself which activity is more effective: 6v2, 5v2, 4v2, or 5v3???. There is no one correct answer, since it depends on the level of the players. But, for a given level of players, there is probably a 'correct' activity.

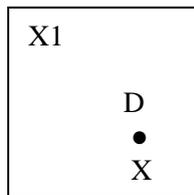
Another question to consider is: Should the activity used to *teach* support be the same activity used to *cement/ingrain* it in the players? For example, a 6v2 activity might prove a good choice to teach the players the concept of support since the 6 attackers can keep the ball long enough to maintain a rhythm and allow players time to think about their positioning. But once they understand the cues, it might prove more effective to switch to a more challenging activity, such as 5v3 or 4v4, which replicates the demands of the game much better.

THE VISUAL CUES

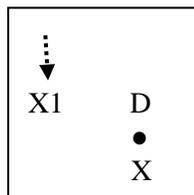
Here, we highlight four visual cues which we feel are the key points of good support. Typically, when possession is lost, it is likely one or more of these key points caused the breakdown (of course, technical deficiencies might be the main cause, but we are not dealing with technique in this session). The four key points are:

1. Read the pressure on the ball (Angle)
2. Read the pressure on oneself (Space)
3. See the field (Open body)
4. Eliminate needless runs that isolate the ball carrier (Runs into shadows)

1. Read the pressure on the ball (Angle)

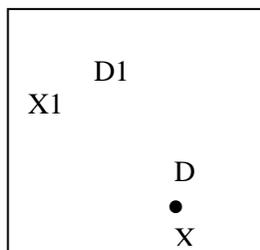


Here a pass to X1 can be easily intercepted by D.

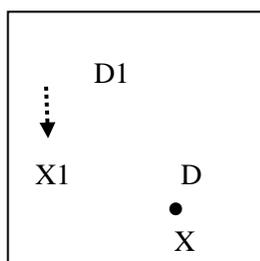


Here, X1 provide a better Angle and a pass to him is easier.

2. Read the pressure on oneself (Space)



Here, although X1 can get a pass, he will be under immediate pressure as soon as he gets the ball.



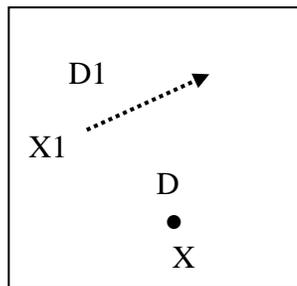
Here, X1 moved away from D1 to give himself more Space so when he gets the ball, he has time on the ball.

3. See the field (Open body)

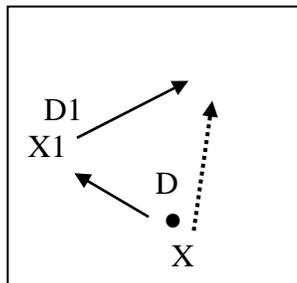
It is important for players to get into the habit of opening their body so they can see the whole field and see as many of their teammates and opponents as possible. This will help them decide what to do with their first touch. To keep the ball or to play it first time.

4. Eliminate needless runs that isolate the ball carrier (Runs into shadows)

Players need to learn to 'run smart not hard'. Players make too many runs across the grid that don't accomplish anything other than energy expenditure and isolating the ball carrier. Often times, it is better to stay put or move towards the ball, not away from it.



Here X1 makes an unnecessary run that takes him behind D and isolates X. In essence, X1 is running into the 'shadow' of D and is not supporting the ball anymore. Also, if he gets the ball he will be under pressure from D1 with his back to the field.



Here X1 stays so that X can do a wall pass to beat defender D. This is a much better decision on the part of the attackers than the choice above (X1 running behind D).

In conclusion, coaches should observe their players supporting positions and runs in practice and games and use the above four visual cues to teach them support. If we do that starting at the younger ages (8U/9U), more players will develop this innate ability to support the ball.