



## ONE on ONE | Evading Pressure

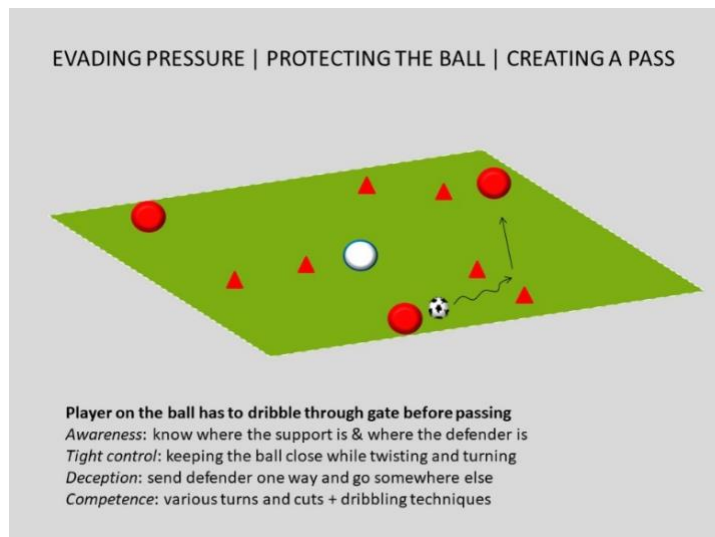
Evading pressure to make a pass | The need for lots of 1 on 1

I still remember the days, a long time ago, playing soccer in the streets of Haarlem in The Netherlands, not bothered by anything, just focused on that magical ball. Sometimes playing alone, experimenting, twisting, turning, dribbling, but of course the highlights were when others joined and we played street soccer games. Two on 2, 3 on 3, 5 on 4, 1 on 1 on 1, it did not really matter, they were real games, competitive, exciting and full of dribbling, experimentation, deception. Nothing around us mattered anymore. Dinner, no time, darkness, keep playing under the street lights. This is missing a bit now, streets are too crowded, too many cars. I do think back to those days very fondly, we loved to dribble and no parent or coach would tell us not to do that. We became very good dribblers.

Five, six years ago, I was in Mexico coaching a Canadian team playing in the ConCaCaf U13 Champions League tournament and what struck me was that the majority of the Central American players were very accomplished dribblers, absolutely lethal in 1 v 1 situations. Already aware of the importance of that, I focused even more on 1 v 1 domination in my daily best practice and I came to grasp even more that if you want to develop good passers, you have to allow them to dribble first and become good dribblers. How often have we seen a young player, I am talking 8-13 years old, the Golden Age of Learning, who tries to pass the ball with a defender right in front of her. Consequently, the ball gets lost, but the young player gets praised for making an attempt to pass.

Pass, pass, pass has become the mantra of coaches coaching at the grassroots level, these all- important years that we, in the past, would spend in the streets and dribble, dribble, dribble. Parents have also jumped on that bandwagon and may call a nine-year old player selfish for wanting to dribble. Now, without getting all moral about this, let's see what this actually does to this young budding soccer player, because I would like to argue that if you are not a good dribbler it will be very difficult to become a very good passer at a high level.

Passing is easy when the lanes are open, there is lots of support around you and the defenders are marking very loosely. The latter will not happen at an accomplished level. Defenses are tight, ball carriers are constantly harassed and team mates have trouble getting unmarked at the right time. Passes often have to be created by twisting, turning, dribbling, changing angles to find a gap and to allow team mates to timely move and provide support. The skillful dribbler has a much better chance to complete her passes. You





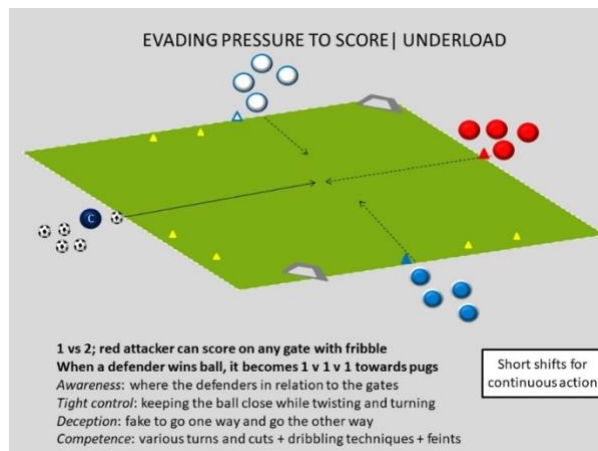
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could argue that dribbling skill is a necessary competence to pass, pass, pass. In this first illustration (above) I show a way to practice evading pressure and creating a pass. It is a skill that needs to be explored and practiced countless times, particularly,

but not exclusively, during the Golden Age of learning. There are multiple other ways to practice this competence and young kids love working on it.

All of us marvel watching an Iniesta or a Frenkie De Jong, skillfully maneuvering the ball, left, right, behind the leg, all the while scanning over the shoulder, ahead and with the “computer” making calculations at warp speed. These are players that do this at the highest possible level, but they are not the only ones that have developed this in themselves.

With a real emphasis on not giving up the ball cheaply, all higher-level teams employ players that are capable of evading pressure. Full-backs, goalkeepers now deceive an create a bit of space pressure. As coaches craft, promote it, it. It will enhance our can dribble away make better passes, are building crucially, enjoy the



pressure and creating a center backs, even often have the skill to opponent, cut or dribble to and get away from the first we need to embrace that practice it, allow it, develop youth games, players that from the first opponent, are able to create overloads, confidence on the ball and, game more.

In this second exercise, game, one attacker has to combat 2 defenders to score by dribbling through one of the three gates. When one of the defenders wins the ball, the game becomes a 1 vs 1 vs 1. For instance, the blue defender wins the ball and tries to score on one of the pugs. She now has to deal with the red attacker that has become a defender, but also with the white defender, who still tries to win the ball and score herself. If the red attacker regains the ball, she again tries to score by dribbling through one of the gates. This is a very dynamic game that has many different elements the players can work on, while following the concept of repetition without repetition. In repetition without repetition (Nikolai Bernstein), players have to continually solve problems in similar but never exactly the same situation. Not only the attacker has to solve problems, but the defenders also solve problems continuously. In the beginning the attackers may not have a lot of success, but as a coach we should be ok with that as the learning will stick more when the players have to struggle to have success. The sweet spot to work towards to is 50-80% success (Make It Stick, Peter Brown et al.) to keep motivation high.

## Bart Choufour | Freedom to Play