

Using Indoor Soccer to Improve Your Outdoor Game: A Guide for Players and Coaches
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Indoor soccer is an avenue for many soccer players to continue playing during the inclement seasons of the year. This version of soccer can be helpful to the development of today's player if used properly by both coaches and players. The goal of this article is to increase awareness for both coaches and players, as to the good habits that can be learned or taught through playing indoor soccer.

Field Player Development

Technical Proficiency on the Ball

Balls used indoor are typically heavier in weight and smaller in diameter than a size 4 or 5 regulation soccer ball (commonly called a "futsal" ball). Playing with a *heavier* ball reduces the amount of time the ball is bouncing. This is positive as the ball remains on the floor and is a natural development tool for players as they are forced to play with the ball at their feet. Playing with a *smaller* ball asks the players to play with less striking surface which requires players to be sharper with each touch or strike. The *heavier* and *smaller* indoor ball spends much time on the playing surface, which equates to more time the ball spends at the players' feet. This is a natural benefit of the indoor game that promotes individual technical development.

Mobility

Because the number of players on the field are smaller numbers (usually 5 players), it is crucial that all players both defend and attack. When a team is in possession of the ball, it is important that all players be encouraged to participate in the attack in some fashion. When a team is defending, it is important that all players be encouraged to participate in the defensive effort. Teaching and encouraging mobility helps players to develop on "both sides of the ball" and helps to eliminate typical player labels that they are only a "defensive or attacking player." This aids in overall player development and helps to encourage player versatility.

Building out of the Back

Because most indoor soccer leagues utilize a "3-line pass" rule (goalkeepers can't throw or kick the ball when restarting play over all three lines [both offside lines and midfield line] this encourages goalkeepers to distribute the ball from their hands to a teammate to maintain possession versus randomly throwing or kicking the ball up field. It will be appropriate at times for the goalkeeper to look up-field to a player in the middle of the field, and at other times it will be appropriate for them to play a simple short ball to a teammate in the defending portion of the field. Playing out of the back also lends itself to attacking mobility as it allows the players in defensive positions to initiate and be involved in the attacking build-up versus kicking it up field for the forwards and midfielders to handle. Teaching and encouraging building out of the back exposes players to various styles of play that vary from the more traditional direct styles common among many of today's youth soccer teams.

Combination play

Specifically the wall pass. In the indoor soccer game, wall passes literally occur. The literal wall pass can be beneficial for players in 1 vs. 1 situations to get behind a defender on their own by in a sense, passing to their self. Players should be taught and should learn that running at defenders and playing a ball with the outside of their foot (properly disguised) off the wall will help them to get behind their defender. For the more advanced player, 3rd player combinations should be taught and learned. A 3rd player combination in the outdoor game would be a sequence of three, one-touch passes, where the ball travels from one player to another and then again to a third player. In the indoor game, this can be taught with two players when one player intentionally plays the ball off the wall for another player to run onto. Understanding combination play in terms of how it relates to movement off the ball is crucial for the development of today's player. Training for this in the indoor game will certainly translate into success in the outdoor game.

1 vs. 1

1 vs. 1 duals are the simplest form of the game of soccer. These situations help improve individual attacking and defending. Because of the nature of the indoor game, and again, the type of ball that is typically used, 1 vs. 1 situations are constantly present. From an attacking standpoint, coaches should encourage players in 1 vs. 1 duals to attempt to get behind defenders on the dribble and when that is not possible, they should be encouraged to keep the ball and to either 1- get out of pressure by dribbling or 2- by holding the ball while under pressure until help from a teammate arrives. Players should not be coached to randomly kick the ball off the wall when they are under pressure! From a defending standpoint, players should be encouraged to be patient in tackling and should not "dive-in." Players should be taught to use the wall to help in defending (forcing one way or another). This situation is relative to the outdoor game as in this case, the wall simulates a teammate/pressure/sideline.

Speed of Play

Because the space is tighter in the indoor game than the outdoor game, players are forced to make quicker technical and tactical decisions. Because the indoor playing surface is "true" and the ball rolls consistently and rapidly, passes arrive to players' feet and into space much faster than on an outdoor surface. This lends toward improvement of individual and team speed of play as the players are forced to make quicker decisions and play faster than they are accustomed to playing. Coaches can help their players with this faster game by teaching them that a "thinking 1st touch" is critical for success in the indoor game. A player's 1st touch should take them where they want to go and away from pressure. By using indoor soccer as a tool to improve player and team speed of play, players become more confident playing quicker and should look to apply this new confidence in playing faster to their game outdoors.

Finishing

Because so many shots on goal are errant and rebound off the goal-line wall, players need to follow each shot to finish rebounds both off the wall, and from the goalkeeper. While the technical aspects of finishing are prevalent in the indoor game, more importantly, the mental aspects of taking and following shots are ever present as well.

Goalkeeper Development

Angle Play

Because the indoor game is fast moving and played in a tighter space, it is important for goalkeepers to “move with the game” by staying “in-line” with the ball. Because the indoor goal is smaller than the outdoor goal, the goalkeeper has less space to cover. With that said, angle play is equally important because if a goalkeeper leaves any portion of the goal exposed, a field player in the indoor game is likely to expose it because field players are so consistently close to the goal and in close shooting range.

Playing high off line

Because so many random balls are played behind defenses, either directly or off the wall, it is important that the goalkeeper not be “glued” to his goal line. When a goalkeeper is stuck on his goal line, he is not able to collect those penetrating balls, which more often than not, lead to a dangerous situation where an opposing attacker gains possession of the ball in the ever dangerous area of the field.

1st Touch Goalkeeping

Because many shots-on-goal in the indoor game are taken at close range, it can sometimes be difficult for goalkeepers to cleanly catch a ball struck with an ample amount of velocity. While it is easy to understand how it is difficult for a goalkeeper to cleanly handle these balls, she must be encouraged and trained not to give up rebounds. A very large percentage of goals in the indoor game result from a ball being finished from a rebound off the goalkeeper. If goalkeepers increase their ability to catch and hold well struck balls from a close distance indoor, this will certainly equate into improvement of their shot stopping and ball handling ability in the outdoor game.

The Goalkeeper as a Field Player and an active participant in maintaining possession

Indoor teams, who use their goalkeeper as an active participant in the attack, are fully utilizing their available resources. Goalkeepers need to be proficient with the ball at their feet and teams need to become more confident with playing the ball to their goalkeeper’s feet to maintain possession and relieve pressure. When teams utilize their goalkeeper as a member of the team by passing the ball back to them, they are maximizing the benefits of the players on the field and are playing a key role in helping to develop the goalkeeper’s development with the ball at their foot. If the goalkeeper can develop successfully with the ball at their feet in the tight-spaced indoor game, this will surely translate into success in the outdoor game where there is more available playing space.

Indoor soccer is a valuable compliment to outdoor soccer if used properly. Players who resort to randomly kicking the ball off the wall when under pressure are wasting this important opportunity to develop their skills while playing indoor soccer. Coaches should understand that their influence is very important to how the players will use indoor soccer. If coaches stress and teach the value in indoor soccer to their players in terms of their development, there is no question that the players will benefit. Coaches, who stress winning, indirectly discourage players from experimenting with new things and pressure them into random, direct style of play. *Let’s work together to utilize indoor soccer as the valuable player development tool that it can be!*

