



# Four-goal games

Improving U12 players' tactical application of technique by **Dave Schumacher**,  
WSYSA Director of Coaching and U.S. Soccer National Staff Coach

Most players' greatest deficiency is in maintaining possession of the ball under the pressures of the game. This becomes problematic in developing attacking play in this age group. For example, the first touch may let players down as a direct result of their tactical awareness of the pressure from opponents. This is evident every time you see young players turn the ball toward an opponent or dribble into pressure. Their urge to go forward impacts their decision-making. Four-goal games, combined with guided discovery by the coach, are a great tool for improving players' tactical behavior and technical skills.



Paying attention to details is very important when working with youth players.

AXEL HEIMKEN

Getting players to change their natural tendency to play directly and rush forward takes time, just as developing the ability to maintain possession as an individual or group takes time. The coach must create realistic simulations of the game in training in order for players to begin grasping the concepts involved. One of these concepts is learning how to change the point of attack.

The focus at this age is how, when and where to use technique. Ages nine to 12 are considered the "golden age of learning." There is a tremendous opportunity to ingrain positive technical and tactical habits during this period. It all begins with basic decisions involving the ball.

In the following session we use several four-goal games for most of the time and focus on changing the conditions of the game. That way players are playing most of the time rather than standing around in drills.

This type of session is perfect for guided discovery, a coaching tool that uses questions to guide players to uncover answers on their own. For example:

- Exercises 1 and 2: Ask players what they see when they take the time to look. Explore with them some of the tactical pictures they see.

- Exercise 3: Ask players what they see when they take the time to look. Ask them what impact the centerline has on their decisions. What kind of space or options do they begin to see?
- Exercise 4: Ask players what they see now that they are in a full game. Explore with them some of the tactical pictures they see. How will changing the point of attack help them in this game?

Don't be afraid of this approach. The game really is the best teacher.

## Four-goal games

- Four-goal games are perfect for adding players as they arrive at training.
- Four-goal games are dynamic and fun.
- The main goal of these games is to create awareness and get players' heads up.
- The group is broken up into 1 v. 1s, 2 v. 2s, 2 v. 1s and 3 v. 2s.
- Players are forced to have "eyes in the backs of their heads."
- Be careful not to overcoach and interrupt the flow of the game. Try to strike a balance between coaching points presented during the flow of the game, during natural stoppages and to individuals.

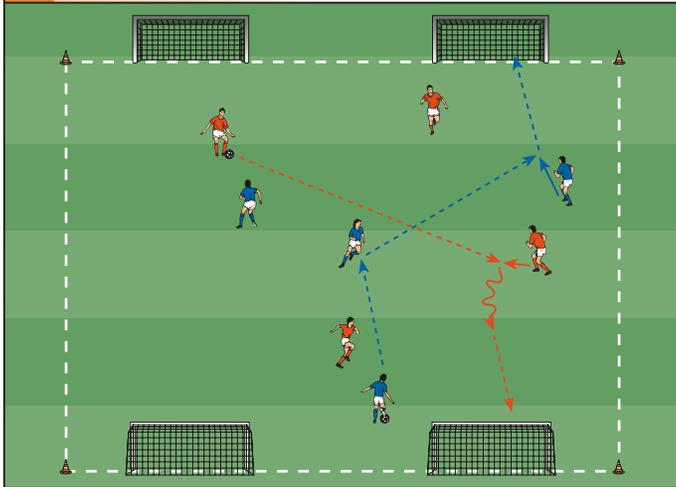
## Coaching points: Games 1 to 3

- passing and receiving technique
- marking technique
- open body position
- good first touches
- early recognition of passing options
- early decision on passing options
- basic tactical shapes
- passing in the direction you're facing (avoid turning toward opponents)



## FOUR-GOAL GAMES

### 1 Four-goal game with a twist (two balls)



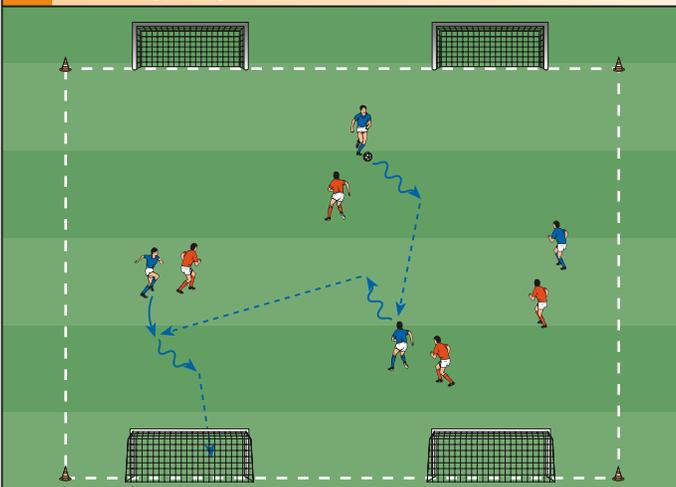
#### Setup

- Mark out a 30 x 35-yard field.
- Set up two goals on each endline.
- Divide players into two teams of four to six.

#### Sequence

- Teams play 4 v. 4 to 6 v. 6 on four goals.
- Two balls are in play at all times.

### 2 Four-goal game with three touches



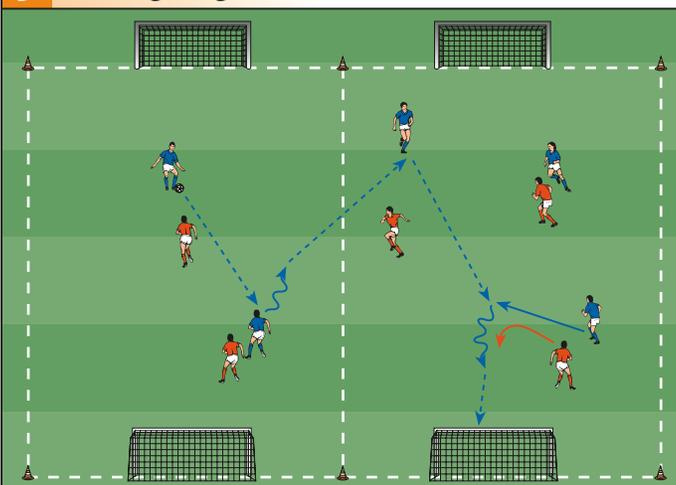
#### Setup

- Mark out a 30 x 35-yard field.
- Set up two goals on each endline.
- Divide players into two teams of four to six.

#### Sequence

- Teams play 4 v. 4 to 6 v. 6 on four goals.
- Players must play with three touches.

### 3 Four-goal game in divided area



#### Setup

- Mark out a 35 x 45-yard field.
- Divide the field into two halves.
- Set up two goals on each endline.
- Divide players into two teams of five to seven.

#### Sequence

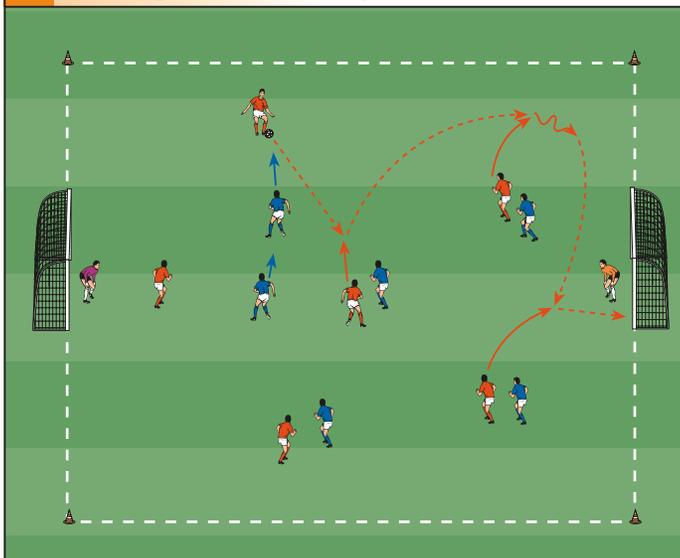
- Teams play 5 v. 5 to 7 v. 7 on four goals.
- Attackers must play ball into other half to score.

#### Variations

- Increase field size to stretch play out from side to side.
- Add a neutral player who helps the attacking team maintain possession of the ball.

## FOUR-GOAL GAMES

### 4 Final game: 7 v. 7 to goal



#### Setup

- Field is a half (60 x 55 yards).
- Set up one standard goal on each endline.
- Divide players into two teams of seven.

#### Sequence

- Teams play 7 v. 7.

#### Coaching points:

- applying techniques to the game
- giving support and creating passing options for the player who has the ball
- group shape (use whole width of field)
- good first touches
- passing in the direction you're facing (avoid turning toward opponents)



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