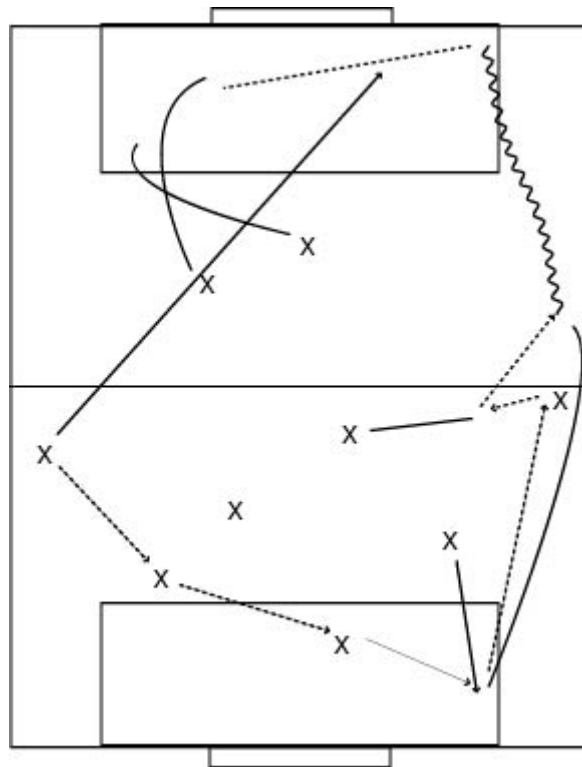


Shadow Play Training

Shadow training is one of the greatest tools available to a coach. Unfortunately, I don't think many coaches or players understand the tremendous value in doing this and therefore lose out on one of the easiest ways to teach shape and balance and movement. Also, too many players don't understand the purpose of shadow training and therefore don't get the full benefit of it when it's used at a training session.

The way shadow training works is to put 11 players on the field in positions, and have them move the ball (and themselves) without any opposition to start with. In other words, they are competing against their shadows. The reason for doing this is it allows the coach and players to see where all movement should go based on everyone's movement off the ball. For example, if you want to work on switching the ball around the back you would have the players in position and it's an easy way to see that the support is going to be behind square at all times and that the central midfielders are constantly supporting in triangles. Even if a coach talks about this type of movement off the ball, until the players actually see it and do it, they won't really understand how this is done. By utilizing shadow training, they can all see the movement as well as participate in the movement without regard for worrying about whether it will be successful at first since without opposition, it should almost always be successful.

If, during your preseason, you are trying to put in a whole system of play that involves switching the ball around the back, overlapping runs and near post/far post runs, they can all be tied together in a shadow training session by having the ball start with an outside midfielder, she plays the ball back to a marking back who proceeds to switch the ball around the back to the other marking back who plays it up to the outside mid and then overlaps around her. The ball can be played to an inside mid who then finds the overlapping runner and then the ball is taken down to the end line and served to the near post/far post/12 yard runners. (see diagram below to see this movement).



By doing this pattern repeatedly without opposition, the players will be able to see all of the movements and see what is expected of them.

The next step is to add 4-5 opponents against the 11 players (I actually do shadow work 11 v 1 with the one always being a keeper so that we always end up with a shot). This way, the 11 should still experience success but they have to pick up the pace. Once this is being done correctly, go to 11 v 7 and then finally end up with 11 v 11 and see if they can keep the patterns going against real opposition.

I use shadow training more than most coaches because I feel that there are so many benefits to it with very little negatives. One negative is that it's easy for a coach to lose a team's interest if there is too much talking going on during the shadow work. It's not unusual for a coach to freeze a team during a pattern to make a point but do this sparingly and get right back into the pattern so you don't lose the interest. The other negative is that it's hard to get the intensity up during the shadow work so it's vital for the coach to be very high energy in order for the players to realize the importance of the shadow work.

If you are not currently using shadow training in your practices, I strongly encourage you to do so. Give it a try and let me know what you think.