

Elements and the Teaching of Creative and Deceptive Play

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What is creativity in players? Is it just beating another player in a 1v1 situation? When we think about the creative player we might think of stars Ronaldo, Ronoldinho, Kaka, Totti, Reyna, Maradona, Hamm, Zidane, Marta, Preki, or Ortega to name a few. What makes them creative and ultimately feared and celebrated?

To find the answer, let's think first about the idea of creativity in soccer players. The idea of creativity in the game is demonstrated through the players and their ability to solve new and old problems presented by the game. Creative players share the trait of having a positive and driven response to successes and failures in practice and games. Creative players are internally driven to create or build solutions to overcome the challenges.

For coaches teaching the creative player, the first part of the effort is to help refine their technical skills and all aspects of those skills. Over time, creative players work hard to refine their technical skills as they increasingly adapt to the challenges in the game and achieve goals.

The second part of helping players build solutions is the development of a set of tactical and psychological tools that allow the player to become more strategic and more unpredictable in their approach to solving problems. Unpredictability is at the heart of creative players and play.

Creative players are internally driven to solve problems, over the course of seasons, years and careers. As they refine their technical skills and discover many ways to solve problems, they develop into fully adaptable and ultimately, creatively unpredictable players.

Technical Elements of a Creative Player

- Use of the outside of the foot
- Use of both feet
- Ability to purposefully bend passes and shots
- Quick turning
- Measured touches in receiving and dribbling, that is touching the ball with the right weight so that the player can get to it before the defender
- Control when the ball in the air
- Use of all surfaces of body minus arms and hands

Tactical and Psychological Elements of the Creative Player

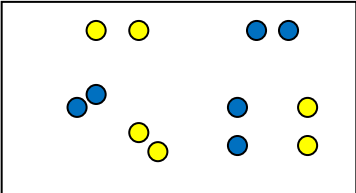
- Individual deception without the ball, body feints
- Individual deception with the ball, ball and body fakes
- Ability to bend passes around defenders when there is no angle to play directly
- Ability to bend runs and to check away to open space for oneself
- Ability to use him/herself or others as decoy to open space for other teammates
- Ability to view the space both on and off the ground as viable space to use
- Ability to assess many options quickly
- Ability to combine with others in an advanced way
- Ability to think ahead and plan in advance in a strategic sense
- Field awareness

Although improvement of technical elements indeed in need of focus, this article completes with a base of activities for developing coaches to improve soccer creativity. These aspects should generally be taught with general and advanced technical skills.

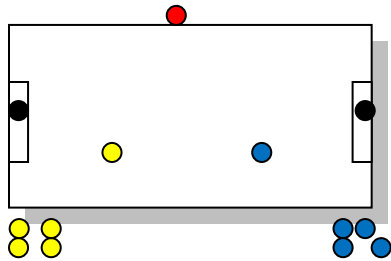
Base Set of Activities for Improved Teaching of the Creative Player and Creative Play

As a preface, presenting these ideas in different ways stimulates the creative side of players and keeps the sessions fresh and exciting for both coaches and players. Internalization of these ideas require a long term approach and attitude, so be patient and assist the players in filling out all of the elements of their game. All activities below can be mixed and matched to create practice sessions as long as they are progressional and appropriate to the ability level of the players.

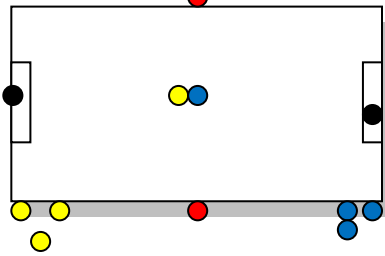
The first activity is completed without a ball and is considered a warm-up. It helps players begin to think about unpredictability, thinking ahead.

Running in 1's	In 1's - Open but confined area, slow, runner can perform different types of soccer running for warm up, ask for changing directions, then changing speed on cut		-Practice body fakes with hips, shoulders, head, different bodies work differently
Running in 2's	In 2's - Follow the leader, second player behind the first, leader does as above, many and rhythmic role changes on command from coach, saying "New Leader" as command and players switch roles		-Players should experiment with single and double body fakes
Running in 3's	In 3's - Same as above, three players in a line, one generally behind the other, lots of leader rotations from command of coach		-Regular changes in leader creates rhythm and sync of following players

The second activity is the 1v1, allowing either player to score in either goal. The activity below includes goalkeepers but at U6 and U8 no goalkeepers would be used. This is a coaching standard concept, multiple goal games, and gives players choices of goals to attack. This type of activity is a beginning point for expressing creative unpredictability. The game teaches players how to use the unexpected to open them up to score and have fun in the game. After a while even young players will begin to pretend to go to one goal and then turn and score in the other goal. This basic idea is termed Times 2 (X2) Thinking, that is pretending to do one thing and then doing another as a strategic plan. X3 Thinking is pretending to do two things before doing what one would like to do.

<p>1v1's with Server and Goalkeepers</p> <p>● ● ● ●</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Play starts with Server playing the ball into the middle of the field -One player from each team enters field and tries to win the ball -Either player can score on either goal -GK in midsized goals, restricted to feet only and must stay on line (allows for calm finishing for attackers) -When GK possesses ball, GK plays to the player who didn't touch it last -Two new players and new service when ball is scored or out of play 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Encourage players to use single body feints prior to receiving the ball -Looking for players to change direction and attack the opposite goal -Creative players will like to "toy" with the defender and begin to fake at one goal and attack the other -Encourage creativity, X2 and X3 Thinking and Action
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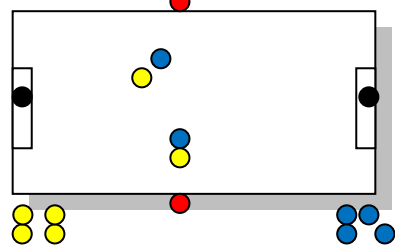
The third activity focuses on players receiving the ball who are being marked by a defender. Attackers must initially try to get separation from a marking defender to receive the ball. This activity helps to teach players how to move without the ball to open space and the use of body feints to get oneself open. This concept should be taught at the same point or just prior to teaching 1v1 deceptive fakes with the ball. Adding a ball makes it more complex. This fundamental idea translates through the most simple to the most advanced moments in the game.

<p>1v1's with Servers and Goalkeepers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -1v1 start in middle of the field shoulder to shoulder - Server designates one player/team the attacker -Players only attack one goal and defends the other -Attacker must move to get separation from defender to receive ball -GK in mid-sized goals, keeper use feet only, restricted to end line to promote calm finishing from attackers -When defender wins ball, it is played to a server to restart them as the attackers -Restart by server with a new set of players when ball goes in goal or out of play 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Attacker on the balls of the feet for sharp movements -Create separation with defender through movement and deception -X2 and X3 Thinking and Action, single and double body fakes -Use of arm ok for small, low push off, should never extend fully or be high, keep the arm bent, low, & firm -Make your move if defender looks away from you - Body/head/shoulder fakes can be done at any angle to off balance defender
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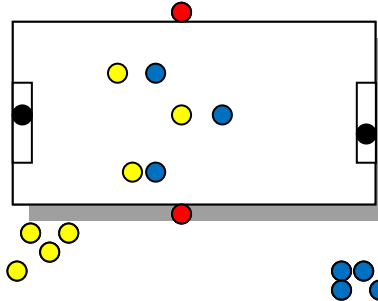
The fourth activity begins to bring about player coordination in two's. Play starts and always restarts with the movement of the attacking players on the field through the use of a decoy run. One of the attackers initiates play by making a decoy run and the second player fills the space that has opened as the decoy runner moves through. The server is only allowed to play into the second player.

Both attacking players are encouraged to use body fakes to initiate or change their runs as the defenders try to predict where they can win possession of the ball. This type of activity helps players better understand the effectiveness and intelligence of making runs without always expecting to receive the ball. As players grow, this simple concept leads to a better understanding of the real meaning of teamwork and self sacrifice in the game. The idea also helps players begin to value a style of play that is increasingly patient, clever and movement oriented.

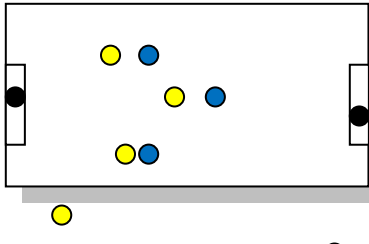
Also importantly in this game, when the GK receives ball, he/she puts it back into play only after a decoy run is made. This condition of the game changes the angle of service from the side only to from both side and from behind. This service will resemble and can serve as the beginning point of teaching coordination between two forwards or central midfielders. This aspect also aids in the decision making of distribution of the GK.

<p>2v2's with Servers and Goalkeepers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Same structure as above -Man to man defending -Score only on one goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Play starts when both pairs, one from each team, are shoulder to shoulder in middle of the field -Introduction of the "decoy run" to initiate play, player closest to the ball generally is the decoy runner -Server may only play into the second player. The first player is the decoy run, decoy run can be initiated with single or double feints - Second player fills space cleared by first to receive ball -When GK receives ball in hands or feet, the top two players begin decoy run sequence, GK may only play to second player 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single and double feints (X2 and X3 Thinking) to initiate decoy run -Creative players will scheme and plan ahead of time how the first run will look to open up the second player -Players begin to learn the value of making a run without the expectation of always getting the ball, promotes the team and self sacrifice concept -The team of 2 players is the starting point to creating a flowing, creative offensive group
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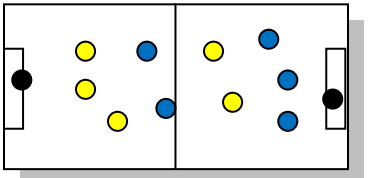
The fifth activity is generally the same but goes one step further with three players on the field. This activity is more advanced and is for the advanced players after they have established a solid understanding and performance ability of the previous idea and activity. In each restart from the server the decoy runner makes the decoy run. The remaining two players must coordinate to fill the space left open. The activity teaches the idea of single and double decoy runs. The two trailing players must decide who moves in first and then second. This idea is the beginning of teaching your team to attack in waves and into open spaces, instead of too many going forward clogging the dribbling and passing lanes.

<p>3v3's with Servers and GK</p> <p>-Same structure as above</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Play starts when three pairs, one from each team, organizes in the middle of the field - Server can only play into the second or now third player into the play -The first decoy run generally comes from the player who is closest to the ball -When GK receives ball in hands or feet, the top two players begin decoy run sequence, GK plays to second or third player 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Smart defenders begin to shut down second runner, now third player can exploit spaces opened by decoy runner & second player into the play, timing of runs, patience and deceptive running -Rhythm, flow, and team orientation can now be established in the group of 3
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The sixth activity is 3v3 Knockout. The game is started as a 3v3 with GK's. After a goal is scored the team who is scored upon loses a player. The object is to score three goals and eliminate all the opposition's players. The game presents clear disadvantages for the team who has fewer players. The team with the less players must now create or build solutions even when things aren't fair in terms of numbers. Creative players will be constantly trying new solutions even though many of them will not work. Creative players will not give up and even relish the opportunity to go against teams with more numbers. When players do solve the problem and overcome clear disadvantages, confidence to continue to try in the face of adversity always is reinforced.

<h3>3v3's Knockout with GK</h3>	<p>3v3 with ball starting at GK</p> <p>When Team A scores, Team B loses a player and the game is played 3vs2. If Team B scores next, Team B gets a player back to make it 3v3 again. If Team B scores next, Team A loses a player, 2vs3. If Team B scored again, Team A loses a second player making it 1vs3. If Team B scores again, Team A would have lost all three players and lost the match.</p> <p>Free substitution at any time</p>		<p>Numbers down; Increases in dribbling and shots from outside</p> <p>Numbers up; More effort to commit defenders High pace of pass</p> <p>High pressure defending when team is numbers up</p> <p>Low pressure defending when numbers down</p>
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The seventh activity is for the older youth player and continues to reinforce the familiar thread of the decoy runner on all restarts and when GK has the ball. The requirement of the decoy run required on all restarts and GK possession over time will begin to influence the overall speed of play upon transition and during regular play. The game also employs penetration of a defender if the front two are heavily marked. Penetrating player should run into open spaces cleared by top two players.

<h3>6v6 including GK</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teams shape is a 3-2, man to man defending -All restarts must begin with a decoy run to begin team rotation, kick ins or throw ins. -When GK has ball in hand may not serve to player making initial decoy run, must play into second or third players 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Encourage players not to stop but to slow down and time their running (deception, angle and pace) just ahead of the open opportunity to serve ball
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The final activity is a small sided game (no graphic), any number will work, 1v1-11v11, 6v6 is a great number. The only condition of the game is that the winner is determined by the team who scored the best goal, not the most goals. To determine the best goal, each team at the end of play nominates their top goal to the coach for a final decision on winner.

Multiple, relatively short games work best so that all players have many chances avoiding anyone being disappointed with the coaches decision on the winning team. This type of game fully opens the door for creative players to think and grow. The game releases the fear of getting scored upon by not counting goals against. It's focus steers all players participating to become strategic thinkers not to mention the stimulate their confidence in trying new things.

The "Best Goal Wins" game is the best replication available for the street game played in many internationally successful countries. As most of the street games are pickup games with new players coming and going and lack of a final winner, the winner is the team that was the best creators and performers. The result is an activity that is remembered by what happened new and great instead of placing value on a multitude of bad goals. How we reinforce the players has a direct effect on what they value.