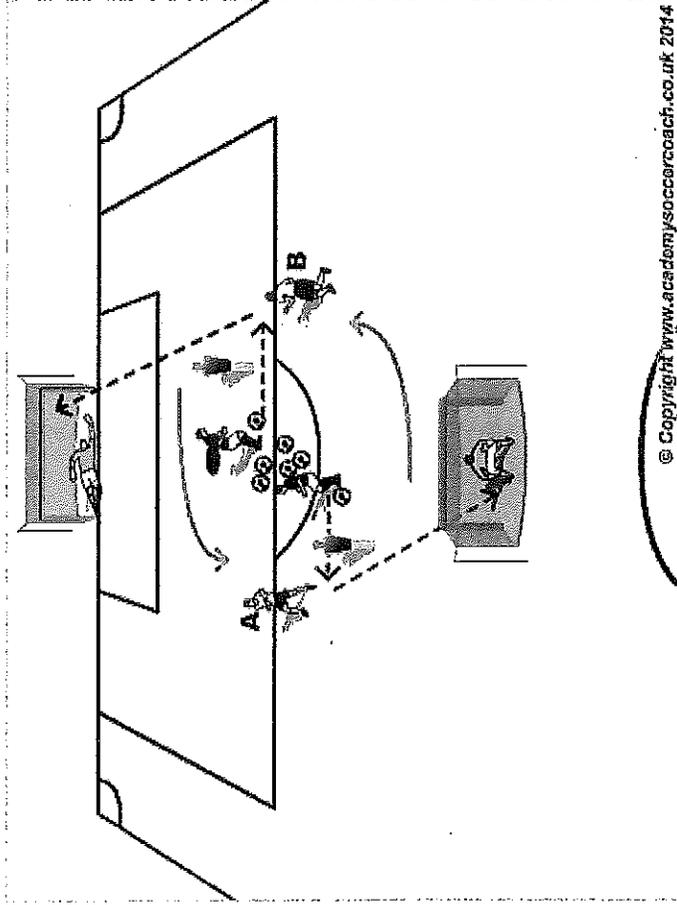


Exercise One

Finishing is all about habits. The very best in the business act instinctually and without any hesitation when a goal scoring chance appears. The moment a forward pauses to think or take an extra touch, the defender can recover and the opportunity disappears. This exercise works as a quick-fire finishing exercise, which can be easily adapted to challenge players in different ways. It can also work on speed, agility and can be physically demanding when performed at a high intensity. The set-up involves two goals approximately 30 yards apart, two forwards, two servers, two mannequins, and a good supply of balls. On the coach's signal both forwards start at the same time towards different goals. They both receive a ball from their respective server, let it come across the mannequin, and then shoot first time into the goal. Immediately following the shot, Player A and Player B rotate positions and as soon as they arrive, the servers play the next balls. The exercise continues at high intensity for two minutes.



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Coaching Points

- Even though it is a high-pace exercise with lots of shooting and sprinting, technique is very important, especially as players get tired. You can gauge this by how many consecutive times they miss the target.
- Forwards who can develop rhythm in an exercise like this typically do well. In essence, you are performing the same skill over and over again but have pressure and fatigue to fight. Successful routines are the best way to overcome both.
- Encourage your forwards to make the keeper work. Pick out a corner.

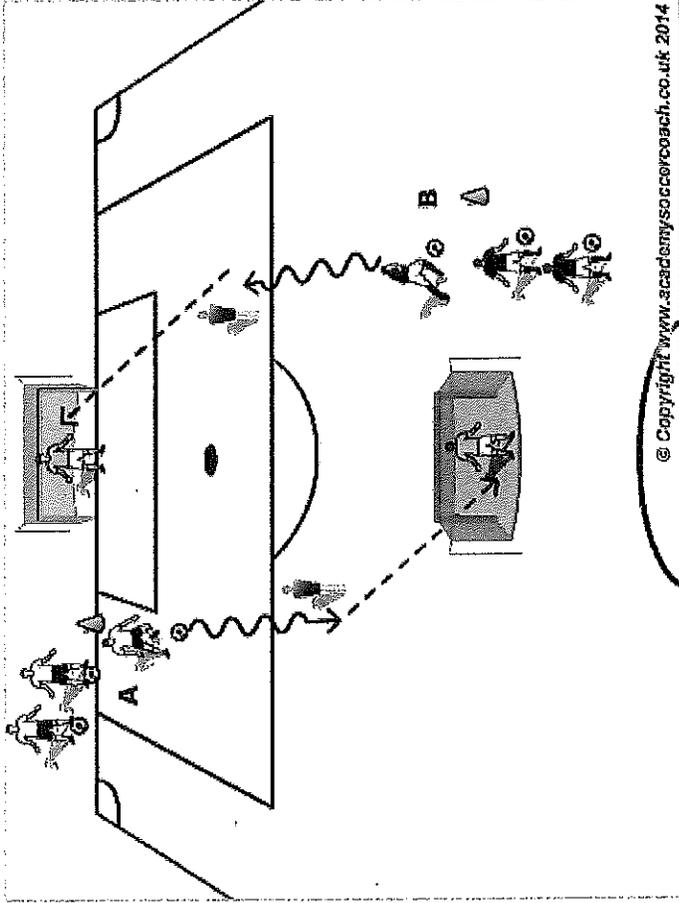
Progressions

- After each set, change mannequins and challenge the players to work on their left feet.
- By changing the position of the server, you change the angle of the shot. Keep changing it up to challenge the forwards.
- Move the goals closer together and change the service to half-volleys, volleys, and headers.
- Create a competition between the two forwards and get them to count their goals. Offer a point for rebounds too as this rewards good habits

Exercise Two

The higher the level, the more infrequent shooting opportunities can become. Elite players only have a split second to set the ball then shoot. To overcome this challenge, players must have the ability to create their shot and, when an opportunity does arrive, produce a quality shot at high speed. This exercise works on developing those key habits at the edge of the penalty area. It takes place in the final third with two goals thirty yards apart. You will need at least six players, two goalkeepers, two mannequins, and a supply of balls. There are three sets and each set is for three minutes.

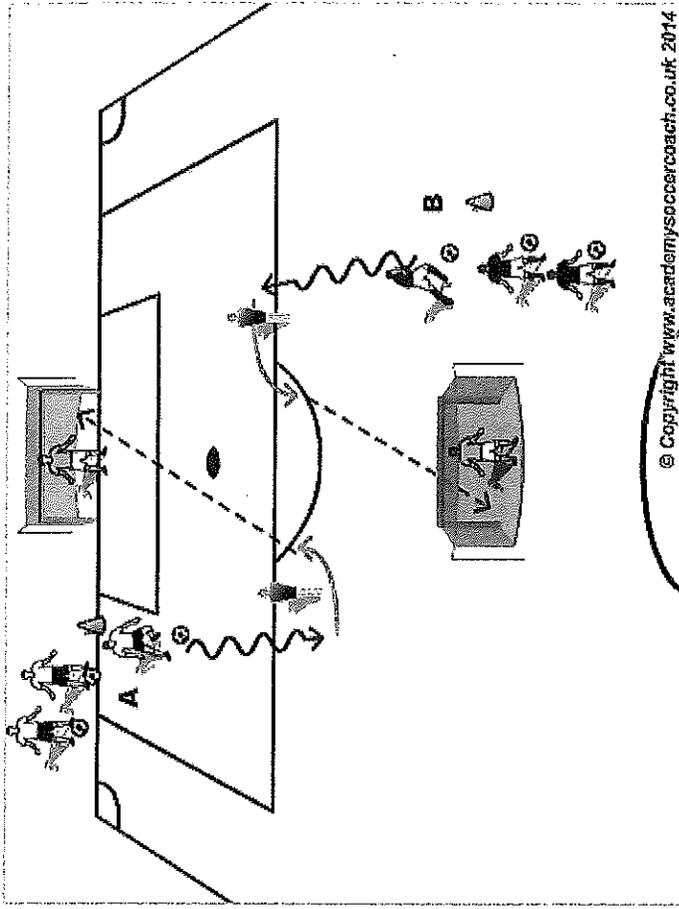
Set One



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At the same time, players A and B both dribble towards the mannequins straight ahead. When they approach the mannequin, they perform a move of their choice, then drive past the mannequin and shoot on goal. Following the shot, they retrieve their ball and join the other line.

Set Two



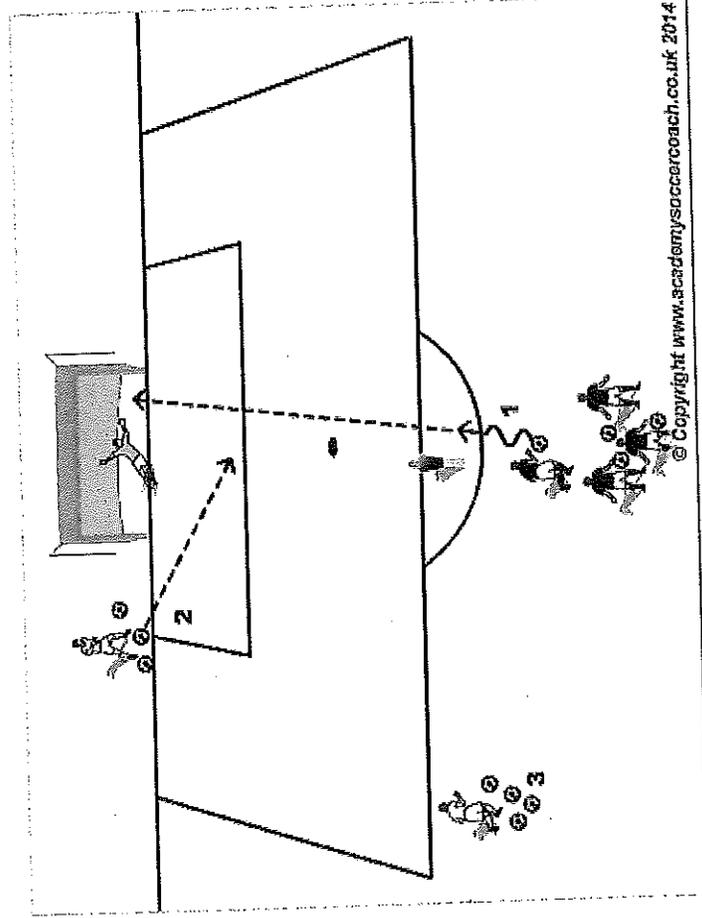
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Similar to the first set except this time both players dribble on the right side of the mannequin, then turn and shoot on the goal from the side where they began. After the shot, they retrieve the ball and start at the same line again.

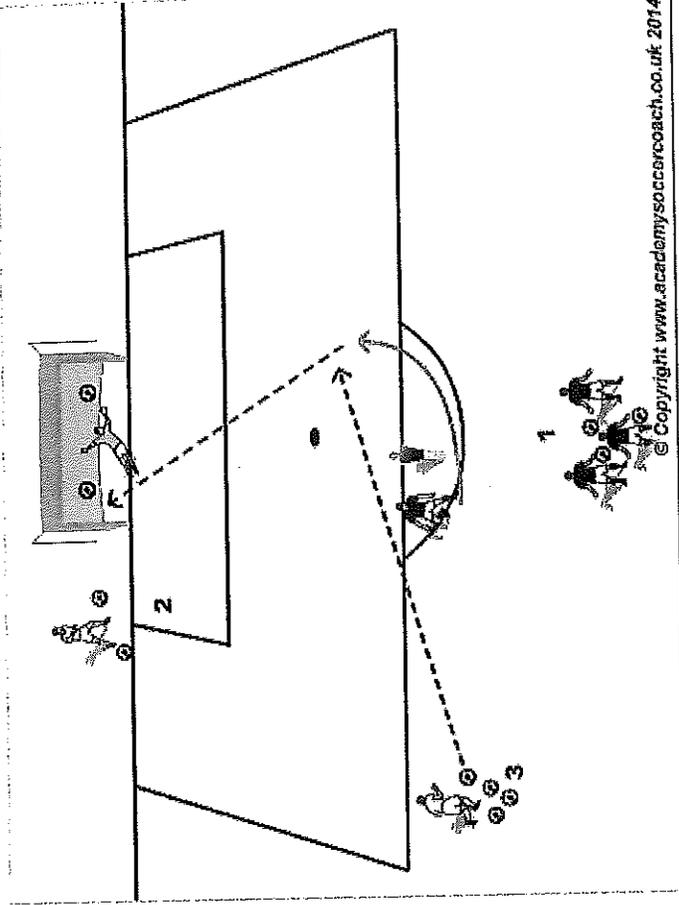
- Place a time restriction on the whole exercise. Now the forward has to get two attempts on goal, along with the sprinting, inside 20 seconds or less.

Exercise Five

When I was a player at Wingate University, we always finished the last session of the week with a game called "Power Finesse". It was fun and an exercise which tested you from both long and short range within a matter of seconds. This is a slight variation of it but with the same focus on different types of finishes at lightning speed. The exercise takes place just outside the 18-yard box with a goal, supply of balls at three stations, two servers, a goalkeeper, and a mannequin. Each player will have three types of finishes to complete in one set.



One player (in the black shirt) works at a time and starts with a ball. On the coach's signal, they must drive at the mannequin, perform a move or drop the shoulder, and shoot on goal. As soon as the forward shoots on goal, they must sprint to the goal and the server on the by-line delivers a ball for them to finish from close range.



Immediately following the close finish, the player must then recover back to an onside position, at the right side of the mannequin, where the server on top of the 18-yard box will play a diagonal pass for the forward to take one touch, then finish on goal. After the third finish, the forward must recover back to the starting spot while the next player begins the exercise again.

Coaching Points

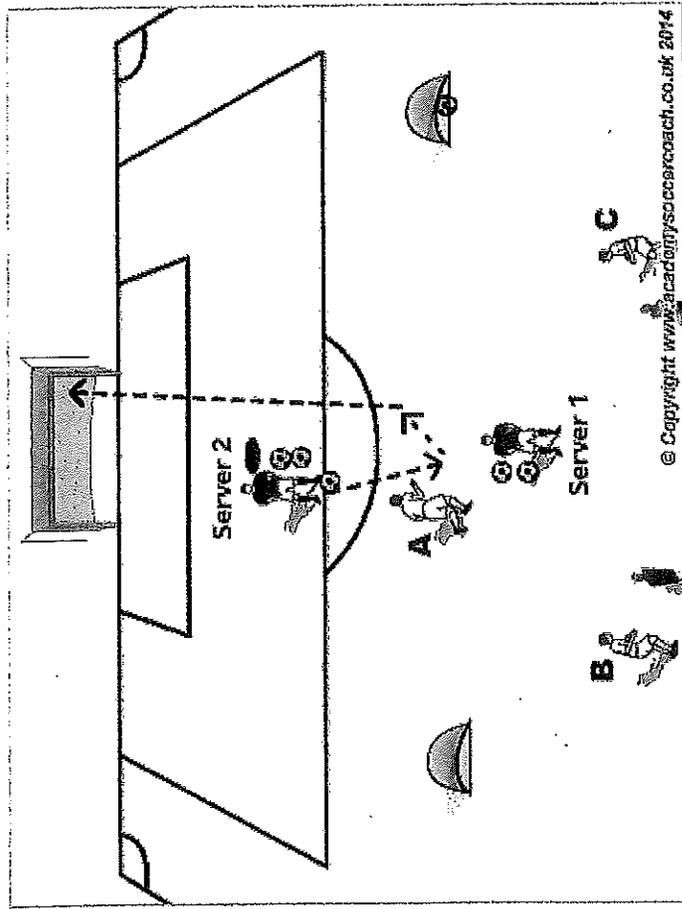
- Three different types of finishes not only have different technical demands, but also mental ones too. This is where decision-making comes in. For example, power is required for the initial shot, but not for the next two finishes.
- Movement is important for the second and third attempts and must be dynamic and performed at the player's maximum effort.
- Encourage the servers to play fast, difficult passes, into the forwards. You will be doing them no favors if they are continually finishing from six yards with soft passes.
- Angles are also important for the second and third attempts. Getting too straight or too wide will leave a difficult finish for the forward regardless of the type of pass.

Three midfielders are involved in the exercise along with two servers. Player A starts off as the attacking midfielder, while Players B and C act as central midfielders that A can combine with.

Part One

1. Play begins from Server 1, who plays a pass at speed, into Player A
2. Player A lays the ball off to either Player B or C (C in the example below)
3. Player C plays a quick return to A on the other side of the mannequin. Player A receives the pass and passes into one of the mini-goals.

Part Two



After passing into the mini-goals, Player A sprints towards Server 2 on top of the 18-yard box. When Player A is approximately five yards away, Server 2 passes the ball for him/her to take one touch to set at an angle, and the second touch to shoot on goal.

Immediately following the shot, Player A makes a recovery run back to either Player B or C and they rotate positions. The exercise continues until each player has performed 5 sets.

Coaching Points

- Technical execution of combination play in central area
- Quality of the final pass into mini-goal
- After the pass from Server 2, the attacking midfielder's 'set' should be close enough to keep control of the ball but far enough to get away from a defender.

Progressions

- Add a time restriction to the exercise and challenge the attacking midfielder to complete part one and two, along with the recovery run, inside twenty seconds (you can increase or decrease this depending on the skill levels of the players)
- Challenge the attacking midfielder to disguise the first pass into the mini-goal, and instead open up and play the other way
- Create a competition between all three midfielders -- by keeping a score of successful passes and shots on goal. You can also add a goalkeeper.

Conclusion

I believe that the next ten years will be a critical time for the attacking midfielder position. There is no doubt that coaches are to blame for changing the role from that of a pure artist to more of a functional worker with specified outcomes. Increased pressure to win games along with a more intense tactical focus has driven us to contaminate this position. We are asking more from our attacking midfielders, and it seems more perspiration and less inspiration. It is odd that even coaches at the highest level today celebrate attacking midfielders who can track runs and possess an incredible work ethic but that is the reality of where the game is going. Now that we have modified and almost enlarged the position, the next challenge for coaches is surely to help develop players who can excel in it. Countries like England and the United States have traditionally struggled to develop world-class attacking midfielders but this surely has to change. My prediction is that nations who cannot develop them at youth level will