



# The tactics of dribbling

Active, directed, purposeful dribbling with fakes by **Steve Hoffman**,  
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**Talented youth players are first and foremost good dribblers. Players who can move the ball at high speeds and fake their way past multiple opponents stand out; their ability sets them apart from the rest. Very young players naturally love to dribble, so this age is excellent for learning. As long as coaches let young kids dribble, future spectators will always have new Ronaldinhos and Messis to admire.**

When we talk about dribbling, we distinguish between two types: close dribbling to maintain possession of the ball, and speed dribbling to cover space and get past opponents (which includes fakes). To be successful dribblers, players have to be versatile dribblers. Versatile dribbling includes:

- variations in dribbling technique (using the inside/outside of the foot, the sole and the instep)
- variations in dribbling speed (suddenly switching between slow and fast dribbling)
- variations in the direction of dribbling (dribbling with both feet in any direction, cutting the ball with the sole, inside or outside of the foot)

To become more versatile dribblers, players need to focus on the following technical/tactical aspects:

- active dribbling
- directed dribbling
- purposeful dribbling
- dribbling with fakes

## Active dribbling

It's harder for opponents to attack the ball if it's constantly in motion. When dribbling for possession, players must repeatedly cut the ball away from opponents, using the foot farther away from the opponent and shielding the ball by putting their bodies between it and their opponents. When dribbling for speed, they must keep the ball moving for-

ward at all times, maintaining a high speed but also using changes of speed to fool their opponents. Never come to a full stop, and use the outside of the foot to dribble past opponents.

## Directed dribbling

The object of dribbling is to get past your opponents. To accomplish this, approach opponents at a slight angle, drawing them to one side. With this type of diagonal dribbling, accompanied by fakes, you can cause opponents to shift their weight onto one foot; then you dribble past them on the other side. Usually the opponent will turn away from the ball momentarily, allowing you to dribble past them on the other side a second time (this is called "turning" your opponent).

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## Purposeful dribbling

Dribbling is not an end in itself. The dribbler must not lose the ball, and the dribbling run must always lead to a follow-up play. This may be a pass to a teammate, a shot or a cross. The dribbler must recognize the appropriate moment for the pass and avoid unnecessary risks in tight spaces.

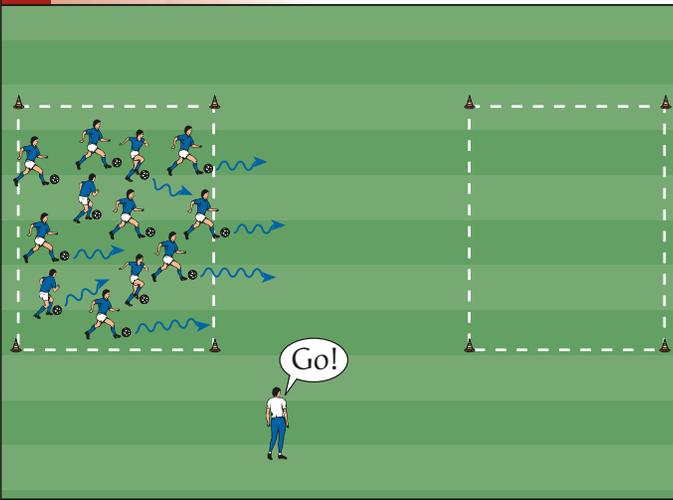
## Dribbling with fakes

Fakes include body fakes/fake steps, shooting/passing fakes, turning fakes, looking fakes and speed fakes. It's fakes that make dribbling truly effective, because fakes are what enable dribblers to get past opponents. Always fake while running/moving, never while standing still. After the fake, speed up to take advantage of the head start you have on your opponent. And always have an alternative ready (e.g. single/double step-over) in case your opponent doesn't fall for the first fake.



# DRIBBLING

## 1 Warm-up



### Setup

- Mark out two 10 x 10-yard grids 15 yards apart.
- Players assemble in one grid; each one has a ball.

### Sequence

- Players dribble using all surfaces of the foot, with foot fakes and body fakes.
- On command, players sprint with the ball to the other grid.

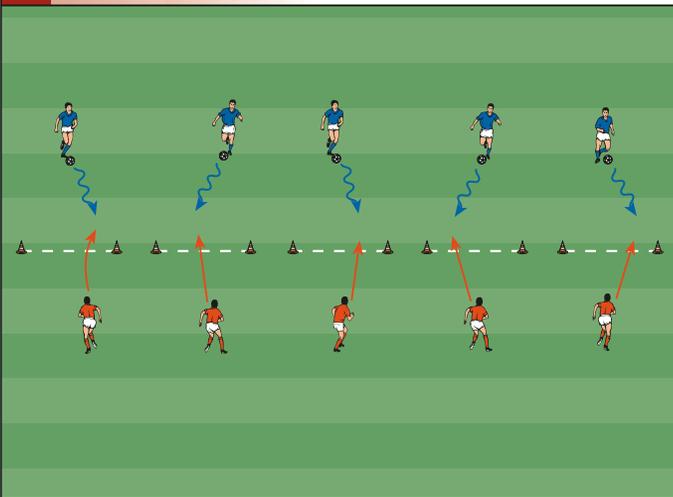
### Variations

- On command, players change direction/pace for at least 10 seconds.
- Players dribble in both grids and switch on command without colliding.

### Coaching points

- Teach players the difference between close dribbling (to maintain possession) and speed dribbling (to cover space).
- Work on changing pace and direction, cutting the ball and using fakes.

## 2 Maintaining possession



### Setup

- Using cones, mark out several three-yard-wide goals.
- One attacker (with ball) and one defender stand at each goal.

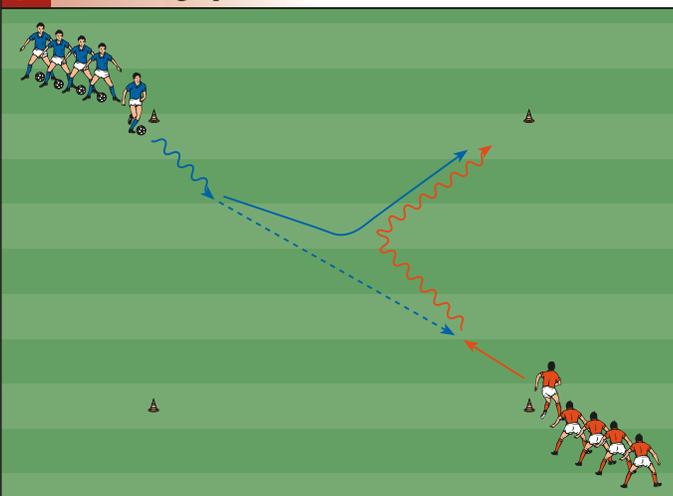
### Sequence

- To score, the attacker must stop the ball at either cone.
- The defender can only cross the line to defend at the right or left cone in order to stop the attacker from scoring.

### Coaching points

- Players should keep their heads up and try to take on opponents 1 v. 1.
- You can also run this exercise as a competition.

## 3 Creating space to attack



### Setup

- Using cones, mark out a 12 x 12-yard field.
- Attackers and defenders are positioned in opposite corners of the field.

### Sequence

- The first defender passes to the first attacker.
- The defender then defends the cones beside and behind him.
- If the attacker stops the ball at either side cone, he scores one point. If he can penetrate and score on the rear cone, he scores three points.
- The next two players start after the attacker scores or the ball goes out.

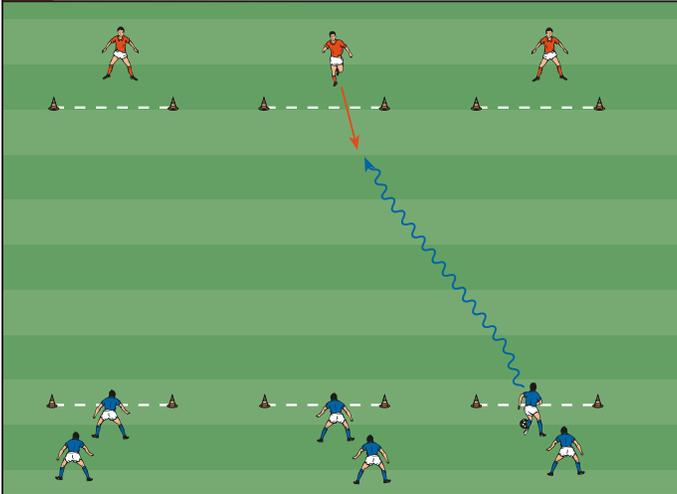
### Coaching points

- Attackers must create space behind their opponents to beat them 1 v. 1.
- You can introduce shielding as a way to maintain possession.
- You can also run this exercise as a competition



## DRIBBLING

### 4 Changing the point of attack



#### Setup

- Field is the penalty box.
- Using cones, set up three goals on each touchline.
- One player stands in each goal; one of them has a ball.

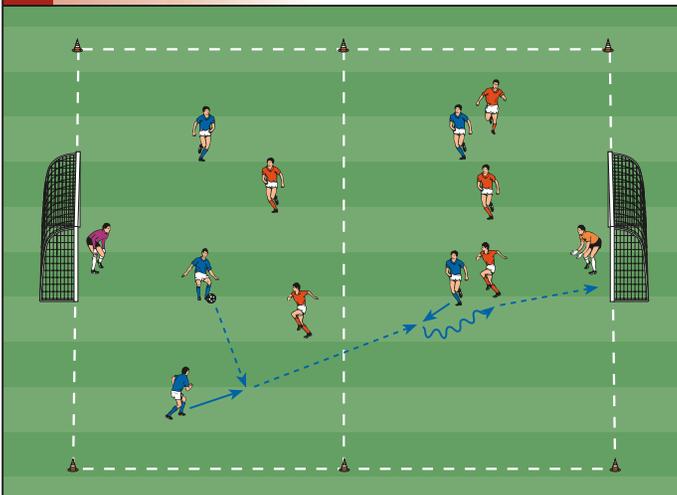
#### Sequence

- The player with the ball starts 1 v. 1 play, attempting to score on any of the three goals opposite.
- After the attacker scores or the ball goes out of bounds, possession rotates to the next player.

#### Coaching points

- This game calls for a tremendous amount of fitness, giving you a economical session that also includes decision-making under pressure and opportunities to beat defenders 1 v. 1.

### 5 Dribbling game



#### Setup

- Mark out a 15 x 20-yard field with goals.
- Using cones, mark out a centerline.
- Divide players into two teams of five plus goalkeepers.
- Three defenders are positioned in the defending half, two attackers in the attacking half.

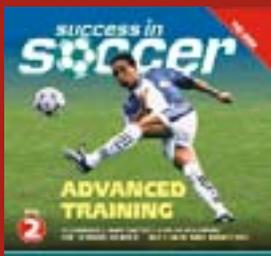
#### Sequence

- Teams play 5 v. 5.
- Defenders and attackers must stay in their assigned halves.

#### Variations

- One defender can join the forwards after passing the ball to them to create a 3 v. 3 situation.
- Two defenders can join the forwards after the pass to create a 4 v. 3 situation.
- Teams can play freely.

## TRAINING TIPS FOR ADVANCED PLAYERS



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