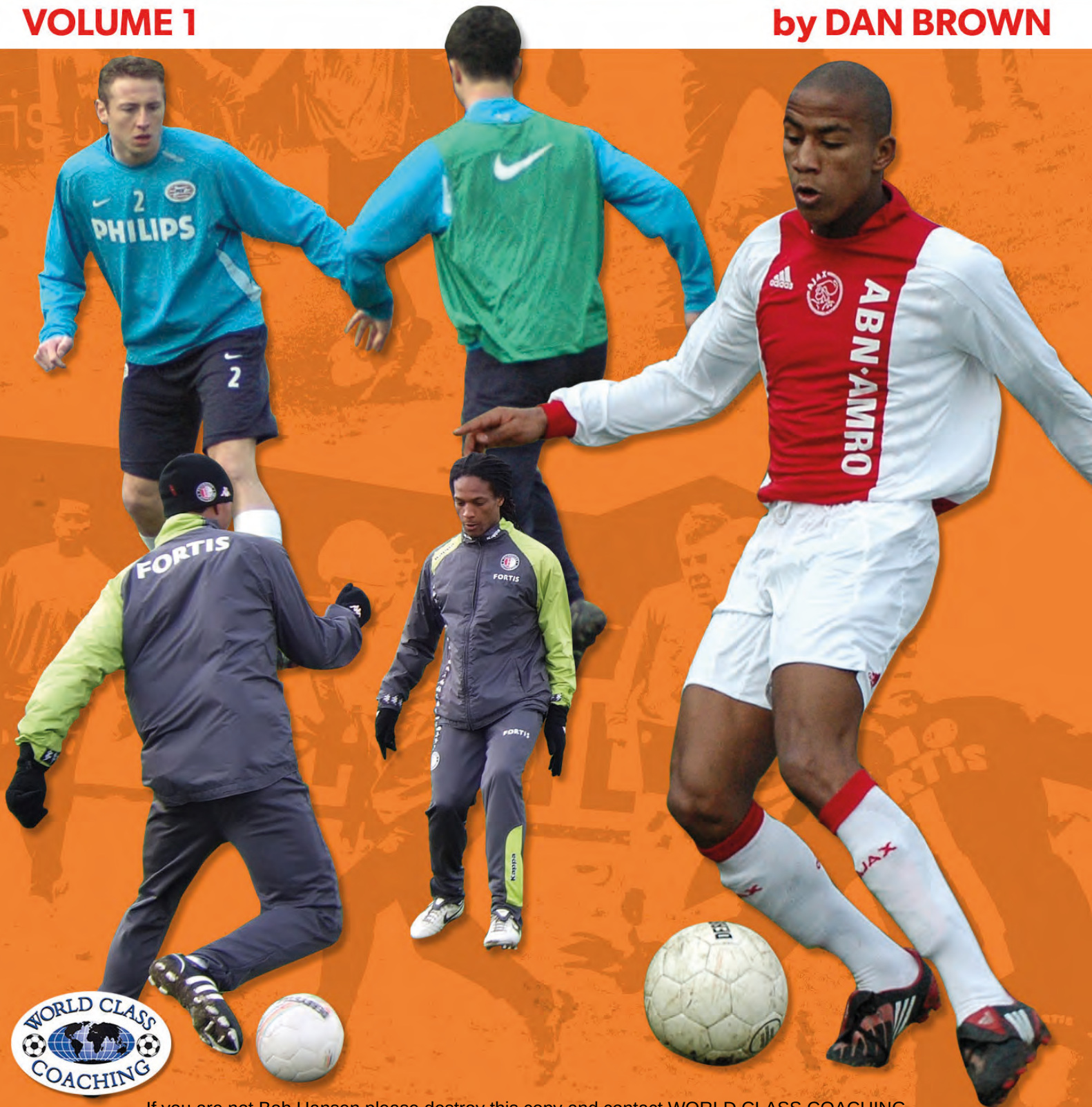


DUTCH PRO ACADEMY TRAINING SESSIONS

VOLUME 1

by DAN BROWN



Dutch Pro Academy Training Sessions Vol 1

By

Dan Brown

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Table of Contents

3	Overview and Itinerary
8	Opening Presentation with Harry Jensen, KNVB
10	Notes from Visit to ESA Arnhem Rijkerswoerd Youth Club
12	Schalke '04 Stadium and Training Complex Tour
13	Ajax Background
16	Training Session with Harry Jensen, KNVB
19	Training Session with Joost van Elden, Trekvogels FC
22	Ajax Youth Team Sessions
31	Ajax U13 Goalkeeper Training
34	Ajax Reserve Game & Attacking Tendencies

Overview and Itinerary Coaches for World Class Coaching/Dutch Touch Coaches Tour to Holland March 2012

Introduction: In March, *World Class Coaching* in conjunction with Terry Michler's *Dutch Touch* sponsored a 9-day coaches tour of Holland and Germany. Coaches from Europe, the US and the Caribbean were treated to an outstanding overview of soccer in the Netherlands, with an emphasis on player development and coach education. As well as a full program of observing pro, youth and top amateur teams playing and training; seminars and the opportunity to question and interact with top coaches, we enjoyed excellent hospitality, food and friendship as well as unseasonably sunny weather with a little bit of tourism thrown in for good measure. In addition to crisscrossing the small country of Holland, we ventured into Germany for a tour of Schalke '04's impressive Veltins Arena and training complex as well as a pleasant stroll along the splendid Rhine promenade in old town Dusseldorf.

Our tour group, made up of club, college, school and youth national team coaches was based at the comfortable Hotel De Oude Molen ("Old Mill") in the picturesque town of Groesbeek, Gelderland, 15 km from Nijmegen and 2 km from the German border. Though a small town, Groesbeek is home to two of the region's top third division teams, De Treffers and Achilles FC. Though technically described as amateur teams, in reality they are high-level semi-pro clubs more similar to AAA baseball farm teams in the US or to high level Conference football teams in the UK. Each own modest stadiums; full training facilities, clubhouses with bars, restaurants, executive lounges and fanshops; as well as large youth and amateur divisions.

Gelderland is the largest province of the Netherlands, located in the eastern part of the country. While the cities of Nijmegen - the oldest city in the Netherlands – and Arnhem and their famous Rhine bridges are perhaps best known to many Brits and Americans as ground zero for WWII's Operation Market Garden, ("A Bridge Too Far"), soccer-wise they are home to Eredivisie clubs Vitesse Arnhem, NEC Nijmegen and to De Graafschap based in nearby Doetinchem.

Our tour was organized by Jan Pruijn, currently the Head of Technical Affairs at Ajax Cape Town. Pruijn has served as the head of the Ajax International Youth Development where he was responsible for the establishment of the "Ajax-way" program for Ajax branches in South Africa, Ghana, and Belgium. He has also served as the head coach of NEC Nijmegen and Helmond Sport as well as working for the KNVB, the Lebanese F.A., A.F.C Amsterdam and De Treffers FC.

Additionally, we were hosted by former KNVB instructors Harry Jensen and Theo Dirks, former NEC youth coach Remco Ten Hoopen, Trekvogels coach Joost Van Eldon and coach and author Terry Michler. The Coaches Tour was held in conjunction with a game and training tour for a selection of U14 CBC Dutch Touch players and parents from the St Louis area as well as a tour of the women's soccer team from Central College in Pella, Iowa.

Journal Glossary:

- **KNVB** (Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbal Bond) or the Royal Netherlands Football Association; the equivalent of the English FA or the USSF headquartered in Zeist.
- **"Point forward" or "point back"**: Refers to the arrangement of the three midfield players in the 4-3-3 formation. "Point back" is with 1 defensive and 2 attacking midfield players and "point forward" is with 2 defensive and 1 attacking midfield players
- **Eredivisie** (Honor Division), Dutch 1st division or highest level of professional play in the Netherlands

- **Eerste Divisie** (First Division), second tier of professional play in the Netherlands and often referred to the Jupiler League after its sponsor; not to be confused with the same name for the Belgian first division.
- **Topklasse**, semi-professional play. The third tier of Dutch soccer.
- **Hoofdklasse**, the highest level of amateur play, and the fourth tier of Dutch soccer.

Observations on Soccer in the Netherlands: Much has been made and written of the “Dutch Secret” for or the Dutch Vision for producing players, teams and coaches far outsize of their population. While there is plenty of room for debate about the success of the Dutch national team in major tournaments, its more physical style of play in the last World Cup, or the current level of play in the Eredivisie, there is little doubt that for a country of 16 million, the Dutch punch well “above their weight” in the hierarchy of world soccer. All of the Dutch coaches we met were extremely proud of this and generally attributed their country’s success due to a.) the level of coach education and development and b.) the focus on the development of players as individuals as well as members of team. The Netherlands has the highest per capita ratio of licensed coaches of any country in the world.

The overwhelmingly popular formation in the Netherlands is 4-3-3 with primary variations being the arrangements of the 3 midfield players. The conventional 4-4-2 is unusual though 4-4-2 with a diamond shaped midfield or 4-2-3-1 were seen.

Other Notable Observations: The KNVB exerts robust centralized control over all aspects of both youth and senior soccer in the country, including coach and player development through its 6 Regional Centers as well as the KNVB Academy headquartered at Zeist. This translates into a strong and clear vision of training methodology, coach education and even club organizational structure. In my opinion, this - while seemingly paradoxical - furthers the development of individually creative players by providing a clear structure in which to develop inventiveness and spontaneity.

Thanks: Special thanks to coaches and fellow tour participants Gerry Montague, Rob Dorey, Dylan Lienart, Jacek Pobiedzinski and Terry Michler for a sharing pictures, videos and information for this journal; Joost van Elden for help with translations; Katia Paroczi for video editing; and Astrid Pruijn for her patience and organizational skill with the tour.

Additional Information: Additional information and material on soccer in Holland can be found in World Class Coaching’s on-line “*Dutch Sessions*” issue which includes material from Jan Pruijn, Terry Michler and Remco Ten Hoopen as well as Dave Clarke’s extended PSV Journal. Michael Sokolove provides an excellent view of Ajax’s Academy in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled “How a Soccer Star is Made.” Other excellent books on soccer in the Netherlands are available at worldclasscoaching.com.

Author Biography: Dave Brown is the Director of Coaching for the WFC Rangers premier youth club in Bellingham, WA. In addition to being a former high school, college and ODP coach, he has coached at the top youth level for over 20 years and was Washington State’s co-winningest coach for five years, winning several state championships. His former players have gone on to play professionally in the MLS and WUSA as well as earning U17, U20 and full US National team honors. He holds the USSF “B” National Coaching license and the Director of Coaching certificate from the NSCAA.

HOLLAND/GERMANY COACHES TOUR ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS

March 15 - 25, 2012

Thursday March 15

- Welcome and Orientation presentation by Harry Jansen and Remco Ten Hoopen
- Visit with top amateur youth club Arnhem ESA Rijkerswoerd, hosted by Flip Witjes, ESA Director of Football and former Vitesse Arnhem player
- Tour ESA facilities and observe the U14 Dutch Touch team select from St. Louis against ESA U14 team and the Central College women's team of Pella, Iowa versus ESA women's U19 team

Friday March 16

- Departure for Gelsenkirchen (Germany) and Stadium Tour of Schalke '04's Veltins Arena
- Lunch at Schalke '04 restaurant and beer garden
- Tourist visit to Dusseldorf Old Town
- Departure for GelreDome Stadium, Arnhem for an 8 pm match between Vitesse Arnhem and Heracles Almelo

Saturday March 17th

- Departure for Amsterdam
- Watching Ajax youth team games and tour of the Ajax training complex De Toekomst ("The Future")
- Visit the Ajax Fan Shop
- Visit downtown Amsterdam for a canal and walking tour

Sunday March 18

- Depart to DVSG De Treffers ground to observe Training Session with coaches Harry Jensen and Theo Dirks training CBC Dutch Touch select youth team
- Home game between 3rd Division teams De Treffers vs. VVSB. Post-game meeting and match analysis with De Treffers trainer Camiel Jager

- Traditional Dutch dinner in local restaurant

Monday March 19th

- Walk to the training ground of Achilles FC; observe training session with Joost Van Elden of Trekvogels FC, Nijmegen and CBC Dutch Touch youth team
- Depart for Amsterdam to observe Ajax youth teams training at De Toekomst
- Watching Jong (“Young”) Ajax (Ajax reserves) vs. Jong Heerenveen

Tuesday March 20th

- Depart for “De Herdgang”; the training complex of PSV Eindhoven
- Observe PSV U16 and U19 youth teams training
- Presentation on Youth Development at PSV with PSV Director of Youth Development, Jelle Goes,
- Presentation and Q&A with Gert-Jan van Dijk, Head Fitness Coach for PSV Youth Academy
- Lunch in PSV Canteen followed by optional tour of PSV Stadium and visit to fanshop
- Observe U13 and U15 PSV youth teams training
- Observe PSV U12 team training
- Match, Jong PSV (PSV reserves) vs. Jong NEC Nijmegen
- Dinner at Pizzeria La Stella, near Groesbeek

Wednesday March 21

- Tour of NEC Nijmegen Goffert-Stadium and Training Complex
- Observe NEC First Team training
- Lunch at NEC Youth Training Complex canteen
- Observe NEC U14 youth team
- Observe NEC U13 & U15 youth teams
- Departure for Stadion De Vijverberg, Doetinchem, for game between De Graafschap vs. FC Twente

Thursday March 22

- Departure for Rotterdam and Feyenoord's Varkenoord Training Complex
- Observe Feyenoord U12 to U15 youth teams training
- Observe Feyenoord First Team training
- Visit Feyenoord Fanshop and lunch in stadium restaurant "Het Kuipje"
- Observe Feyenoord Training U16 and U17 youth teams training
- Visit and presentation at top youth club RKTVC Tiel, at Sportscomplex "Ridderweide" with RKTVC Tiel Director Erik van Verseveld

Friday March 23

- Departure for Vitesse Arnhem Training Complex at Papendal National Sports Center
- Welcome by Gerry Hamstra, Head of Vitesse Youth Academy
- Observe Vitesse Arnhem First Team training
- Catered lunch and presentation on Youth Development at Vitesse Youth Complex
- Watching Vitesse Youth Teams Training at Sportpark Valkenhuizen
- Wrap-up with Gerry Hamstra

Saturday March 24 REST DAY

- Watching NEC U13 vs. Heerenveen U13 at NEC complex
- Free time options included shopping and lunch in downtown Groesbeek or Nijmegen or visiting nearby WWII Liberation Museum
- Dinner in Old Mill Hotel, Groesbeek.
- Third Division game between FC Achilles of Groesbeek and WKE Emmen FC

Sunday March 25th

- Bus to Schiphol Airport Amsterdam and Departure

Thursday March 15

Opening Presentation with Harry Jensen, KNVB Instructor

Our opening presentation was by Harry Jansen, for many years an instructor to ex-pro players from the Netherlands obtaining their KNVB (Dutch Football Association) licenses. Harry has since taught coaches and players in Asia, Europe, America and Africa. The presentation was also prepared by Theo Derks, also a UEFA “A” Licensed coach and is a fully qualified instructor through the KNVB.

The highlights of Harry’s presentation, which focused on match analysis as the basis for development, included:

The Dutch Vision on Soccer Begins with Observation: This means watching the game through the spectacles of the coach; not watching as a spectator or or a “newspaperman, paying attention only to the outcomes and result. A coach pays attention to the **causes**!! What led to a goal being conceded or scored? What led to victory or defeat?”

How to Watch a Game: The game is broken down into four stages or “moments” and therefore match analysis should reflect this and ask the following questions:

1. ***When our team has possession:*** Why didn’t we score? Why are we losing the ball so soon ?
2. ***When our opponents have possession?*** Why can’t we win the ball? Why are our opponents scoring so easily?
3. ***In transition after losing the ball:*** Why are our opponents so dangerous when we lose the ball?
4. ***In transition after gaining the ball:*** Why aren’t we able to capitalize on turnovers?

Learning how to watch soccer involves analyzing soccer problems. Typical observations one could make include:

- “The cooperation between the goalkeeper and the defenders is not good resulting in early loss of possession.”
- “Defenders do not use the entire playing area and the position play without the ball is very poor.”
- “This is what creates poor service to our strikers.”

There are 5 key *elements* in how to analyze and describe the soccer problem.

1. ***Which moment is the main moment of concern?***
 - When we are in possession.
 - When our opponent is in possession
 - Moments of transitions
2. ***Who are the main players and groups involved?***
 - Goalkeeper
 - Goalkeeper +Defenders
 - Defenders + Midfielders

- Midfielders
- Midfielders + Attackers
- Attackers

3. **Where** does it happen?

- Which part of the field.

4. **What** is going wrong in relation to the objective?

- technique, poor long passes, poor connection, poor finishing, etc
- insight, poor positional play, poor marking, etc.
- communication, relation between giver and receiver, etc.

5. **Specific elements** such as the importance of the game, weather conditions, the condition of the field.

The process of Team-Tactical training starts with:

1. Observing and then analyzing the game
2. Describing soccer-problems
3. Making choices, priorities
4. Drawing up a plan; day-, week-, month-year plan
5. Preparing the training
6. Implementing the training
7. Evaluating the training

Coaching in the team-tactical training can be broken down into 3 stages in a training session:

One: The Orientation or Experience period

- Organization and logistics of the training session
- The formation a team uses in 11 v 11 will effect the roles and positions player fill during training
- Always focus on the players that are key to the session's objective
- Simplify (reduce numbers as needed) from 11 v 11 or 8 v 8 to make main coaching points

Two: The Learning Period

- Coach to the specific objectives as well as applying and reinforcing good football general principles
- Focusing on 4 or 5 specific moments in relation to the coaching objective.

Three: The Game Period

- Use 6 to 10 build-ups/sequences taking 3 to 10 minutes
- Keep the game competitive recognizing the game winner.

Training through Small-Sided Games: At this point Harry discussed a number of possible simple small-sided games that could be applied to teach players the concepts of width, depth, compactness and support in defense and the importance of penetration. Once basic concepts were introduced, play can expand to 7 v 7, 8 v 8 to 11 v 11.

Notes from Visit to ESA Arnhem Rijkerswoerd Youth Club

Following our opening presentation we visited ESA Arnhem, a top amateur youth and senior club located on the outskirts of Arnhem to observe matches between a CBC Dutch Touch U14 selection and the Central College women's teams versus their ESA counterparts. While the teams were warming up, we were hosted for coffee and a tour of the club's facilities by ESA Director of Football and former Vitesse Arnhem player, Flip Witjes.

He shared the following information with us:

History and Membership: ESA is comprised of 1,500 members playing in 91 teams. Teams range from senior teams for men and women to 5 and 6 year olds who play mini-soccer in a jamboree style "Champions League" on Saturday mornings, wearing the jerseys of Barcelona, Chelsea, etc. Training for most teams takes place twice per week with games on weekends. The club's facilities are currently maxed out with a waiting list.

Facilities: ESA was founded in 1954 and was originally based at the Valkenhuizen sports complex before moving in 1994 to its current site in Rijkerswoerd, a new and growing suburb of Arnhem. The club now has 6 full-sized natural grass fields, 1 artificial turf pitch, a sports hall including a large gym, changing and storage rooms and a clubhouse with a bar and small cafe. In addition to running an indoor soccer program; basketball, volleyball and team handball clubs rent space in the multi-use gym area.

Additionally, ESA contracts with the *BallControl* Soccer School to provide individual training based on the methods of Wiel Coerver for boys and girls from 5 to 16 years old. Training is focused on ball mastery, one-on-one situations, changes in direction, passing and beating an opponent. This training is at an additional cost to families.

Finances: The cost to play at ESA is 1,200 euros per year, currently about \$1,500 US. ESA rents its facilities from the local municipality at the cost of €1,400 euros per month. Sponsorship and income from the club's café and bar help to supplement costs as well as "development" fees received if an affiliated player is signed by a professional club. Coaches are compensated with those coaching at the first team level at 8,000 Euros ranging down to 2000 per season.

Management & Organization: A management team of four report to the ESA Board and oversee nearly 300 volunteers weekly. The management team positions are:

1. Director of Facilities, Logistics & Hospitality
2. Director of External Relations, including PR, sponsorship and special events
3. Director of Finance & Business
4. Technical Director for Select and Recreational Soccer

Additional Notes:

- The club has a written code of standards and regulations that players and parents must adhere to. Red cards require an appearance before the club's board.

- ESA is starting to appoint more women as coaches for both of its younger boys and girls teams as the club finds that their empathy and ability to nurture players makes them particularly effective at these ages.
- ESA plays a traditional 10-month weekly game season from late August to May in a rainy Northern European climate similar to Seattle's or Manchester's. During the year, they average only 4 game cancellation days due to snow or rainy weather, yet their natural grass fields were in excellent condition – flat, green and smooth. Several of us on the tour concluded that field maintenance in Holland was at a higher level than many of our home clubs or that Dutch cows were very special!

Friday March 16

Schalke '04 Stadium and Training Complex Tour

Our first full day began with a visit east to visit Gelsenkirchen in the industrial heartland of Germany's Ruhr Valley. The city's historical ties to coal and steel, current high unemployment rate and its legendarily passionate fans draw comparisons to Newcastle or Pittsburgh. Derby matches with Borussia Dortmund (35 km east) are one of the game's great spectacles.

Though we visited on the day after Schalke's victory over FC Twente in the Europa League and training was light, we were treated to a tour of the magnificent Veltins Arena (cap. 61,673) and the chance to tour the rest of the complex. An isolated location, hundreds of visitors on an "off" day, multiple fields and facilities, a restaurant and beer garden overlooking the training pitch make a visit to Schalke seem like a soccer pilgrimage for a true fan.

After a tour of historic Dusseldorf, we departed for a dinner of typical Dutch stadium fare at the GelreDome Stadium, Arnhem before an 8 pm match between Vitesse Arnhem and Heracles Almelo

Saturday March 17

Saturday was dedicated to a day in Amsterdam, touring Ajax's famous training complex De Toekomst and observing several youth games. A visit the Ajax Fan Shop was followed by a short trip to downtown Amsterdam for a canal and walking tour.

Ajax Background

Founded in 1900, AFC Ajax *is*, to many, Dutch soccer. The introduction of the Bosman rule and the rise of La Liga and the English Premiership have combined to make Ajax and the Dutch league less influential on the European stage, but Ajax continue to be synonymous with attacking, flowing football and home to arguably the world's best youth development system. Their status as Holland's top club and their continued participation in the Champions League were assured this spring when Ajax again finished as Eredivisie champions under the guidance of Manager Frank De Boer. Even without the luster of their two greatest periods when they ruled Europe with mostly home-grown players, Ajax still draw the headlines, scouts from clubs with deep pockets and inquisitive coaches like few others.

In 1995, the last year Ajax won the Champions League, the Dutch national team was almost entirely composed of Ajax players and the names of van der Sar, Blind, Rijkaard, de Boer, Seedorf, Davids, Litmanen, Overmars and Kluivert are as indelibly identified with Ajax as those of the all-conquering Ajax team of the early '70's that included Rep, Krol, Neeskans and of course, Ajax and Dutch demi-God Johan Cruyff.

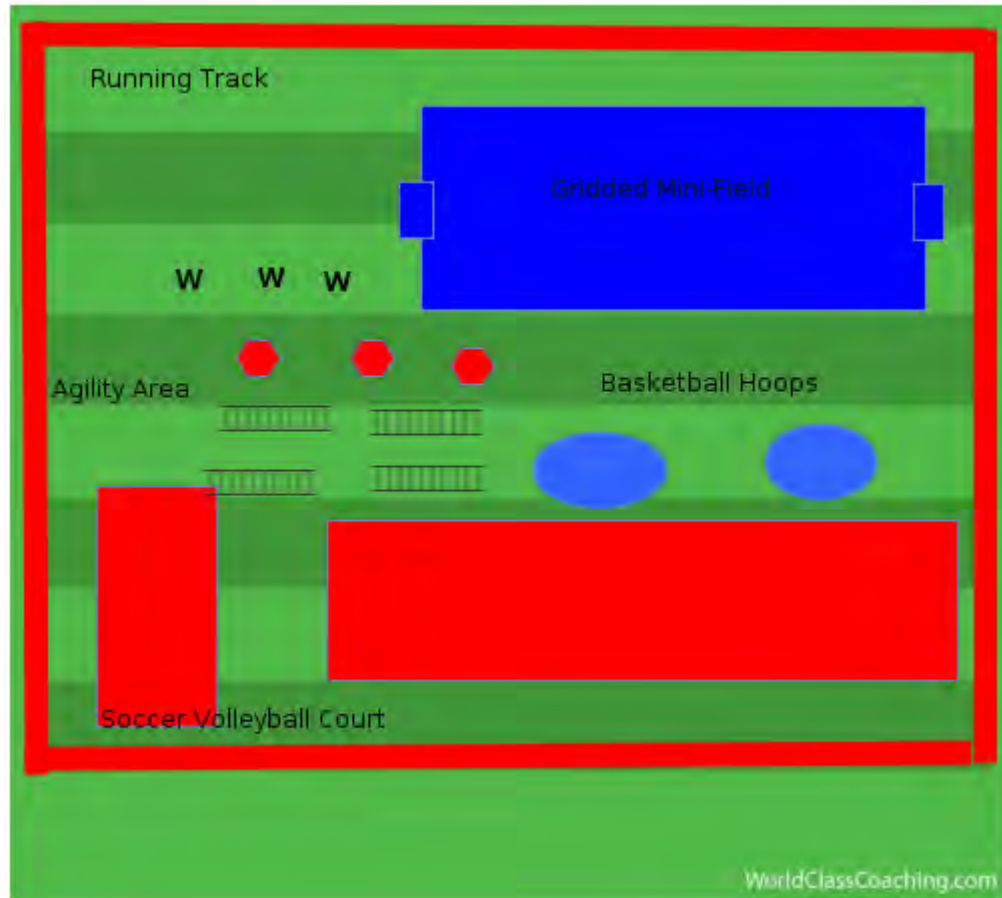
Even under the current economic limitations, Ajax players continue to be sought after and recent Academy graduates shining in other leagues include Wesley Sneijder, Rafael van der Vaart, Nigel de Jong, Maarten Stekelenburg, Thomas Vermaelen and Urby Emanuelson. Central defenders Jan Vertonghen and Toby Alderweireld look set to join right back Gregory van der Wiel in heading to richer pastures soon.

Manager Frank de Boer and his assistant Dennis Bergkamp keep the ties to the club's glorious past and when we visited the club's academy and training complex, De Toekomst ("The Future"), both strolled by us on the way to training as well as did former international players Rob Witsche, Brian Roy, Wim Jonk and Michel Kreek, all currently on the coaching staff.

A visit to a reserve game gives a hint to importance placed on young players. Seated within proximity of us were former Ajax legends Piet Kiezer, former captain Danny Blind, Gerri Muhren, Orlando Trustfull, Ronald Koeman's father Marin and numerous scouts and agents.

De Toekomst is located a block from Ajax's modernistic stadium, the Amsterdam ArenA (cap. 52,000) and includes multiple natural and synthetic fields, an indoor "airdome" field, a comfortable café with view of the fields, locker-room facilities and the new adidas miCoach Performance Centre.





Fitness Training Field: Another new addition to the complex is a small field dedicated to speed, agility and alternate training methods. A 300 meter running track surrounds an incline running hill equipped with both smooth track and stair steps for sprint training, courts for soccer volleyball, basketball hoops and a gridded 42 x 24 yard mini-soccer court. Beyond a group of players playing casual games of soccer volleyball and header basketball, we did not see the field in action.

Sunday March 18

Training Session with Harry Jensen, former KNVB Coaching Instructor

Training Session held at De Treffers FC, Groesbeek

The focus of the session was on attacking play with an emphasis on timing and quality of movement to the ball.



“Y Drill”: This typical Dutch drill focuses on timing and movement to receive forward passes.

- A line of players with balls start at the center circle prepares to pass to a forward positioned near the top of the penalty area.
- A central defender is marking the forward from behind, though not trying to intercept the ball at this point.
- The first player passes to the forward who receives the ball and turns with in one touch while keeping it shielded. With his second touch he passes the ball to one of the outside forwards to his right or his left.
- Upon receiving the ball the outside forward dribbles toward the halfway line before passing to one of the resting players before he rejoins them at the back of the line.
- Player rotate forward after each sequence.



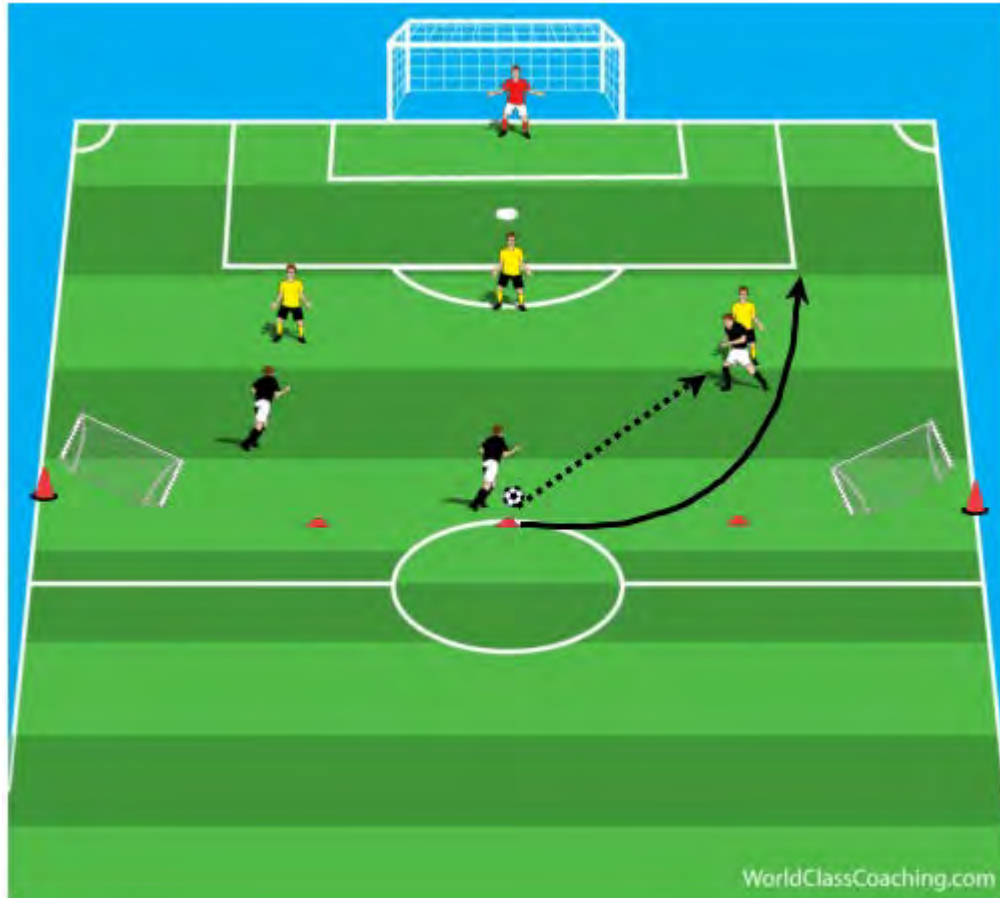
Progression: In the next series, the forward is coached to move away from his marker before the ball arrives and receive the ball facing his opponent. He again has the option to pass to either teammate who receives the ball and returns to the halfway line. The defender is still not trying to intercept the ball but may now block one of the passing lanes, forcing the forward to pass to one receiver or the other.

Coaching Points:

- ✓ Good starting position; near to defender, good body shape (bent slightly forward and a little loose to be able to absorb a blow from a marker).
- ✓ "Be active and light on your feet, don't be a goalpost!"
- ✓ Forward should be aware (by use of his trailing arm or a quick check over shoulder) of where his opponent is.

3 v 1. Three attackers now develop an attack on one defender plus a goalkeeper and try to score a goal.

- Defenders now have their own mini-goals to attack.
- Goals scored by defenders or directly from a backpass by the goalkeepers count for 2 points with goals from the attacking team counting the normal 1 point.



Progression: A defender was added every five minutes or so to bring the game up to 3 v 3.

Coaching Points:

- ✓ Attacking players were coached to start play by means of an overlap and the players were coached to always keep the ball central except immediately before a cross.
- ✓ Attackers were encouraged to switch the ball from one wing to another when time, space and technique would allow.
- ✓ Defenders were encouraged to either counter-attack quickly upon winning the ball or to make a good early back-pass to the keeper, allowing for a good pass or to make a direct attempt on goal.

Following the training session with Harry Jensen we were treated to lunch in the Executive Lounge prior to the home game between 3rd Division teams De Treffers vs. VVSB. Despite losing the game, De Treffers head coach Camiel Jager took time to provide a short analysis of the game for us. This was followed by a traditional Dutch dinner in local restaurant

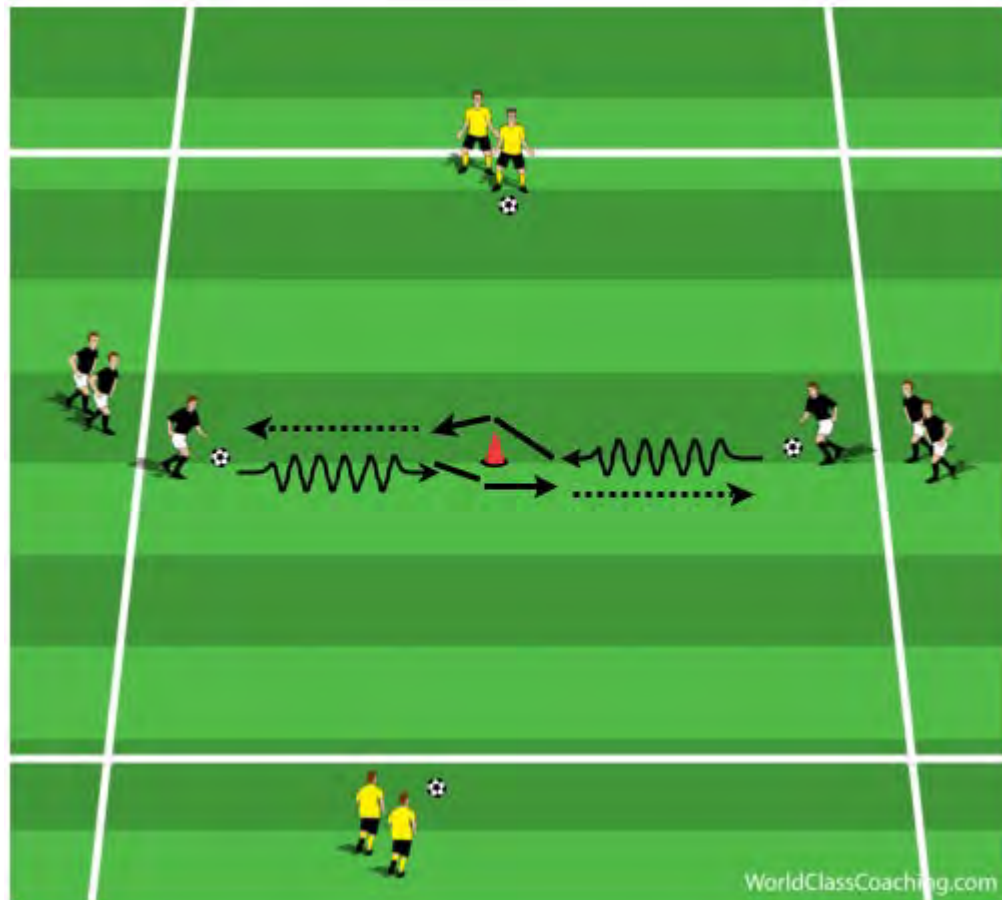
Monday March 19 Morning

Training Session with Joost van Elden, Trekvogels FC

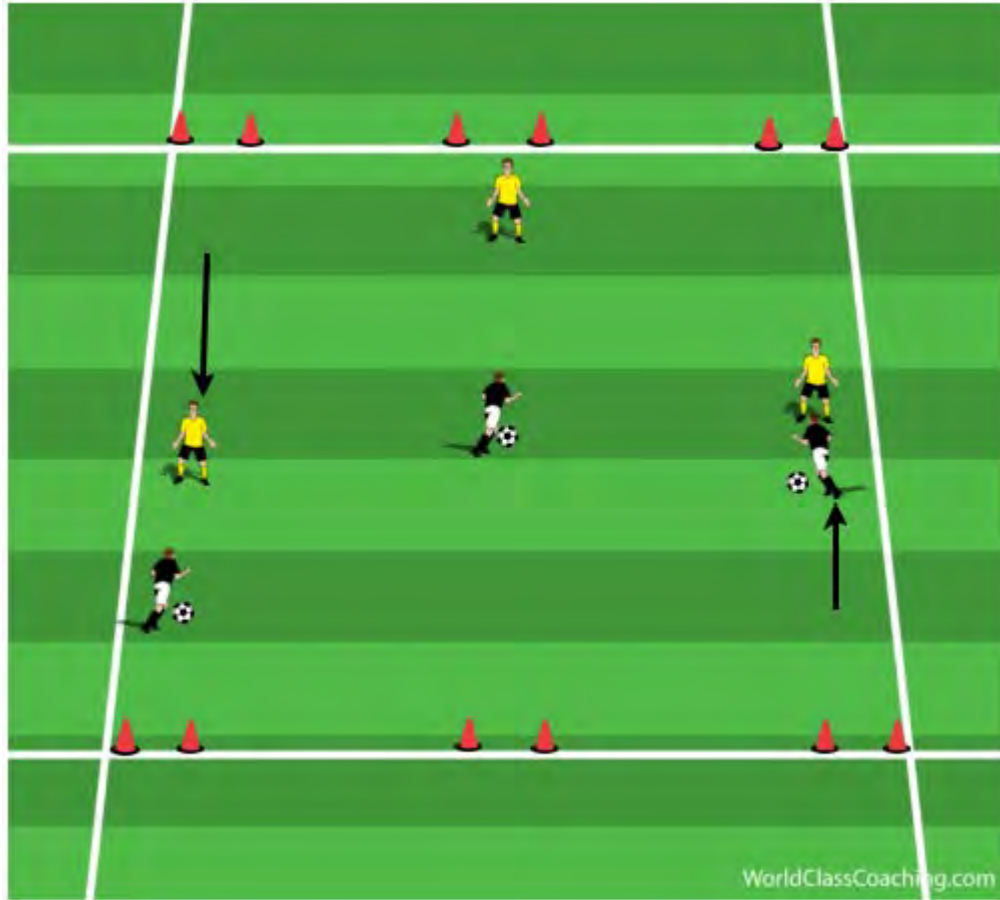
10:00 am: Joost van Elden is a coach with Trekvogels FC, a youth club located in Nijmegen. We observed him training a U14 youth team from St Louis at the Training Ground of Achilles '29 FC in Groesbeek.

Training Session Focus on 1 v 1 Dribbling

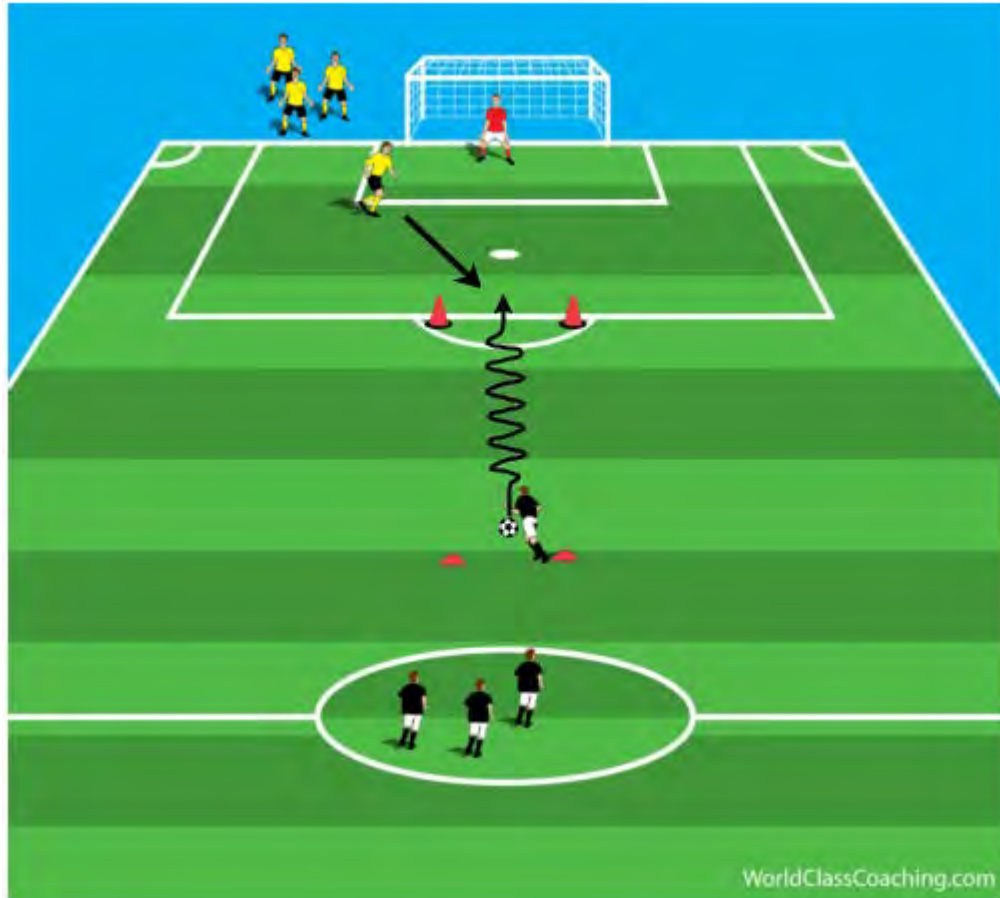
Warm-Up: Following a short jog, the players practiced moved freely with the ball in a 15 x 15 yd. area, practicing changes of pace, direction and moving the ball with different parts of their feet. During short breaks the players juggled and stretched.



Coerver Drills: The players now were arranged in four lines facing each other with a cone in the middle of the work area. Two players at a time practiced dribbling toward the cone, feinting to go one direction and carrying the ball the opposite direction around the cone. The players practiced a step-over move, a change of direction using the sole of their foot and a scissors move.



1 v 1 Practice: The players then joined with a partner in a 15 yd. long area and practiced attacking and defending a 1-yard goal made of disc cones, trying different moves and techniques to get past their opponent. The coach intentionally did not coach much during this period but encouraged the players to try new things and praised successful attempts.



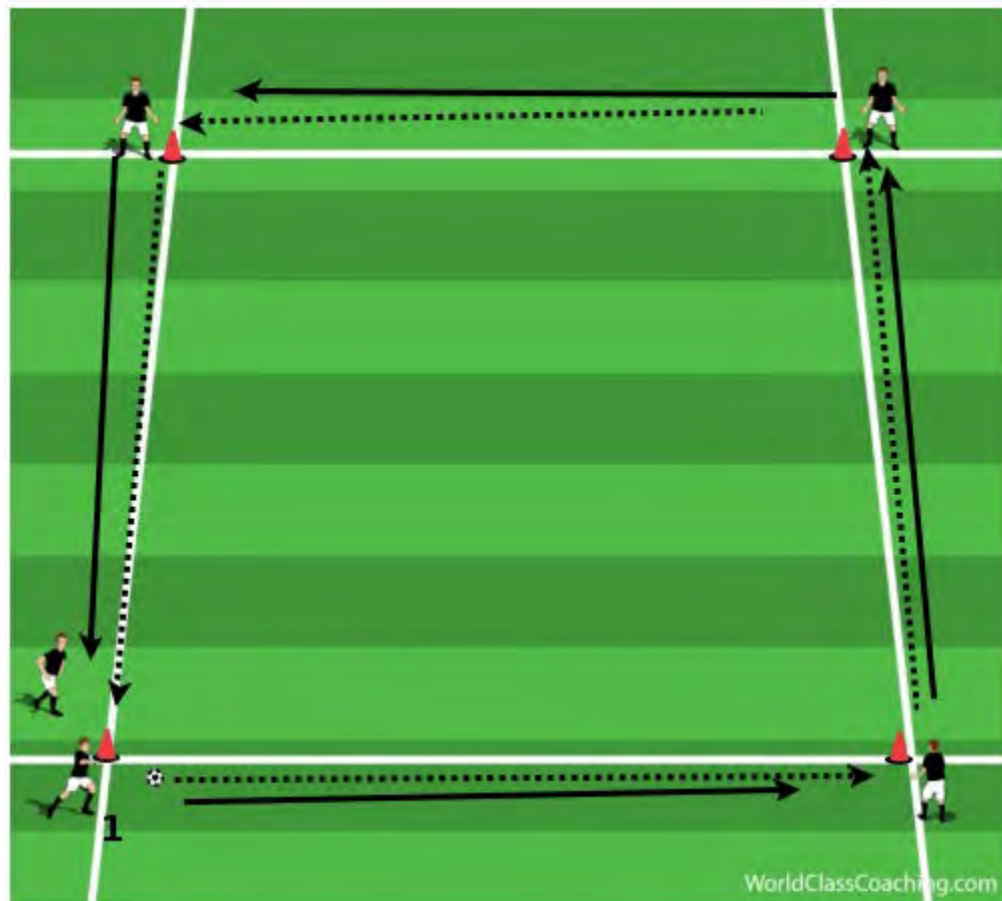
1 v 1 on Full Size Goal: Attacking players start near the center circle with ball. As soon as they begin to dribble toward the goal, an opponent leaves his position to defend an 8-yard wide gate at the top of the penalty area. Attacking player attempts to dribble through the gate to score on a full-size goal and goalkeeper.

5 v 5 Small Sided Game: Two teams of 5 v 5, organized in a diamond shape with goalkeepers playing as “sweeper keepers” played in an area 40 yds long x 20 yards wide with mini-goals 6 yards wide and 7 feet high. Emphasis is on recognizing 1 v 1 situations and using a move or dribbling skills to create a goal.

Monday March 19 Afternoon

Ajax Youth Team Sessions

Ajax Youth Teams: Though the first team's training session was closed to the public, a number of youth teams were training concurrently. Following are some of the more interesting activities we observed:



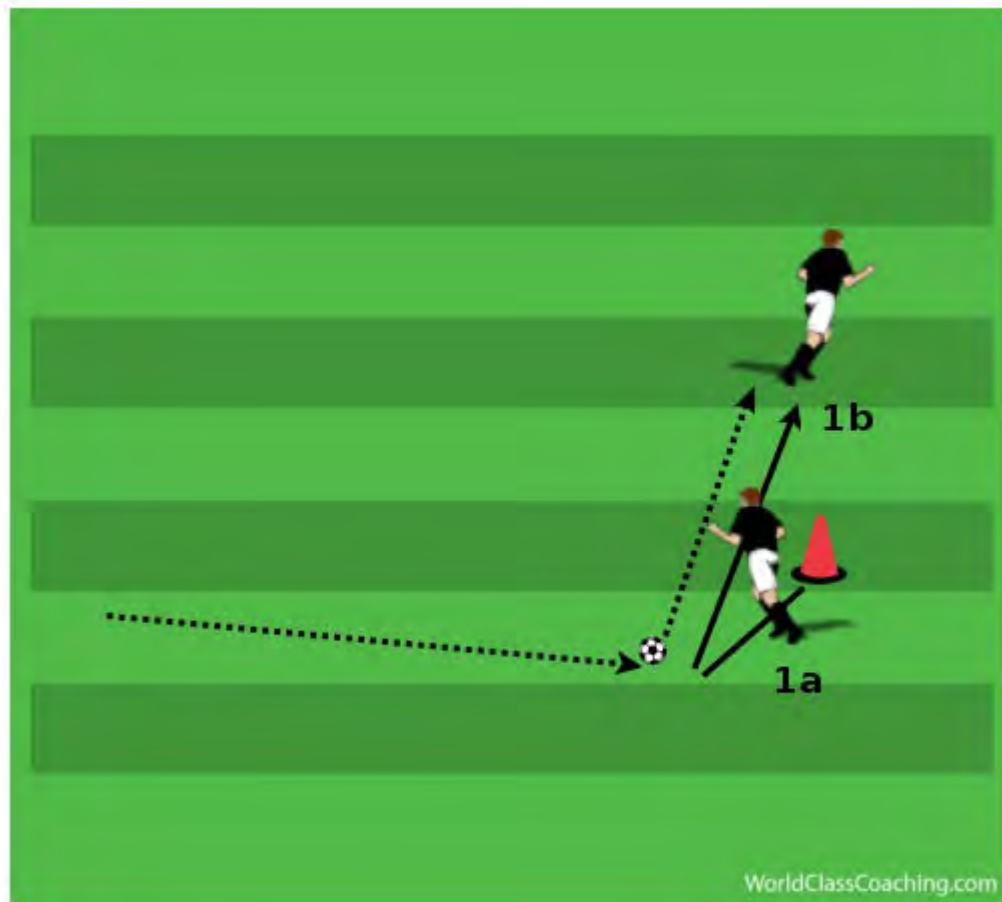
1 DIAGRAM DIAMOND DRILL

Ajax Diamond Drill: During our time at Ajax we saw this well-known drill performed many times; always with pace and energy.

- Player 1 passes the ball to his right to his teammate who, sideways on to the passer, prepares to control the ball around the cone into space toward the player to his right.
- The second player passes the ball to the player to his right and the sequence is continued.
- Each player follows his own pass and takes up his predecessor's former position.

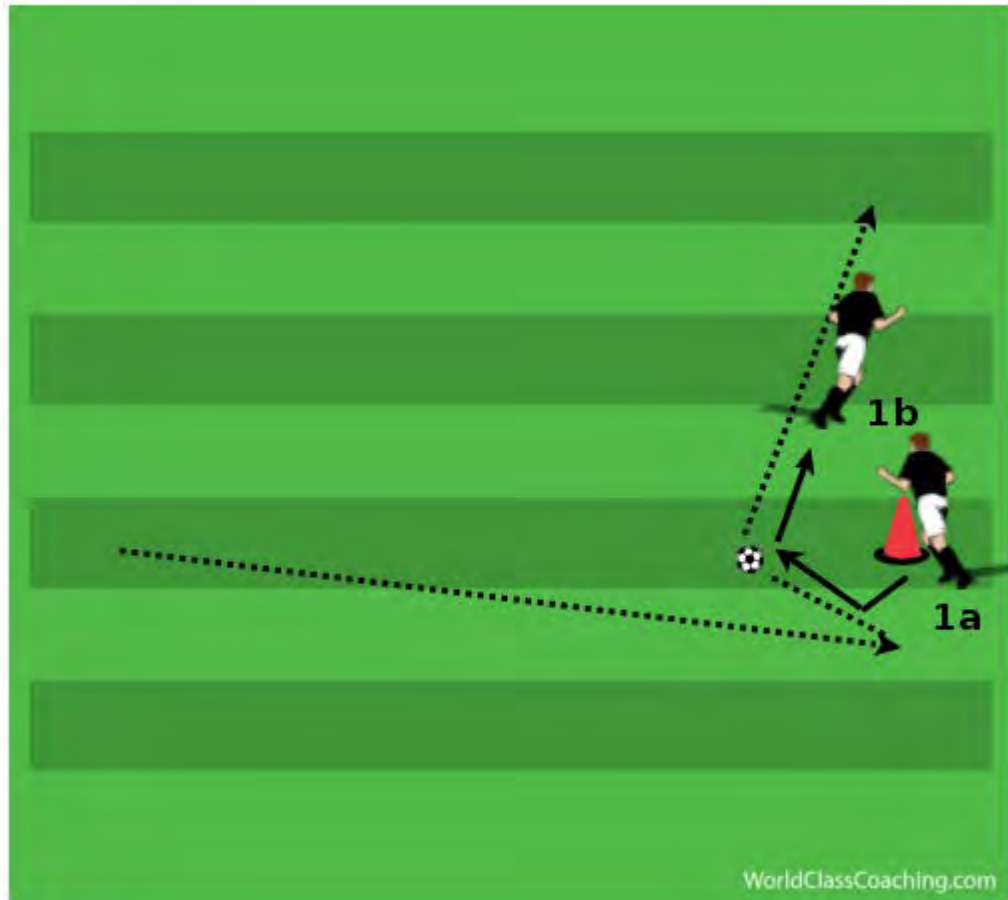
Coaching Point: In each case the players made a movement away from his "defender" (cone) to create room for himself to receive the ball and pass.

We also observed a number of interesting variations on the drill, all using the same basic set-up. They are illustrated here with one player as to make the individual movement of the player easier to see.



2 DIAGRAM DIAMOND DRILL

Ajax Diamond Drill “Scoop” Variation: This variation involved a pass intentionally made “behind” the receiving player, requiring him to come back to meet the ball with his back foot (in this case his **left**) and “scoop” the ball forward and on to his front or **right** foot with one motion before passing it to the next player.



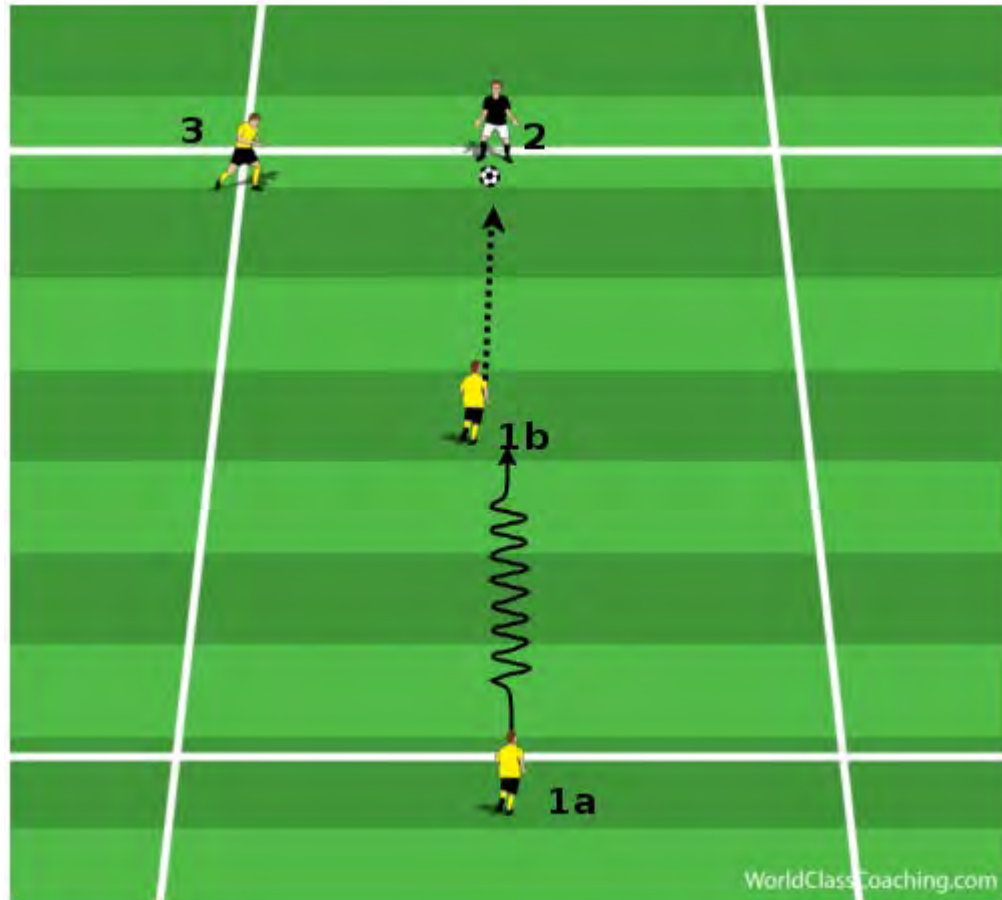
3 DIAGRAM DIAMOND DRILL

Ajax Diamond Drill “Cut” Variation: This time the ball is allowed by the receiver to run past the outside of the cone. Using his right foot, he – with one motion – quickly “cuts” the ball across the cone and back toward the middle of the square before passing with his left foot. This recreates the situation in a game, for example where a player receives a square pass in front of goal confronted by an opponent. To wrong-foot his opponent, he pretends to let the ball run across his body before cutting it back across the defender and shooting with his other foot.



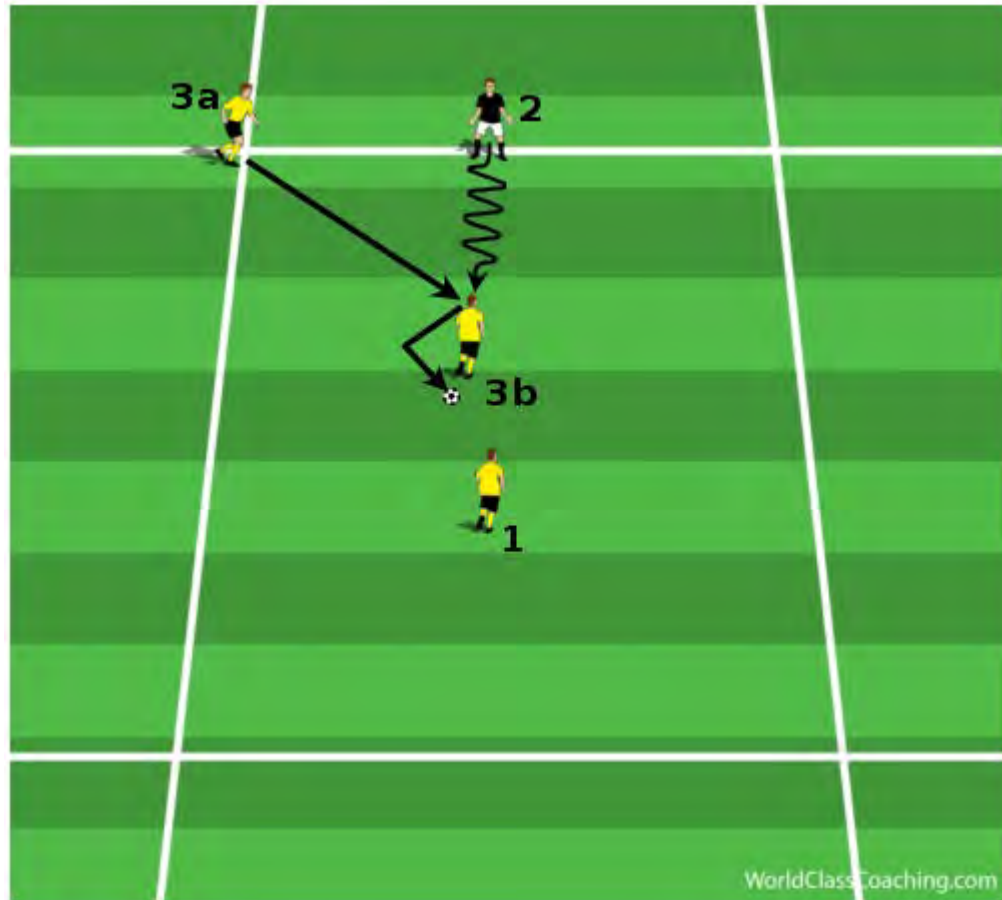
4 DIAGRAM DIAMOND DRILL

Ajax Diamond Drill “Cruyff Turn” Variation: In this example, the active player prepares to receive a pass from a teammate positioned at the top of the grid. He lets the ball run through his legs before cutting it to the right at a 90 degree angle with his trailing right foot with an action similar to a Cruyff Turn. He immediately turns to pursue the ball and pass to the next player.



5 DIAGRAM AJAX 2v1 ONE Set-up

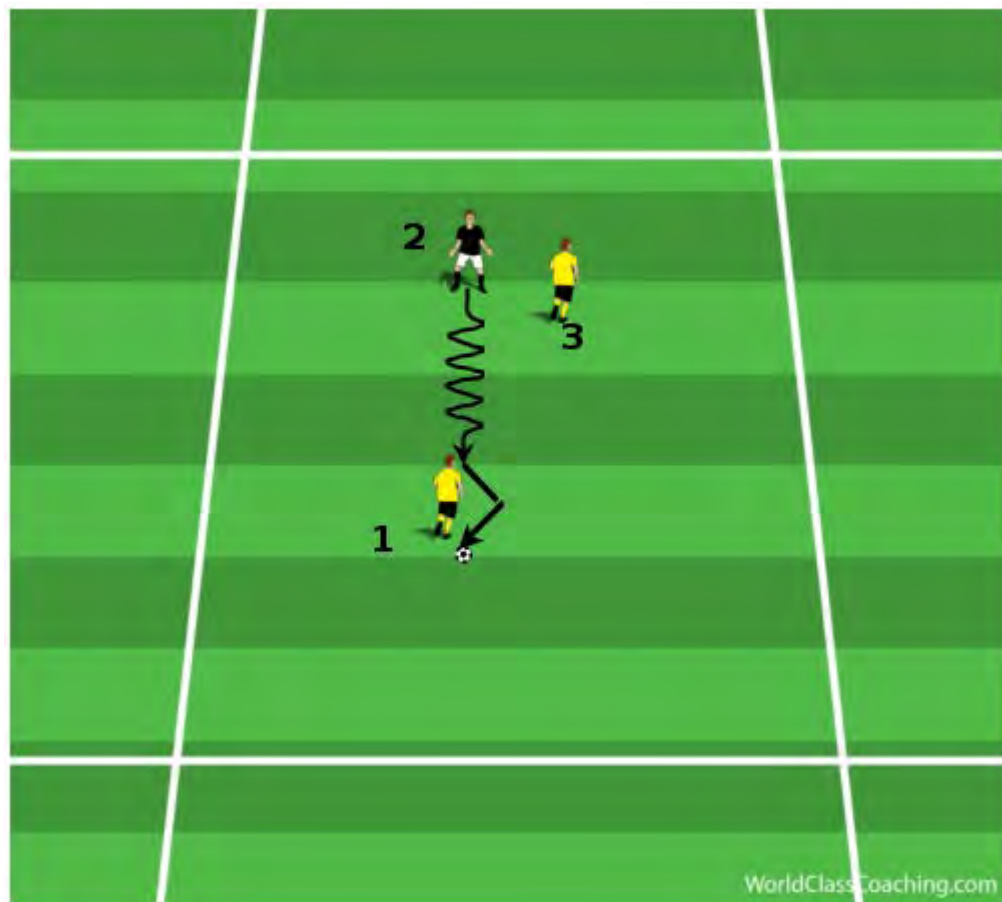
2 v 1 Dribbling Drill: The following drill introduced young (U10 to U12) players to defensive pressure from the side in the form of a recovering defender as well as a second defender confronting the dribbler from the front.



6 DIAGRAM AJAX 2v1 TWO

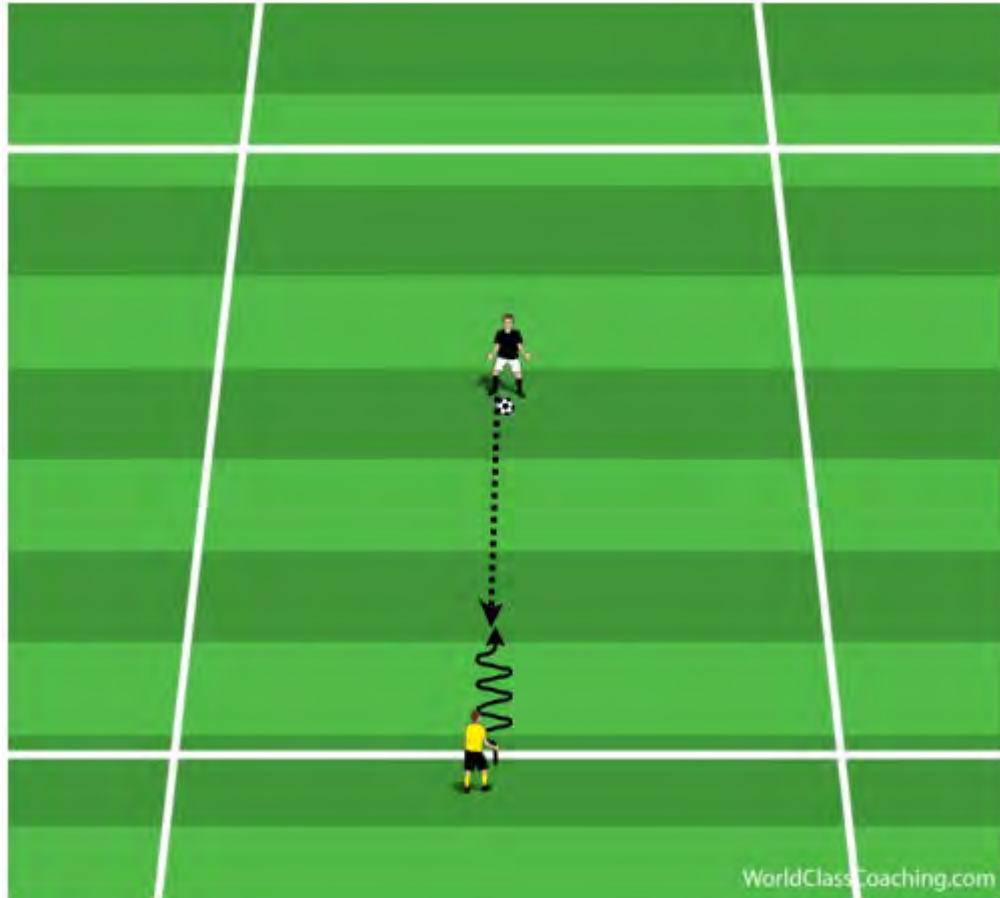
Play begins with Player 1 dribbling forward to the middle of the working area and passing to Player 2. At this point, a recovering defender (Player 3) runs to challenge the dribble at about 50% resistance in the form of “confronting” the player without tackling the ball.

Player 2 must dribble past him, typically making a move to his own right to take advantage of the recovering defender’s momentum.



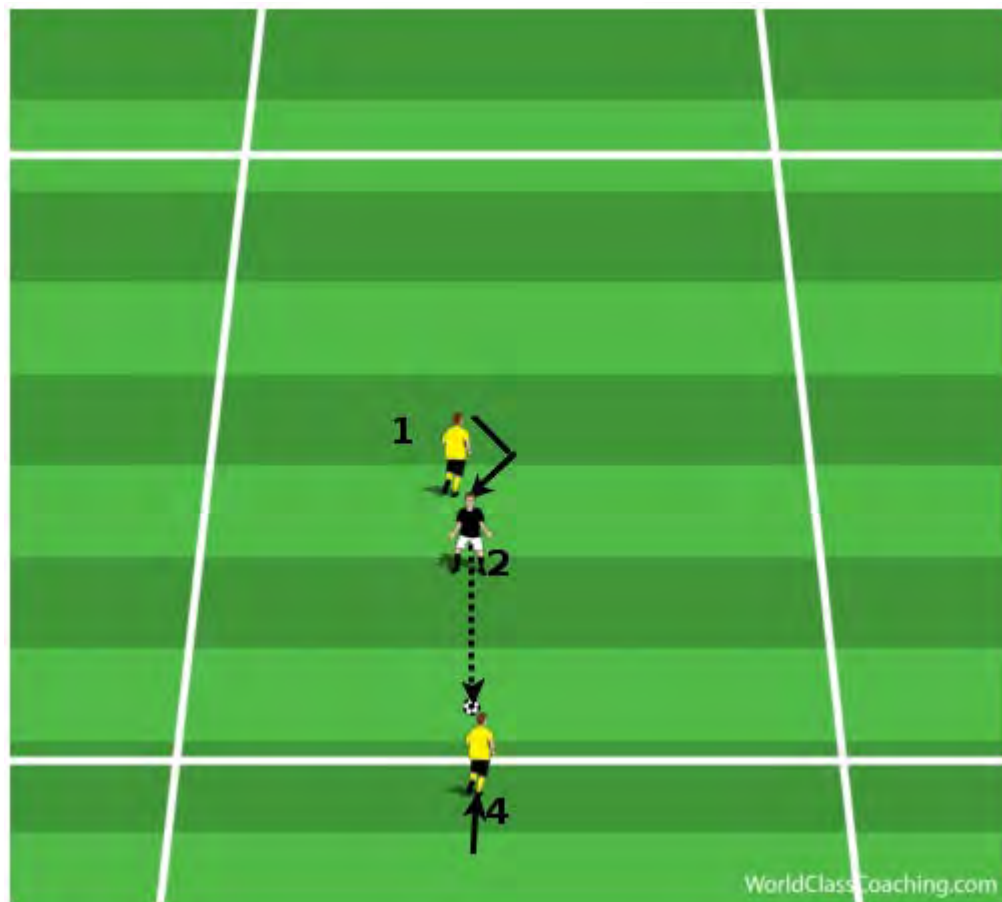
7 DIAGRAM AJAX 2v1 THREE

After beating Player 3, Player 2 prepares to dribble toward and beat Player 1 who has now stepped forward to challenge him.



8 DIAGRAM AJAX 2v1 FOUR

After successfully dribbling around Player 1, Player 2 passes to Player number 4 and then goes to close him down defensively.



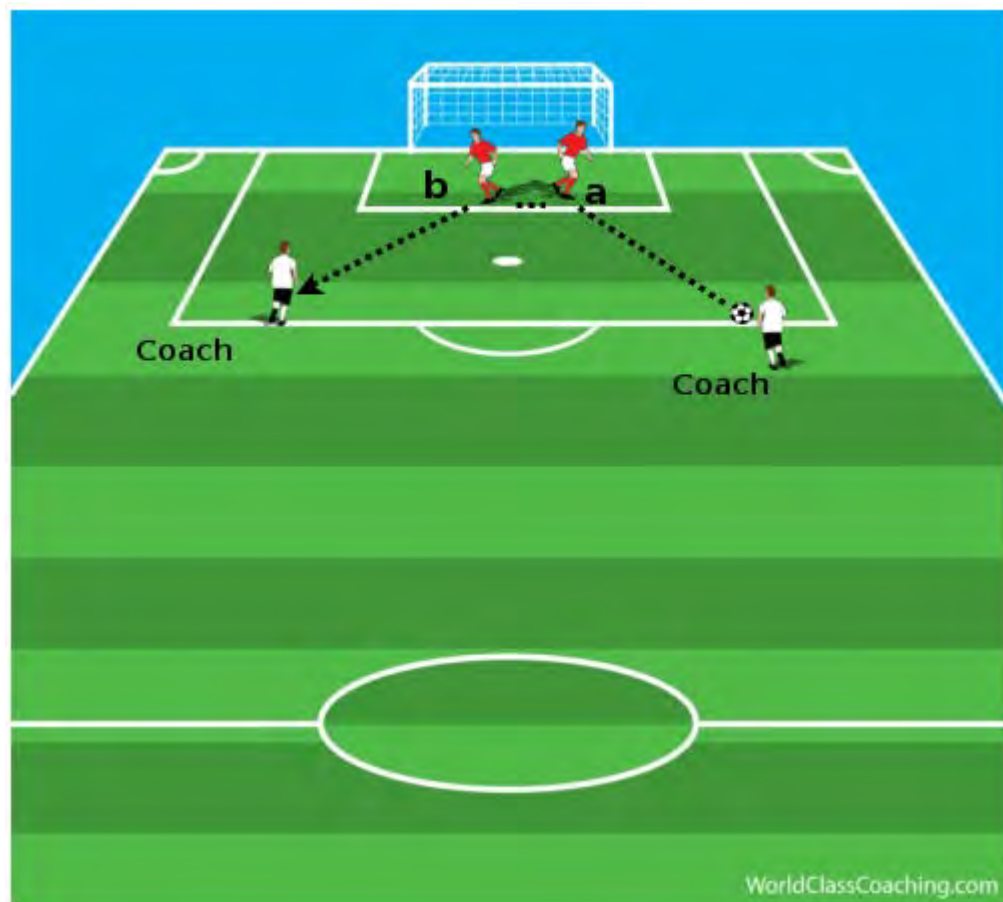
9 DIAGRAM AJAX 2v1 FIVE

Player 4 dribbles past 2 and passes to the next player at the top of the grid; beginning the sequence again.

Ajax U13 Goalkeeper Training

This session was coached by Ajax Academy head goalkeeping trainer René Stam, an assistant and 2 goalkeepers. It included work on dealing with backpasses, kicking and shot-stopping.

Warm-up: The players started with passing 8 balls from the top of the penalty area into a 1 yard goal made of cones positioned inside a full sized goal. Results were counted and the coach took time to correct the player, coaching him to lock his ankle and kick through the middle of the ball. This was followed by some simple one-touch passing back and forth with the coach about 5 yards away. The coach used this exercise to emphasize the need for the player return to his starting position after each pass, stay light on his feet as to get his body behind each ball.



10 DIAGRAM AJAX U13 GKING ONE

Controlling Backpasses: Two coaches both positioned 12 yards out from goal, practiced simple backpasses to the goalkeeper. He would control the ball across his body with his near foot in the direction of the other coach and then make an accurate and firm pass to him with his opposite foot.



11 DIAGRAM AJAX U13 GKING TWO

Pass Followed by Shot:

- The goalkeeper now began with “bowling” the ball to the coach to his right.
- The coach passed the ball back to him at a medium speed for the goalkeeper to make a first-time pass with his foot to the other coach, now positioned at the 12 yard spot. The player was coached to narrow the angle by advancing slightly and to set himself immediately before the coach could shoot.
- The coach shoots first time medium high balls to the middle of the goal where the goalkeeper could make comfortable saves.
- After making the save, goalkeeper passes the ball to the goalkeeper to his right and the sequence begins again.
- The drill was later repeated from the opposite side of the field.



12 DIAGRAM AJAX U13 GKING THREE

Footwork and Shot-stopping: The second goalkeeper now joins the drill to create another option to the left of the goal.

Play is the same as the previous drill, but now when the coach near the 12 yard spot and receives the ball he has several options:

1. He can place his shot again at an easier height and force for the keeper to save
2. He can drive a low hard shot to the far or near post forcing a diving save from the keeper
3. He can play the ball into space for the 2nd goalkeeper to run on to and shoot first time
4. He can play the ball to the feet of the 2nd goalkeeper for him to try and dribble past the goalkeeper or to shoot from close range

Throughout, the head coach encouraged the working goalkeeper to constantly adjust his footwork to be ready for any of the options, to come out and narrow the angle when at all possible and to be ready to come out to confront a breakaway.

The session was lively and competitive while constantly reinforcing good footwork, angles and good decision making. The players cooled down with some a fun juggling game.

Monday March 19 Evening

Ajax Reserve Game & Attacking Tendencies

Jong Ajax (Ajax reserves) play their games at the Ajax training ground stadium on Monday nights in the Beloften Eredivisie, the highest reserve teams competition organized by the KNVB. Players must be aged 23 or below with 3 over-age “dispensation” players allowed on each team. The game we observed was a 3-1 victory over ADO Den Haag earned despite Ajax having a player sent off early in the second half for tussling with an opponent after a hard tackle.

Notable players playing for the reserves included Mats Rits, an 18 year old Belgian U23 national team player marked for stardom, former PSV and Blackburn Rovers centerback André Ooijer aged 37, and striker Mounir El Hamdaoui, 27, who - though born in Rotterdam - has elected to play internationally for Morocco through parentage. El Hamdaoui previously scored 50 goals in 80 appearances for AZ Alkmaar before scoring 13 times in 26 appearances for Ajax in 2010. He is considered to be “exiled” to the reserve team after falling out with manager Frank De Boer.

Ajax youth teams famously play the same system as the senior team and in the case of the reserve term, this is a 4-3-3 with “point back” meaning that the three midfield players are deployed in a triangle with two attacking midfield players and one defensive midfield player.



DIAGRAM AJAX RESERVES STARTING FORMATION 1

Playing against Den Haag's 4-4-2 formation, Ajax's #6 worked effectively to find space between the Den Haag back and midfield lines to create play through a range of short and long passes. Having two midfield players (8 and 10) in close support of the Ajax #9 meant that there was always an easy lay-off option for target passes and plenty of options via the system's abundance of diamonds and triangles.

A few notable aspects of Ajax's attacking play were:

**DIAGRAM AJAX RESERVES DIAGRAM 2 OBPushHigh****Build Up from the Back**

In addition to long throws from the goalkeeper to outside backs, then quickly supported by the midfield players and centerbacks for lay-offs, both centerbacks were comfortable stepping into midfield and supporting play as needed. More often they would both open play wide with the outside backs pushing very high to create room for the #6 to drop back and pick up the ball to begin play.



AJAX RESERVES DIAGRAM 3 Midfield Rotation

On the occasions when Den Haag would press tightly, the three center midfield players opted for a rotation and movement pattern intended to free up one of them to get in a position to receive the ball from a back player and allow for a measured build up.



AJAX RESERVES 4 RAKING PASS

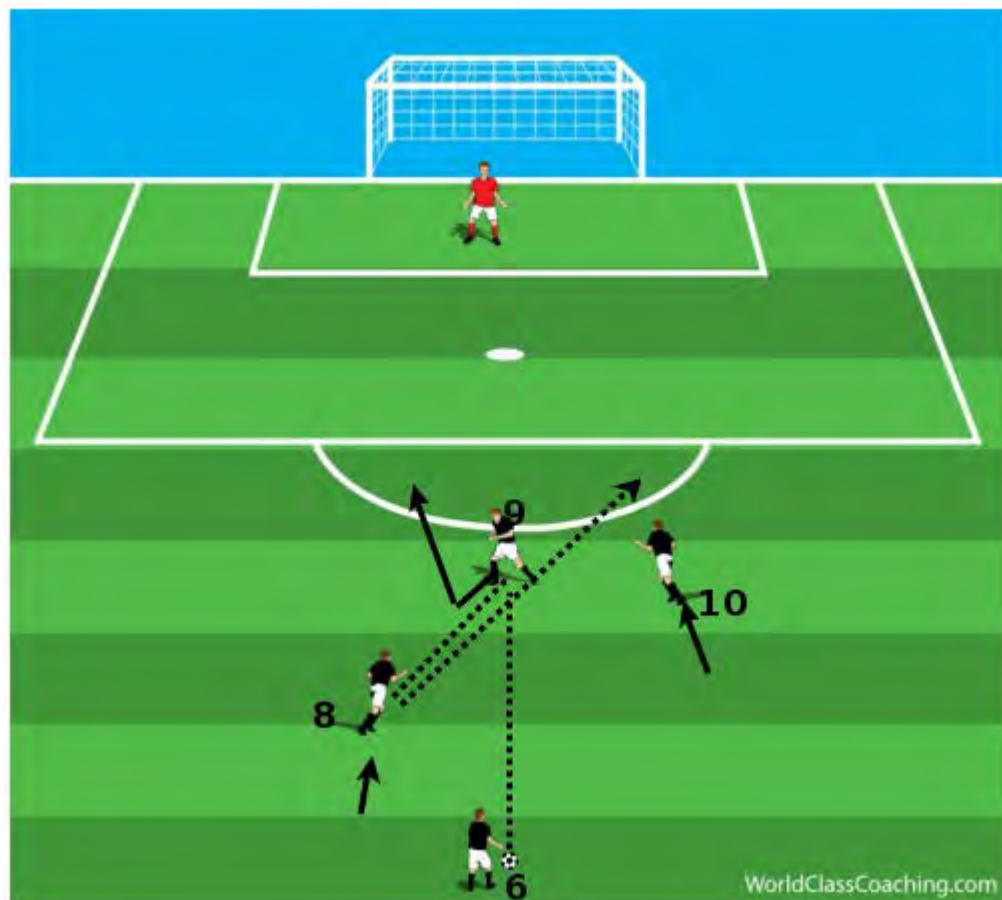
Centerbacks were not reticent to play long cross field balls into space for wingers (7 and 11) to move into space behind the defence or to “run” his defender forward before checking back into space to receive and turn to dribble or to lay off the ball to supporting midfield players.



5 AJAX RESERVES Midfield Combination One

Midfield Build-Up

Long passes, including those from the goalkeeper's feet or hands were always followed by close support. In the situation as shown, #2 advancing with the ball is able to pass to #10 in a congested midfield with confidence due to #10's movement and the team's ability to play one-touch in tight spaces. #6 is able to receive the ball in a position with time and space to play a short pass to #8 or for a longer flighted pass for the left winger to run on to.



6 AJAX RESERVES Midfield CombinationTwo

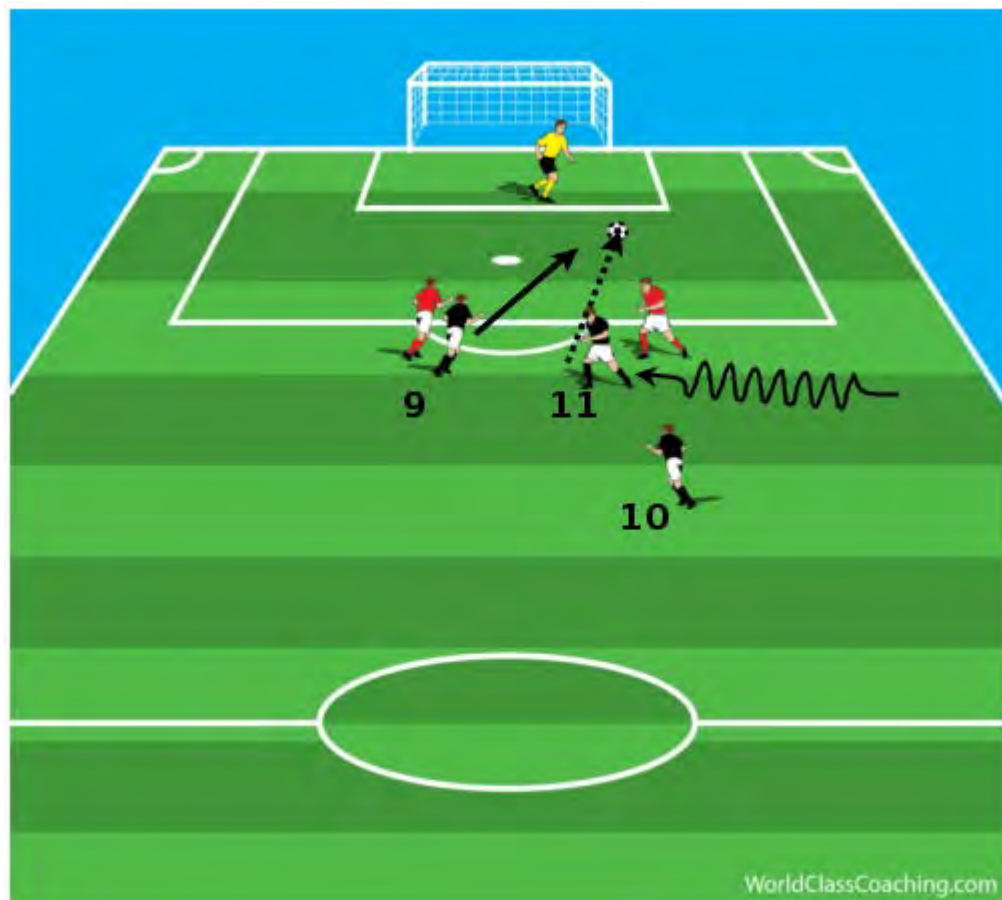
The proximity of the attacking midfield players 8 and 10 to the centerforward means that lay-offs and 3rd man combinations such as the two illustrated here were always possible.



7 AJAX RESERVES Midfield CombinationThree

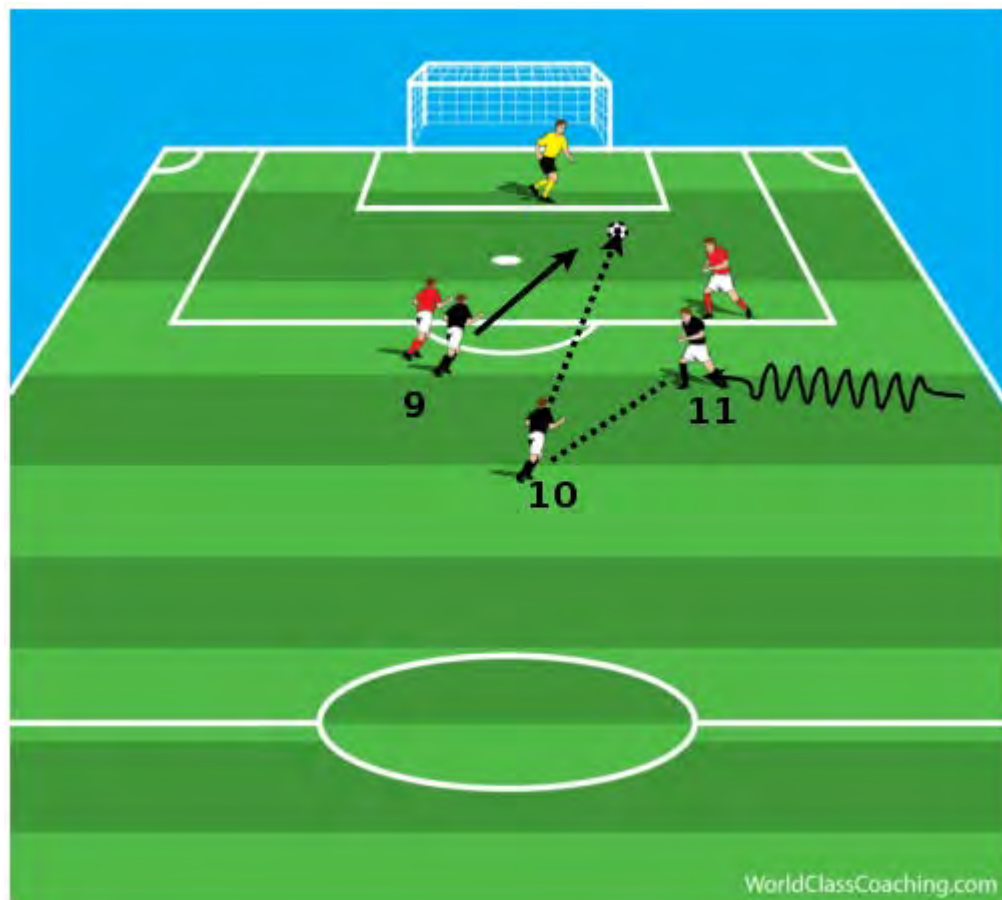
Attacking Third Play

As one would expect, both of the Ajax wingers were quick and decisive and not afraid to dribble and take opponents on. Starting in a wide position, they would cut in from the touchline at 45 degree angle at pace before driving to the endline and crossing, or alternately, cut in and drive across the face of the defence before playing a reverse pass to the #9 or an attacking midfield player making a carefully timed diagonal run into the box.



8 AJAX RESERVES FINAL THIRD 1

A variation on this was a dribble across the face of the defence by #11 before making a quick short pass to supporting #10 who himself then makes a first time weighted pass into the path of the #9 making a darting diagonal run into the penalty area.



9 AJAX RESERVES FINAL THIRD 2