

WOMEN'S SOCCER COACHING



MESSAGE RECEIVED

US DEAF WOMEN'S NATIONAL TEAM HEAD COACH AMY GRIFFIN
ON THE VITAL ROLE COMMUNICATION PLAYS IN HER CAREER

PLUS

- BLIND SOCCER AND THE ART OF COMMUNICATION
- HOW TO RETAIN YOUR TEENAGE PLAYERS
- 'YOU PLAY LIKE A GIRL' - WHY LANGUAGE IN COACHING MATTERS
- AND MUCH MORE...



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Women's Soccer Coaching website and monthly digital magazine offers proven, easy to use soccer drills, coaching sessions, practice plans, small-sided games, warm-ups, training tips and advice. The resources are created for the grassroots youth coach following best practice from around the world and insights from the professional game.

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FROM THE HEAD COACH

Communication is key to successful coaching

This month's issue is dedicated to communication - a vital, but sometimes overlooked, skill which is key to successful coaching, no matter what level, age or even sport you work in.

On a personal note, it's an area I'm really keen to develop and a skill I feel can make the difference between a good and great coach.

We were delighted to be able to speak with Amy Griffin. A former goalkeeper who has previously worked with the likes of Hope Solo, Amy is now executive director at OL Reign and head coach of the US Deaf Women's National Team (USDWNT). She shares her fascinating perspective with Steph Fairbairn.

One of Amy's players on the



USDWNT, Kate Ward, gives us an insight into the world of a deaf coach working in the mainstream game with the University of Texas El Paso, while we are also pleased to share an article from Katie Smith, who works with a blind soccer team in Ohio.

Even if you don't work in these specific fields, Amy, Kate and Katie offer some really great ideas and

insights into what makes a successful communicator. If you get chance, please do also check out our podcast with Amy - it was really inspirational listening to her speak and I took so much away from the time we had with her.

Also this month, we've got a thought-provoking piece on the psychology of language when working with girls, information for England-based coaches on how the Football Association is working to support their development within the female game and plenty more besides.

Take care and stay safe,

Hannah

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

Hannah Duncan (head coach): Hannah holds a UEFA B licence and FA Youth Award, and coaches in the Youth Development Phase at an FA Women's National League club. She has taken a representative team to the Gothia Cup, the world's largest youth tournament, and plays for Whyteleafe in step 5 of the English women's pyramid.

Steph Fairbairn: A coach originally from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in north-east England, but now working in London. She is Level 1 qualified and is head coach at Dalmain Athletic Girls FC, where she manages the Under-13s league team and coaches girls aged between 6 and 16.

Paul Wandless: Paul is Under-17 women's head coach at Egersund IK in Norway. He moved into women's football in 2021 following four seasons coaching in the men's game in Norway's sixth tier, as manager of Bjerkreim IL.

Megan Abbott: 18-year-old Megan is an FA level 1 coach, aspiring to go as far as she can in the game. She has four years of coaching experience, including FA Weetabix Wildcats, Under-7s coaching and soccer schools. She currently plays for Aylesford Ladies.

Katie Smith: Katie runs blind sport programs in Columbus, Ohio. She began coaching blind soccer in 2018 at a camp organized by the United States Association of Blind Athletes before launching her own program. Katie also runs a youth program through Ohio State School for the Blind.

Kate Ward: Assistant coach of the University of Texas El Paso women's soccer team and current captain of the US Deaf Women's National Team. Among her off-field roles, she is chair of the United Soccer Coaches Disability Allies Advocacy Group, vice-president of USA Deaf Soccer board.

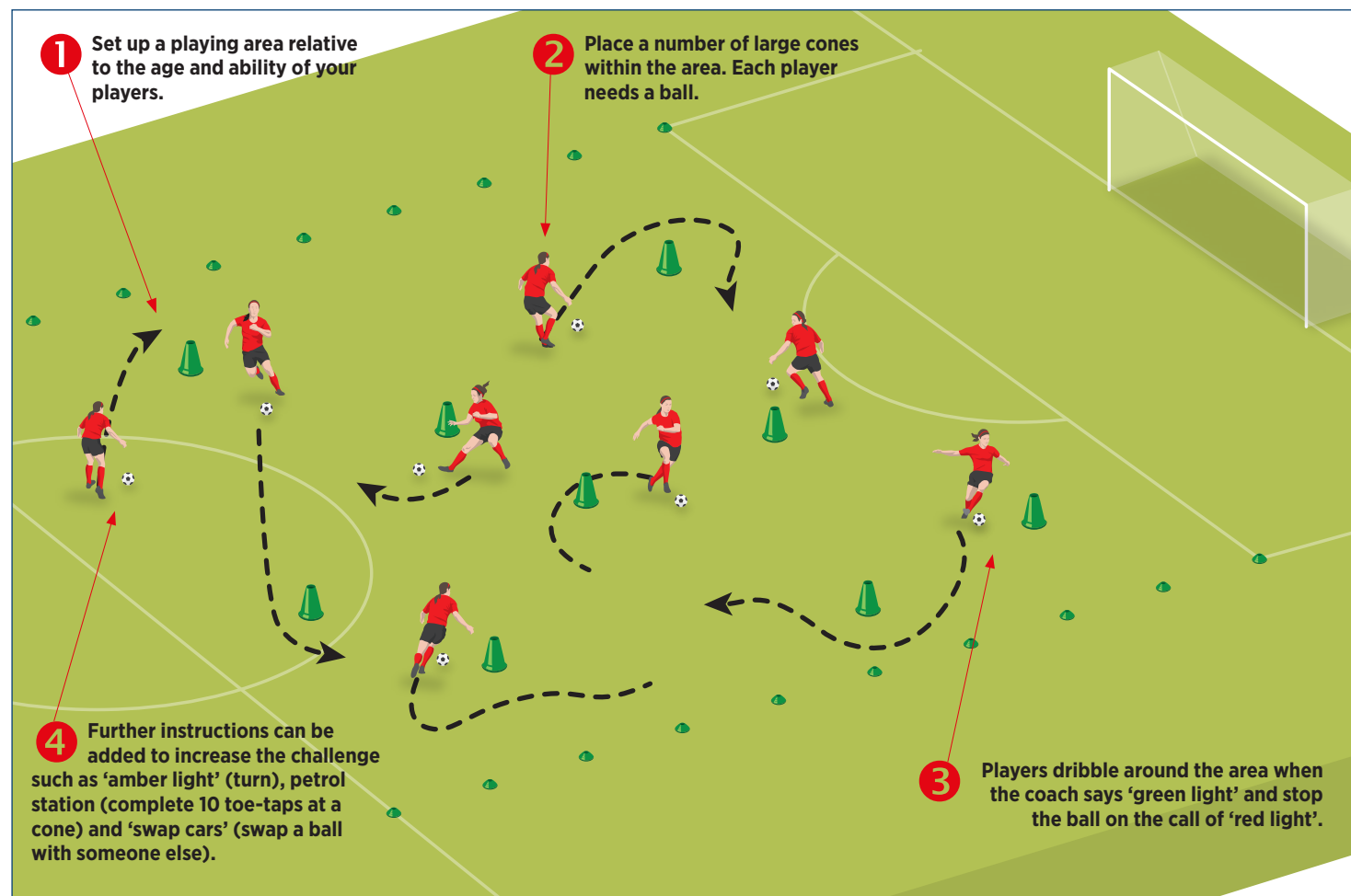
Carol Fogarty: Carol has 15 years' experience as a professional executive and team coach in business and industry in the UK. She is a Level 1 football coach and a Level 2 in volleyball, following a 30-year playing career in the Women's National Volleyball League in the UK.

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Lessons at the driving school

Develop confidence on the ball in this foundation practice. **By MEGAN ABBOTT**



WHY USE IT

This is a great ball-mastery practice for players to develop confidence in having the ball at their feet, as well as incorporating the ABCs (agility, balance, co-ordination and speed). The bumper cars round can also help players interact with each other while having fun.

SET-UP

Set-up a playing area relative to the age and ability of your players. Each player needs a ball and the area should have a number of cones (large dome cones if possible) dotted around randomly.

HOW TO DO IT

Players start in the area with a ball ('car') at their feet – and they are going to learn to drive! Players follow instructions from the coach, starting with: **'Red light'**: Stop with

foot on the ball and **'Green light'**: Dribble. When players are comfortable with this, you can add in more challenging instructions:

'Amber light': Do a drag-back turn.

'Windscreen wipers': Pass the ball from side to side with inside of feet.

'Petrol station': Every player must dribble their ball to a dome cone and do 10 toe-taps to refuel.

'Swap cars': Leave the ball where it is, find another and carry on dribbling.

You can progress the session further by adding in a bumper cars round. Now, all the cars magically transform into bumper cars. To score a point, players must bump footballs with another player.

TECHNIQUE

As you introduce players to new skills, ask them questions to keep them engaged, so they remember what techniques to use. For

example, "When we are in a smaller space with lots of players around us, do we need big or little touches?" or "Who can show me how to do a drag-back turn?"

Try to encourage players to look up while dribbling, as well as keeping the ball close to their feet when space is tight, and bigger touches when there is space in front of them to drive into.

ADAPTATIONS

Challenge the players by making the area smaller to encourage closer control, or incorporate new skills, such as a more challenging turn for an amber light, like a Cruyff turn or inside cut.

Make the session easier by starting without a ball. Players can perform star jumps for petrol station and high knees instead of toe-taps. You can then progress to having a ball involved but with the simple instructions of 'red light' and 'green light'.

FA's search to recruit more female coaches

A concerted drive to encourage more women into coaching is under way in England. **HANNAH DUNCAN** speaks to three of the people leading the hunt.



Sharon Muxworthy



Jo Williams



Jodie Whitford-Stark

As part of its new women's and girls' football strategy - called 'Inspiring Positive Change' - the Football Association says it aims to have exceptional coaches at every level of the game, who are representative of society.

To support this, the FA Grassroots Delivery Team has appointed eight Regional Coach Development Officers (CDOs), focusing on recruiting and developing female coaches across England.

Women's Soccer Coaching spoke with the FA's Sharon Muxworthy, Jo Williams and Jodie Whitford-Stark to find out more about how they are supporting female coaches and coaches within the female game...

WSC: How do you want to make an impact?

SM: "We want to inspire and empower a diverse female coaching workforce for the grassroots game.

"We aim to do this by sharing and celebrating the success stories of the existing female coaching workforce at all levels, to help women realise they already have the necessary skills to become a football coach.

"We are committed to supporting them to step over the sidelines, whether that be from

a parent, spectator or as a former player. The women and girls' coaching pathway is structured to support females at all stages of their journey.

"For coaches on the performance pathway, we aim to offer the support they need at the time they need it, so they can navigate their personal journeys."

"We want to inspire and empower a diverse female coaching workforce."

WSC: What support is in place for new, inexperienced or aspiring coaches?

SM: "We delivered four weekly regional webinars as we launched our 'Women in Coaching' campaign, to coincide with International Women's Day and Women's History Month.

"The webinars celebrated the journeys and experiences of women who coach in grassroots. Many give up their time freely

and it was truly inspirational to listen to women sharing how their journeys in coaching have enabled them to help so many players fall in love with football.

"This campaign celebrated the incredible work of female grassroots coaches, while also inspiring more women to begin their coaching journey, through highlighting the importance of female role models and greater visibility.

"These webinars uncovered a real thirst from women wanting to further develop and be involved with coaching and, as we return to the grass, we are hopeful we can support more females make the transition, with some practical sessions to support the new free online FA Playmaker course."

JW: "We've also launched a Female Grassroots Coaches Online Community - a safe, virtual space for likeminded individuals to connect, share and learn.

"It is hosted by the FA and monitored and contributed to by our coach development team. There are several different topic forums where members can ask questions, contribute to discussions, or even share some of their own ideas.

"The platform is also used to share



Sharon Muxworthy delivering a coach education session at Brighton and Hove Albion

inspirational case studies and best practice from around the country. To join the community, you will need an FA Number ([Click here >](#)) and then you can sign up to the group ([Click here >](#)).

WSC: What support is in place for more experienced and ambitious coaches?

JW-S: "The FA Women's High Performance Football Centres are part of the FA's coach development system.

"There are nine centres across England and each centre is based at a leading university in their region. Universities are high-performing institutions and are best placed to support coaches to be high performing.

"The team identify and support talented coaches in key areas, who aspire to work in the female game with the desire to be the best they can be.

"Since 2017, the centres have been supporting coaches to be better and progress. On average, each centre may work with 300 coaches a year.

"The coaches themselves have ownership over what their coach development journey looks like, what they engage with and to what extent."

WSC: What sort of support can coaches expect from the FA Regional Coach Development Officers and WHPC Coach Development Officers?

SM: "The learning and support we can provide is varied, as we look to meet the needs of females across the game, regardless of the context in which they coach.

"A blended approach ensures we can

utilise digital and/or 'on-demand' resources, as well as face-to-face practical delivery.

"It is hoped this accessible and flexible approach will remove any barriers or obstacles that may have in the past prevented females from engaging.

"We will also work closely with local County FAs to further provide targeted CPD support and deployment throughout the grassroots game, alongside a digital offering facilitated through England Football Learning."

"There is a real collaborative approach to support female coaches..."

JW-S: "The Women's High Performance Centres also offer training and support aligned to coaching in a high-performance environment, such as around the menstrual cycle, goalkeeping, session design, session delivery, analysis, reflecting, psychology, growth and maturation.

"This will be offered through a range of support mechanisms such as one-to-one support, group discussions, communities of

support and bespoke content specific to the needs of the coaches in their community."

WSC: How can coaches get involved and find their nearest Women's High Performance Centre?

JW-S: "You can find your nearest FA Women's High-Performance Centre by [clicking here](#).

"There is a real collaborative approach and clear strategy in helping to support female coaches and coaches within the female game.

"This is helping us, as a team of coach developers, to really work together in ensuring we maximise the right type of support for all, no matter their context.

"So, if you're an aspiring female coach in England and want to know more about the support the FA provides, contact your local County FA Women and Girls' Officer and they can introduce you to your Regional Coach Development Officer for Women and Girls to help you plan your next steps.

"Depending on the stage you are at in your journey, we will ensure you are signposted to the best support for you at that time.

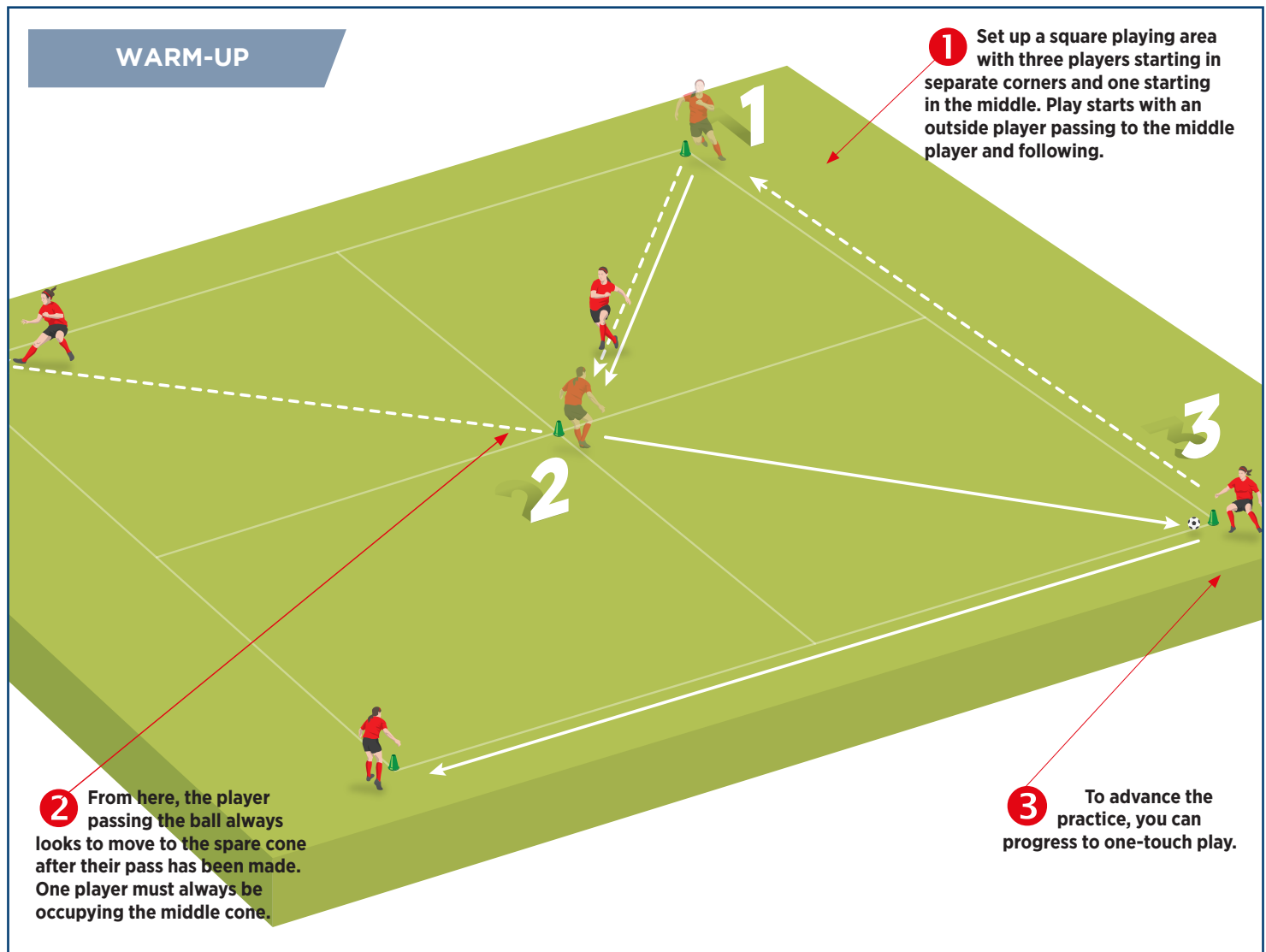
"Whether it be your local County FA, FA Regional Coach Development Officer, or Women's High Performance Centre Coach Development Officer, we will aim to support you together."

Sharon Muxworthy is FA Regional Coach Development Officer for women and girls in the south-east region.

Jo Williams is FA Regional Coach Development Officer for women and girls in the east region
Jodie Whitford-Stark is Coach Development Officer at FA Women's High-Performance Football Centre, St Mary's University, London

Movement off the ball

This three-part session develops players' awareness of moving off the ball to support play, create angles and make intelligent runs. By **PAUL WANDLESS**



WHY USE IT

This is a fun warm-up, getting players moving while getting as much contact as possible on the ball early in the session.

SET-UP

This practice requires five cones and four players, though can be extended to six cones and five players. Place four cones to form a square, with one in the middle.

If possible, use tall/dome cones as this focuses movement around the cone as well as providing an obstacle, forcing the passer to focus on the direction of the pass.

HOW TO DO IT

Three players start on different outside cones, one starts on the middle cone. With no restrictions on the number of touches, players pass and then move to the cone which is free.

One player must remain in the middle - so if you pass into the middle, you are following the pass (as seen in the diagram).

The pass then has to be to a player who is available and ready to receive. The practice can be progressed to one-touch after a few minutes to improve the speed of the game and players' concentration on the next pass.

TECHNIQUE

Encourage players to think ahead, concentrating on where the next pass needs to go, before they receive the ball.

This will help them adopt the best body shape to play a good quality pass at speed, or take a first touch in the direction they intend the pass to go.

Also, encourage passers to play the ball to the foot of the receiver which will be most helpful for them to complete their next pass. Weight of pass is also important in this practice, while quick movement off the ball is pivotal to success.

Player movement ■■■➔

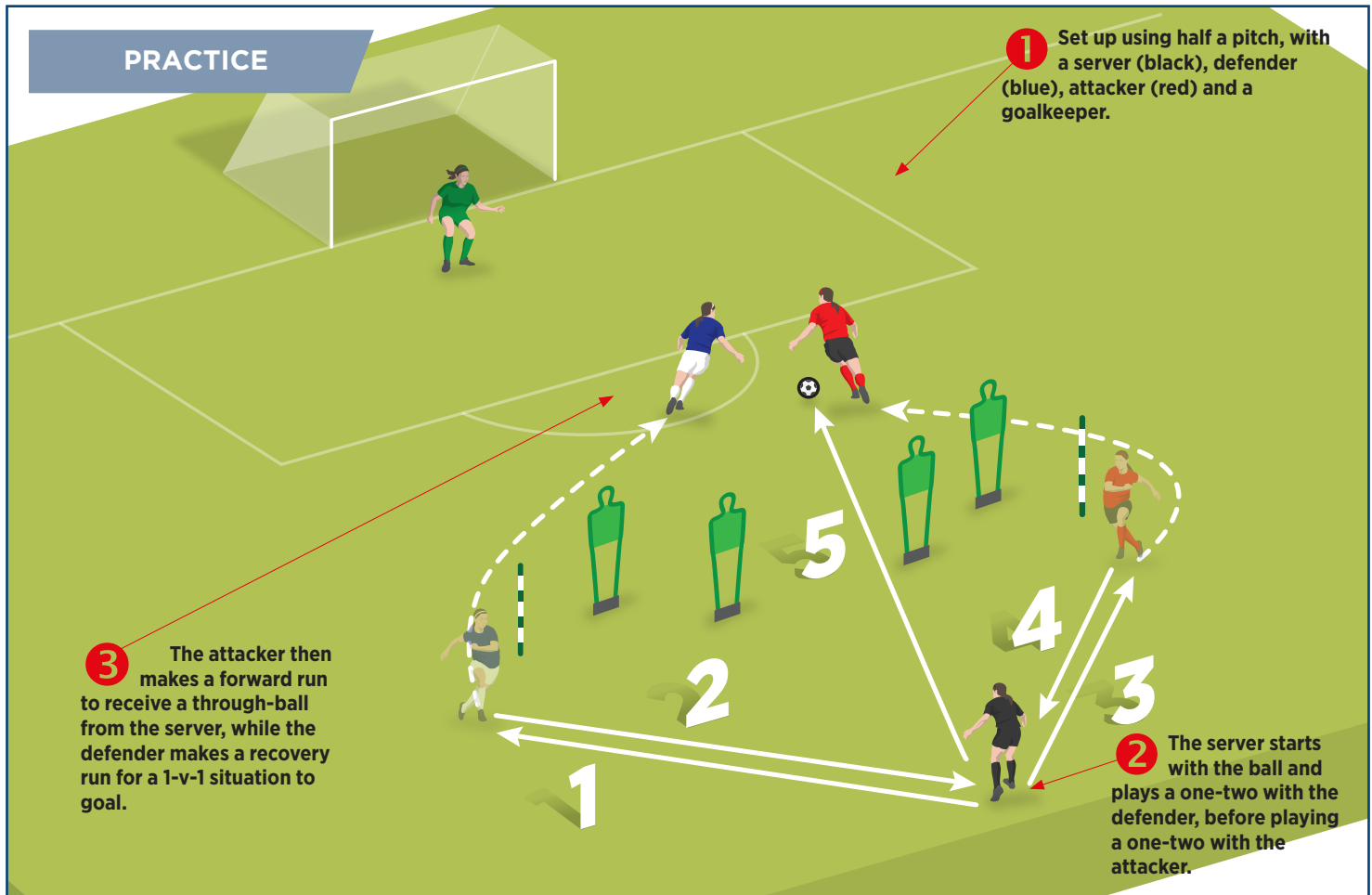
Ball movement ➡

Run with ball ■■■➔

Shot ➡

Movement off the ball

This three-part session develops players' awareness of moving off the ball to support play, create angles and make intelligent runs. By **PAUL WANDLESS**



WHY USE IT

This practice gets players' feet on the ball as well as encouraging quality and timing of movement off the ball.

SET-UP

Set up poles as the start-point markers for the defender (blue) and attacker (red) just outside of the 18-yard box and place mannequins as obstacles in-between the two poles. Use a full-size goal.

HOW TO DO IT

Three players - one attacker, one defender, one server - set up outside the 18-yard box. The server starts with the ball. You can also use a goalkeeper if available. The server plays a one-two with the defender

(blue) before playing a one-two with the attacker (red). The server then plays a through-ball for the attacker to run onto and try to score.

As soon as the ball is played, the defender must also react and get into position to defend 1-v-1 and prevent a shot on goal.

TECHNIQUE

This practice gets players on their toes and focuses them on providing a good weight of pass, adopting a good body shape, as well as developing an explosive movement once the through-ball is played.

Encourage players to curve their run to stay onside and work on feints, double-feints and other movements to deceive defenders.

The server can also work on disguising their through-ball with a no-look pass, using the

outside of the foot or deceiving with their body shape.

ADAPTATIONS

This practice can be switched up in a few different ways, such as altering the number of passes before the through-ball is played.

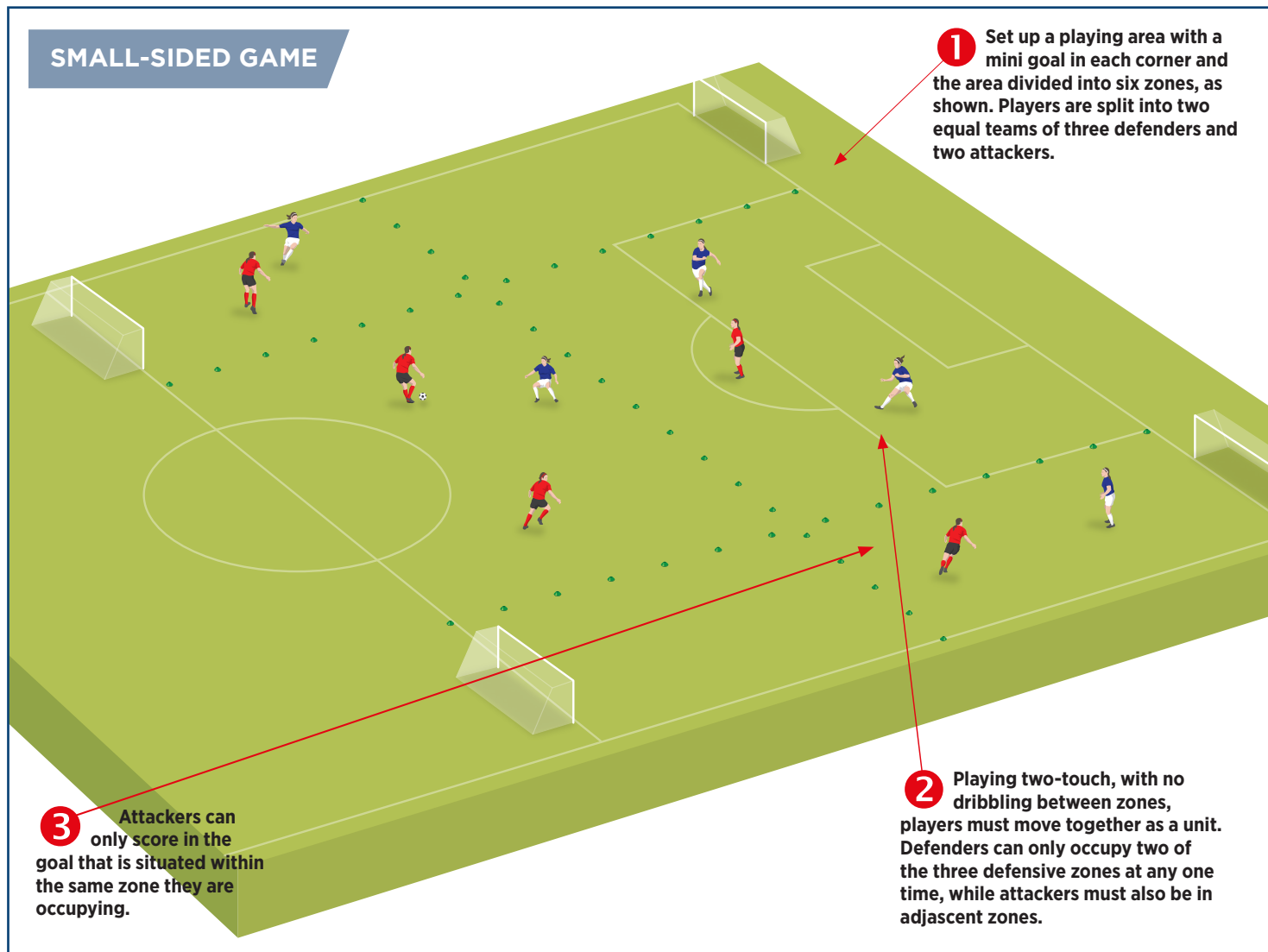
For example, another one-two could be played with the defender, or the through-ball could be played immediately after the first one-two, ensuring players remain on their toes and focused on their movement.

Players can also work off different starting positions, or work on different combinations to create an opening.

For example, the attacker could peel wide to receive, creating space for the server to drive between the mannequins and shoot themselves.

Movement off the ball

This three-part session develops players' awareness of moving off the ball to support play, create angles and make intelligent runs. By **PAUL WANDLESS**



WHY USE IT

This small-sided game builds on the previous practice and is based around awareness of team-mates' positions, positions of opponents and moving across the field together as a team.

SET-UP

Set-up using half a pitch, split into six zones, with a small goal in each corner. Play with two teams of 5-v-5, with each team having three defenders and two attackers.

HOW TO DO IT

It is a two-touch game, requiring players to move together to score goals. A player can only score from within the same zone as the goal they are scoring into. The three defenders should stay within two of

the three defensive zones at any one time.

So, in the above image, if the blues' right-sided defender were to move into the vacant zone, the left-sided defender would need to be aware to move into the central defensive area.

The two attacking players must also stay in different attacking areas. Players cannot dribble the ball into a different area, so passing and movement off the ball are important.

TECHNIQUE

Encourage players to consider when to move as a team and to work on different types of movement to deceive defenders, support in-possession team-mates and create overloads.

Passing skills are also developed in this practice, with weight of pass, passing to feet or into space and passing to the front or back foot all important to success.



A reputation in communication

As a World-Cup winning goalkeeper, successful youth coach and head coach of the US Deaf Women's Team, **AMY GRIFFIN** knows how to get her message across. She explains her methods to **STEPH FAIRBAIRN**

In 1991, Amy Griffin - then Amy Allman - was a goalkeeper on the US Women's National Team squad that won the first-ever FIFA Women's World Cup.

Fast forward 25 years, to 2016, and Griffin was a world champion again - this time as head coach of the US Deaf Women's National Team (USDWNT).

The intervening quarter-of-a-century was spent passing on her deep knowledge and infectious enthusiasm to college soccer players - including future World-Cup winning goalkeeper Hope Solo at the University of Washington - and the US Under-20s Women's National Team.

But Griffin describes the role of head coach of the USDWNT, which she took on in 2015, as "the best gift I've been given".

It has also given her new challenges in terms of communication, an area she excels in given her playing and coaching background.

The team is made up of players with hearing impairments of varying levels. "There are very few people on our team that can understand everyone," Griffin told WSC.

"Some read lips, some sign only, some speak only, some do a smattering of everything. Some do charades, which would probably be my go-to most often when I get stuck.

"There are a lot of obstacles on the field. If someone's running behind you, for example, you can't tell them to drop. If I turn my head 15 degrees, I've just eliminated six or seven players that can't even read my lips or understand what I might be trying to convey.

"It's really hard to make sure everyone's on the same page."

It is a world Griffin was familiar with before taking the job. Her cousin's son became deaf

"Communication is every bit as important as food, water and shelter..."

following illness and it encouraged her family members to learn sign language.

"I happened to be in college at the time," Griffin said. "I was really drawn to the animation of it.

"I think the expressions and body language sometimes tell a deeper story than the words that we say. I love watching - even if I'm not sure what what people are saying, I can tell the mood behind it and I think it's really expressive.

"If you ask the players if I sign, they'll say 'heavens no, but she tries'. If players sign a little bit slower than their normal cadence, I can understand a lot of it. I've picked up a lot and I've taken sign language classes.

"I think most of the players appreciate that I try, instead of just turning my back and talking to the interpreter. I don't ignore the fact that I'm learning.

"Watching the players off the field, integrating in the hearing world, I see how many people shut them out because they're nervous.

"No-one wants to be forgotten and no-one wants to be not talked to because someone is afraid they don't know how to communicate. Just try. Get a pen and paper and include everyone.

"I think communication is every bit as important as food, water and shelter. I really do. The more I understand how important communication is, the more I realise I have a long way to go."

Griffin's approach to effective communication hinges on two key pillars - the first of which is clarity in messaging.

"Pick a topic and stay true to that topic," she advises. "If today you're working on finding the channels in the wide spaces, make that all you coach. That way, the message has



Amy Griffin has been head coach of the US Deaf Women's National Team since 2015

a lot better chance of hitting home.

"Before practice with the USDWNT, I'll tell them what the practice plan is. So when they take their hearing aids out, or even if it's via sign language, we know what drill is first, what drill is second and the concepts we're trying to convey."

The second pillar in Griffin's communication ethos is transparency.

"Being as honest as possible, and being able to show that things aren't going perfectly, is important," she said.

"If you're out on the field and something that looked great on paper isn't flowing, instead of getting aggravated or frustrated, sometimes it's a good time to look inside and see if there's something you could be doing differently and share that with who you are coaching."

Other tactics Griffin employs when working with the USDWNT include allowing players a little more time to solve things on their own

rather than freezing the game, and showing video clips to the team, with the help of an interpreter.

And many of the lessons Griffin learns with the deaf team, she has put into practice with the hearing teams she works with.

"Being able to show that things aren't going perfectly is important."

Her current role - which she took up in 2019 after 24 years coaching at the University of Washington - is as executive director of OL Reign's academy.

Griffin describes her role as "making sure 200 families and players understand our mission and vision and want to be a part

of that". Much of the role involves cutting through what she calls the "white noise" of youth sports.

She said: "There are a lot of people that think youth sports needs to be the place where you're promised a college scholarship or a stage where you're going to make the national team.

"We can help you with that, but our vision is that it's a by-product. It's just a bonus.

"Our club really wants to show that we have a lot of great female role models and a few guys that have always thought the women's game is where it's at.

"We want to create a platform where it does not matter what level you are, you will still have an amazing coach and you will still get treated like the most valuable person in our club.

"Do we get it right every day? Not even close. But we're trying."

It's clear that, for Griffin and the project

'HOW THE DEAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP CHANGED MY PERSPECTIVE'



As head coach, Amy Griffin led the US Deaf Women's National Team to their second consecutive World Deaf Football Championship title in 2016.

The team (pictured celebrating) went undefeated, beating Russia 3-0 in the final.

Griffin offered a unique perspective on the 2016 Championships. She said: "We were there for three weeks, and it felt like I was the one with a different ability.

"Everyone playing was deaf, the refs were deaf, the coaches were deaf. We were the only team with a hearing coach so we were sort of frowned upon.

"I was the one that was missing all the information. I was the one that was frustrating people.

"I was always confused, I was exhausted and I was trying to figure out what the heck was going on and people weren't talking to me. I got to live that for three weeks.

"Because of that, I am so much more aware now of all people with a variety of abilities when I have the access and the means to move through life as easily as I can.

"I never would have felt that as deep if I hadn't been a coach of this team."

'MAKE SURE THEY SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING' - AMY GRIFFIN'S THREE TIPS FOR COACHES WORKING WITH DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING PLAYERS

1 GIVE THEM A LINE OF SIGHT

"Make sure that, when you're doing a drill, they're second or third in the line, so they see what's happening first. They can visually see what you're trying to create and it doesn't put them on the spot. Making sure they are in your view when you're coaching will help bring some calm."

2 CREATE SOCCER-SPECIFIC SIGNING

"We've learned a few signs more specific to soccer. And because of how you would express them on the field, our signs are bigger so everyone can see. We have really quick, animated, large signs. Just a few signs to help integrate the deaf person into a hearing team is super helpful. The kids have fun with it and they learn sign language and then they learn more about deaf culture and the deaf player doesn't feel so isolated."

3 DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS

"Little things go such a long way, like not being afraid to ask a player a question – somebody might say 'I don't want to make her feel uncomfortable', but she's going to continue to feel uncomfortable if you don't say anything. Sitting down with a deaf player and saying 'How can I help? What would you like to see?' means you're not just going from your knowledge base of not being deaf. The perception of what you think they might need and what they actually need might be completely different."



she's building at OL Reign, there is so much more to the game than winning matches.

"I'm finding the coaches that want to buy into what we're doing," she said. "At the older ages, you have to learn how to compete, and in the oldest age group, you have to find a way to win, within our style of play."

"We want supportive coaches that aren't throwing clipboards and all that stuff."

It is a refreshing attitude for someone with as many accolades as Griffin. When asked to reflect on what it is like seeing players she has coached at a young age progress, she offers two different examples.

The first is seeing some of those involved in her US youth teams make it to the senior side, including Rose Lavelle, while she knows Megan Rapinoe from her college days.

"You know you're doing okay when you still have relationships with some of these players that look back at their time and know that maybe we were one tiny piece [in their careers] and that the environment was good enough that they learned something while they were in it."

The second example references two players whose futures in the game are yet undefined.

Griffin said: "We had a player show up at training [with OL Reign] who is home from college for the summer and wanted to get back on the field with her former club. Her coming back is the best compliment ever."

"When things aren't going well, I feel the players know what it's like to be me."

"We also have a player that's the number one keeper in the country and will be a senior in high school. She was training for a World Cup that unfortunately she didn't get to compete in because of Covid."

Griffin's role at Reign will see her have a guiding hand in the future careers of many players. But just as important to her is shaping

teenagers into adults.

She said: "If we nail the experience, if we can teach girls how to navigate the hard challenges, how to be good teammates and good people, how to have tough conversations, how to receive feedback, how to push the envelope a little bit more than they thought they could and get through to the other side, those are the long-term wins."

"That doesn't happen in a weekend or even a season. It happens through the long haul of developing and will never end. I think that's the best part."

And what has she learned from the teams she coaches? Griffin refers again to the deaf team.

She said: "When things aren't going well, I feel like the players know what it's like to be me. They just smile and I know they can see my frustration."

"They're like 'you're fine' and I just take a breath and we move forward. I just wish it was like that in more places in this world."

"They give me confidence to just try. Just try." **WSC**



"When times are tough, she had such a fine balance of urgency..."
HEAR MORE FROM AMY GRIFFIN, INCLUDING HOW HOPE SOLO SPREAD POSITIVITY THROUGH HER DEFENCE WITH HER COMMUNICATION AND BODY LANGUAGE, ON OUR LATEST PODCAST — [CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD IT](#) ↗

5 ways to encourage good communication

HANNAH DUNCAN with tips on how coaches can turn up your players' volume

It is amazing how often, as coaches, we can't get players to stop chatting while we are setting up, during drinks breaks or even when they should be listening to instructions!

Yet when they step onto the grass, conversation quickly dries up and it is more akin to a library than a football pitch.

Encouraging players to not only communicate, but communicate effectively, is a challenge faced by many coaches, yet it is such an important component of any successful team.

Here are some methods to try in your sessions to turn up the volume.

01 NO TALKING!

It sounds a little counter-intuitive, but by putting a condition on a small-sided game which says no player can talk, you might suddenly find they are all desperate to give support and instructions.

Start by awarding a free-kick to the opposition any time a player communicates out loud - and by not allowing talking, it might help some players realise the value of it.

Of course, there are other ways for players to communicate too, whether through hand gestures or eye-contact, and this can help them explore these methods more.

02 ONLY ONE PLAYER PER TEAM CAN TALK

A lot of teams have one or two players who do the talking for everyone, which can make them over-reliant on that select few.

A condition of a small-sided game could be that the coach selects one player per team who is the only player allowed to use their voice. This also gives quieter players the chance to lead, without being drowned out by the naturally louder players.

Some players, however, may not be as comfortable being in the spotlight, so perhaps the chosen player could be rotated every five or 10 minutes.

03 STRATEGIC GAMES

Strategy games are fun ways to get players talking and issuing instructions.

Try noughts and crosses/tic-tac-toe (played by two teams racing relay-style to drop bibs onto cones, or dribble balls into squares) or



Communication between team-mates is vital - but it relies on the right information being passed on, and players willing to speak up (Picture: Ollie Chamberlain)

versions of tag (e.g, two teams playing with a ball in hand, players try to tag opponents with the ball for a point but are not allowed to move when in possession of the ball).

These are easy playground games that players will already know well and have a good tactical understanding of, so they will often naturally start guiding team-mates or verbalising their ideas and strategies.

04 BLIND FOOTBALL/ OBSTACLE COURSES

This is a great method for educating players about effective communication.

Supportive comments like "well done" or "great shot" are certainly not to be discouraged, but we also want our players to give useful information to their team-mates - where to press, what pass is on, which shoulder a player is approaching, whether to turn or protect the ball, and so on. A few cones and bibs are all that is required for this game.

Teams can compete in relay races to add an element of jeopardy and really encourage players to give good, clear instructions to one another.

One player begins blindfolded with a bib, while their partner has to guide them around an obstacle course. You can add a number of challenges, from dribbling a ball, having to collect certain coloured cones, avoiding other

players passing across the course - or get the players to come up with their own ideas.

05 DEVELOPING LEADERS

While the above examples can be used in training sessions on an ad-hoc basis, the best way to encourage communication within your team is often over a period of time.

Developing a culture within your team, where players are given the opportunity to lead in different scenarios, is a great way to embed values and build confidence - hopefully resulting in better on-pitch communication.

Take players aside in training and give them the chance to coach from the sidelines for 15 minutes. Some may choose to loudly issue direction, others may be more comfortable relaying to you, the coach, what they have observed, while others may want to take a half-time team-talk.

You could rotate matchday captains through the season, giving everyone opportunities to lead. Again, some will be loud leaders and others will lead quietly by example.

Players can also be given ownership over warm-ups, progressions or constraints of practices, organising teams for small-sided games, choosing matchday formations or tactics, or any number of responsibilities which will empower them and help develop leadership skills.

Blind soccer: a unique art in communication

Coach **KATIE SMITH** explains how crucial clear messaging is when none of your players can see...

Blind soccer is a relatively new sport to the US, with very few coaches in the country. I am so thankful to be one of them.

It is very different from sighted soccer. Blind soccer is a 5v5 game, with four blind or visually impaired players who all wear eyeshades to level out the playing field. The goalkeepers are sighted.

Matches are played on an area similar to a futsal field (40x20m) and there are sideboards along the length of the field used for the athlete's orientation within the pitch.

Three guides assist with communication - the goalkeeper talks to the players in the defensive third of the field, the coach at midfield can communicate in the middle third, and an assistant coach or sighted guide is behind the opponent's goal to talk to the offensive third of the field.

These guides are crucial for players to shoot the ball, locate it on the field or in case any lose orientation. Most of the communication, though, is through the athletes themselves.

Teammates are constantly using key phrases, like "here", "come to" and "sideboard", while defenders are required to say "voy" when challenging an opponent. This allows for minimal collisions and enables the attacker to decipher where a defender is.

Coaching athletes who are blind or visually impaired means you must communicate in a

different way. You cannot just show players skills or drills - without sight, you must be very verbal.

From directions of a drill to understanding the defensive form, you as the coach are constantly describing positioning of the athlete's body and how they are to proceed down the field.

The first thing you must explain is the orientation of the field. Players need to know where they are located within the pitch and sideboards, the goal location, and their formation on the field.

When describing the width of the field, I will set athletes along one sideboard and tap or say the word "here". They can understand the distance from the sound.

"The players' ability to communicate and orientate themselves astounds me..."

This is also true with the ball, which has ball bearings in it to make a rattling sound. As players get more comfortable with their mobility on the field, they learn to gauge the distance of the sound of the ball and localize the direction.

We will practice a few drills with them that focus on localizing the sound of the ball and staying in position as a team when a teammate is going after the ball.

When first teaching some of the skills, such as dribbling, you use words such as "caressing the ball", so players know not to kick the ball out too far in front of them and lose the location of the ball.

You must describe what area of the foot they need to use to dribble the ball, along with how far apart their feet should be and at what angle. Constant explanation is pertinent for the players to understand what you are asking of them, no matter the skill or drill, whether in practice or in game.

Because there is constant communication



on the field - with the ball, the players and the guides - blind soccer requires immense concentration. It can be difficult to focus on the ball, your location and constant movement within the pitch.

But even with this difficulty, the team has built an understanding of the communication needs for each player. The ability of these athletes to communicate and orientate themselves to the field astounds me.

When we are playing a scrimmage, there will be a breakaway and the players' communication to each other, accuracy of the pass right to their feet and the ability to shoot a moving ball without seeing it is incredible.

The best part of the game is that these athletes are shooting at experienced sighted goalies. They truly motivate me to work harder as a coach every day.

No matter if you are coaching a blind soccer team or a sighted soccer team, communication is pertinent, not only on the field but off it.

I believe understanding your athletes is a large part of the game. I try to get to know every one of my players so when it is time to play I know where their headspace is within practice or on gameday.

I get to know them from their athletic abilities, health perspective, and personally. My openness on and off the field allows me to create a relationship where I am respected and trusted within the soccer pitch.

My athletes know me and know what to expect on the field. They also know I am there for them off the field, too.

Communicating who you are as a coach, your expectations, and your passion for them to succeed will only better you as a coach and allow your athletes to come as their best selves to practice daily.





Kate Ward (centre) with US Deaf Women's National Team head coach Amy Griffin (left) and Joy Fawcett after winning the 2016 Deaf World Football Championship

'I chose right way to make an impact'

As a player, **KATE WARD** spent 12 years on the US Deaf Women's National Team. Now she makes a difference as a coach, giving players she works with a window into her world. Here, Kate tells us her story and how coaching has inspired her...

The sound of a soccer ball being kicked is one of my favorite sounds in the world. I suppose that is ironic because I've been deaf since I was six years old.

When I was three, my parents learned I was deaf in one ear, and hard of hearing in the other. I got hearing aids in both ears and they worked well for about three years. When I was six, I realized they were not working well.

I went back to the doctor, who was unable to do much as my hearing quickly deteriorated over the next few weeks. All too soon, in one month exactly, I became a little girl with a 'legal' disability.

I am lucky because I quickly had surgery for a cochlear implant, a hearing device which has enabled me to function in the hearing world quite well.

There is a common misconception that a hearing device automatically restores your hearing to a normal capacity. I can assure you this is not the case.

I grew up in a hearing world. I have hearing friends and hearing family. I went to hearing schools, and played on hearing soccer teams. And I have spent every day since I was six doing everything I could to fit in and "be normal" in a world predominantly not like me,

just because others can hear while I cannot.

Deafness is often referred to as an "invisible disability". I have spent 20 years of my life learning all the tricks to fit in - how to fake my way through conversations, how to position myself in noisy restaurants so my 'good ear' is facing everyone, how to

"Soccer has been a way for me to prove my own abilities to myself and others..."

anxiously strain to read lips in loud, crowded places, how to introduce my 'deafness' at the right time when I meet new people.

And yet, I often think my own disability is largely a societal limitation that has made my actual sensorial and physical limitation much more difficult to understand.

I am lucky because I've found that sports, and soccer in particular, have been a way for me to prove my own abilities to myself and others.

I look back after 12 years on the US Deaf Women's National Team (USDWNT) and I am so grateful for the journey and what it has taught me as a person, a player, and a leader, and the unique opportunities it has provided me within the soccer world.

Growing up, soccer was a way for me to escape and be a 'normal' kid. I was very lucky to grow up in a community, and with teams and coaches, who helped me achieve this.

In a lot of ways, I think the adults and friends in my life made it a point to be discreet about how much thought they put into making experiences I participated in inclusive.

I'm grateful my coaches and teammates in club and college never made it a big deal that they sometimes had to play telephone to get a message to me on the field or that they made it a point to face me when talking to me.

From a personal point of view, I think it has made me a better player because I must be more aware of what is going on around me, as I can't always rely on vocal information from my teammates or coaches.

Before I ventured into coaching, I had always wanted to be an ear doctor because I



thought it would be the best way to help kids who were growing up like me.

When I finished undergrad with a science degree, I took a gap year to apply for post-graduate health care schools, but soon began to realize that perhaps the greatest impact I could have was staying in the game that had the greatest impact on me.

My deafness, and my experience with the USDWNT, has given me a different perspective on coaching. It also has presented its own set of unique challenges.

In a lot of respects, I'm just like any other coach. But, I've also had to learn that there are things I have to do differently in order to be successful.

I can't always hear the little comments players make, what the referee says, the changes opposing coaches make, or what my player is shouting across the field. Luckily, I am surrounded by people who know that and will relay that information.

These people also challenge me to be intentional in everything I do, to ensure I can avoid moments where my deafness negatively affects my coaching.

I have experimented with different ways to give instruction – do I explain it in the huddle and take questions there or do I set them up first and have them raise hands if they have questions? The hand-raising has been vital for me, because I am often unable to understand where sound is coming from.

It has been special to build this relationship with my players in that I have seen them working to learn what does and doesn't work for me, and then I get to experience them

adjusting to that in the future so it's not an issue again. They even secretly learned how to sign "Happy Birthday" and surprised me with it on my birthday. It still makes me smile thinking about it.

This team has made having conversations about my experience as a deaf person easier, and their questions and perspectives on it have taught me many things.

I talked to a few of my players when I wrote this article because I was curious about a question I was asked to reflect on – "Have my experiences impacted my players? Do they have a different perspective on communication skills or attitudes on or off the field?"

"My deafness has given me a different perspective on coaching..."

Some of them cited having more patience in communicating or being intentional or adaptable in how they communicate. But the most meaningful feedback I received – and I was told not to let it go to my head! – was that their experience of having a coach who is deaf has made them want to make the time and effort to learn others' stories and have more patience and adaptability with other people's situations.

Perhaps I chose the right profession to have an impact, after all.

I have been extremely lucky because I have been able to build an awesome network in the soccer world thanks to my time with the USDWNT, and our head coach, Amy Griffin, who I also consider a mentor.

When I first thought about going into coaching, I turned to Amy and – as she so often has done for me throughout my career – she put me on a path that would help me grow and develop in a personal and professional sense.

She helped me get to my first United Soccer Coaches Convention in 2017, and then told me to go to a meeting there to learn more about starting up a group that advocates for coaches with disabilities.

This group has come to be known as the Disabilities Allies Advocacy Group, and was started with the intention of advocacy for – and raising awareness of – coaches with disabilities and those who coach players with disabilities.

I am proud of how this group has worked to provide a platform and community for disability soccer in the US. This year is big for us, as we are working to release an online coaching curriculum that has been in the works for more than two years, to promote our first ever Disability Awareness Week with United Soccer Coaches in September.

I love coaching, and I love the game of soccer. I love the highs and lows, the winning, the long bus rides, the goosebumps after an overtime goal, and everything in between.

But what I love most about this game is the ability it has to change lives on and off the field. My own life is one of those.



‘Man up, you play like a girl...’

...and that’s no bad thing. Coach **CAROL FOGARTY** explains that what we say and, more importantly, how we say it can have a big impact on our players

Before diving into the world of soccer and what it means for female players psychologically, it is worth sharing a perspective on the impact of the wider social environment in which they live on a daily basis.

This environment, like the club and the pitch, has an important role to play in shaping a woman’s sense of self, her identity in the wider world and the values on which she builds her attitudes and behaviours.

In 2001, renowned sociologist Geert Hofstede conceived the “Masculinity Index” - essentially, how national cultural values and mindsets could be distinguished in terms of the degree to which they represented masculine or feminine behaviours and ideals.

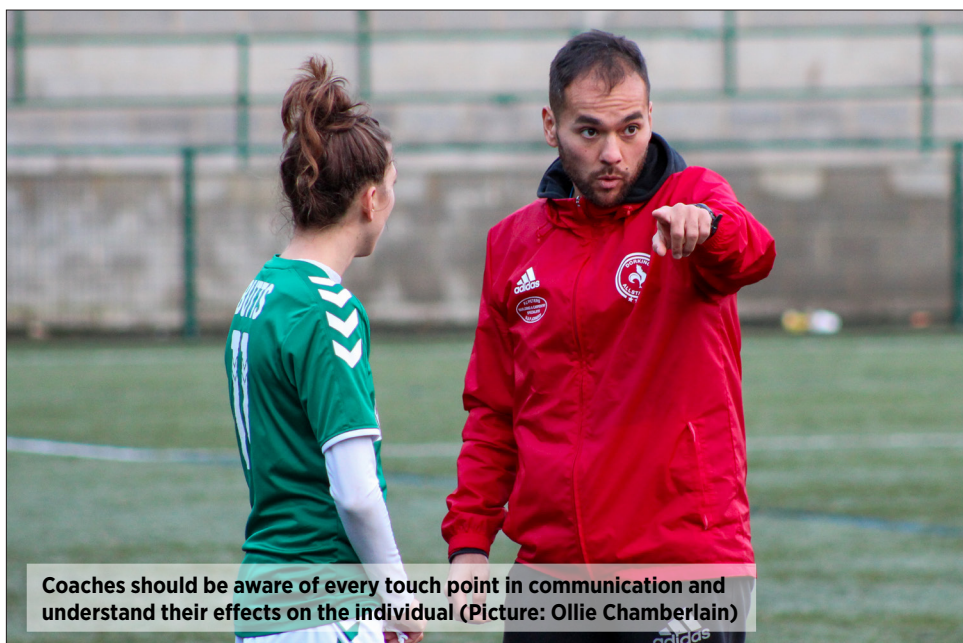
In so-called ‘masculine’ cultures, people - whether male or female - value competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition, and the accumulation of wealth and material possessions. In so-called ‘feminine’ cultures, people value relationships and quality of life and a focus on collaboration.

It is probably no surprise that the UK and US were ranked highly in exhibiting more masculine cultural values, at 9th and 15th respectively.

Girls living in the UK and the US are interacting in a socio-cultural system on a daily basis that prioritises the ‘masculine’ experience.

This is important to be aware of because women in these countries are already having to adapt to a pattern of attitudes and behaviours that may subconsciously favour more masculine ideals - in football terms, the use of league tables, trophies for “man” of the match, performance pathways and so on.

This can lead to women suppressing or hiding some of their more feminine values, as they are not as socially evident, accepted



or prioritised. In turn, this potential lack of being true to one’s self may lead to feelings of uncertainty, self-esteem issues or a sense that ‘something just doesn’t fit’.

“Part of a coach’s job is to make the environment fun and support players.”

When you think of traditionally ‘feminine’ sports, soccer doesn’t exactly spring to mind, given its physicality, historical links to male participation and strong competitive nature - as opposed to gymnastics and dance, for example.

But this is not about playing the game differently, this is about working with both masculine and feminine social values, attitudes and behaviours to ensure they are appropriately represented and interconnected.

This will allow women (and men) to tap into more emotional and collaborative personal values and motivations on the pitch that support their own sense of what it is to be themselves.

Collaboration as well as competition, through a positive learning environment, will also play to ‘soft power’ and what it means to create a psychologically safe space. Working collaboratively fosters an agreeable, calm, and gentle set of behaviours.

As a coach, part of the job is to make the environment, and the experience of being there, fun, memorable and engaging and



Coaches are responsible for developing an environment players can enjoy and using language to support development and self-esteem

to support players - particularly women - in knowing they belong.

Ask yourself - is it common to hear players talk about their club in terms of on the field friendliness or togetherness after the game? Do players enjoy coming to training because they learn from each other, trust and feel supported by their team mates, and feel part of their team? Is it easy to make friends here?

Many coaches or players will have heard shouts of “man up!”, “grow some!” or “you just let a girl get past you” at some point. Becoming aware of whether these phrases, which the misguided consider merely attempts at encouragement, have a negative effect on girls is worth exploring.

Fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety (“I worry what others say or think about me”, “I worry others don’t like me”, “I worry I might be teased”) are more prominent in girls than boys and therefore need to be considered as part of the coaching conversation.

Understanding the player’s perspective on what it is to be a soccer player and for what purpose is critical in ensuring their needs are met and their fears are worked through.

Valuing each player as a person in their own right will enable coaches to see their uniqueness and potential and support a communication style that best supports them.

In other words, being aware of every touch

point in communication and nurturing the right behaviours as coaches will have an enormous effect on how to get the best from both female and male players.

The language used, the support of peers and family and the use of female role models are all important contributors to a woman’s self-esteem. They also help to promote a self-belief that what they are doing and how they are doing it is socially and personally acceptable.

“How something takes off from the coach’s mouth isn’t always how it lands...”

This starts with how coaches communicate with their players. How something “takes off” from the coach’s mouth isn’t always the same as how it “lands” with the recipient.

Our values and internal motivators are very much our own, and subconsciously influence how we think, act, react and interact with the world around us. This is true for all genders and is how many misinterpretations arise in all walks of life.

In football, for example, a coach who shouts “get out wide”, “put some effort in”

and “boss the defence” is probably aiming to encourage motivate or guide. It may, however, land as “you think I’m lazy”, “I’m not doing a great job” and “I don’t want my team mates to think I’m bossy”.

Whether it lands badly or well is the responsibility of the coach, in understanding how to get the best from their players and to communicate in ways that tap into all values whether they are linked to competition, collaboration, winning, friendship or something else.

The coach’s superpower in this instance is great questions. They help to prevent assumptions, to understand whether information has landed in the way it was intended and to enable the players to own their insights and to build solutions in a way they feel comfortable with.

Great questions include “When did you have the most fun in the session and why?”; “Who supported you the most this evening and how?”; “What brought you the greatest sense of achievement?” and “What three things would you like to be better at?”.

Women don’t play football because they want to be more like men, or more masculine - they play football because they like football and what football gives them.

Being clear as a coach as to what that entails for each player will ensure you tap into the very best of the individual for the benefit of the team.



Teenage sticks

Seven in 10 children in the US quit organized sports by the age of 13 and girls give up at six times the rate of boys. **ALISON FOLEY** digs below the figures and asks how we can retain our teens in soccer amid competition

A 2016 poll from the National Alliance of Youth Sports showed that 70 per cent of children in the US quit organized sports by the age of 13.

It is also said that girls give up at six times the rate of boys and that only seven per cent of high-school athletes move on to play sports in college.

I wrote *How To Coach Girls* with Mia Wenjen as a manual to help coaches – both professionals and volunteers – and to share more than two decades of experience in coaching young women.

The positive aspects of keeping girls in sports are numerous – from positive body image and higher grades to lower rates of pregnancy and high self-confidence.

There are also benefits that help in their careers, from learning teamwork and leadership skills to access to networking opportunities.

So what is the secret sauce to keep girls in sports? It's a simple but elusive one – fun.

What does that mean? How do we translate “fun” into a sport while still making

it competitive? Well, fun has many aspects but let's focus on four:

1. Make her feel valued

Girls tend to doubt their abilities and self-worth. They worry about fitting in. They worry about failure. Girls need a safe and

“What is the secret sauce to keep girls in sport? It's simple, but elusive – fun...”

nurturing environment where they can feel comfortable trying new things.

The easiest way to make female athletes feel valued is to connect with them on a personal level. Find a way to praise each and every player during each practice.

Girls are very hard on themselves; they don't necessarily need someone to point out what they are doing wrong all the time.

Instead, find the moments when they are doing something praiseworthy, such as trying something new, mastering a skill they had been working on, or even exhibiting leadership or compassion.

Let each player know that you, the coach, are looking forward to seeing them at the next practice, the next game, and the next season. Your enthusiasm will help fuel theirs.

2. See her as a whole person

Your female players want to be seen as a whole person, not just as an athlete with skills.

They want you, the coach, to know and appreciate the different aspects of their lives – from their other extracurricular activities and their sense of humor to their social relationships.

This takes time and coaches often have that in short supply, but it's the key to earning trust. And this trust is necessary for interpreting the coach.

It is easy for female players to interpret a coaches' words or actions, even if incorrect



or unintentional, as “coach doesn’t like me” or “I’m not coach’s favorite”.

There was a Kindergarten teacher at our school that everyone wanted their child to have. She had the gift of making each of her students feel like they were her favorite.

Taking the time to build a relationship with each player tells her that she’s your “favorite”.

3. Help her form connections with her team-mates

The social aspect is another reason why sports are fun for girls.

Playing different sports and being on different teams gives them the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends that might be outside of their usual social circles such as the school that they attend. These social connections can last well beyond the season.

Try using ice-breakers at the start of every practice, during warm-up. Something as silly as asking questions about their favorite ice cream flavor, or if they have a pet, can help them connect with each other.

Another thing to be mindful of is breaking the team into smaller groups. Girls might already be in groups due to carpools that might be formed based on a city or school, and this can lead to cliques.

Girls tend to stand next to the people that they know. Instead of letting girls form their own groups, have them count off. This naturally mixes up girls with ones that they don’t know.

4. From teen to college

As girls transition from middle school to high school, there can be a drop off in sports participation.

Many sports have try-outs and cuts. Also, very few sports are open to beginners.

If the girls you coach are young, be open to having them play different sports. Multi-sport athletes tend to have fewer injuries, burn out less and learn from being in different roles, depending on their ‘main’ versus ‘fun’ sport.

The transition from high school to college is also a time when girls stop playing sports. Remind your players of the many options to participate in sports in college from

intramural (try a new sport or one that is just meant for silly fun) to club to junior varsity to varsity.

College is also a great time to try something new that athletes might not have time or access to before such as squash, rock climbing, Zumba, or rugby.

We want our players to feel like sports is always an open door for them because it is. It is a gift that keeps on giving. And you, the coach, are the gifter.



Alison Foley is the former Boston College head women’s soccer coach, the most successful coach in BC history, youth National Team scout, and the celebrated author of two books; ‘How To Coach Girls’, and ‘The Elusive Full Ride scholarship’. She currently helps high-school athletes with the recruiting process. You can find Alison at foleyathleticadvising.com or email her hello@foleyathleticadvising.com.

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