

A Rondo for all seasons

Pre-season is about understanding objectives for specific age groups to focus on preparing the body and mind for the challenges that the upcoming season will bring. It's the time of year when coaches and club's can implement the philosophy that'll be in evidence each week on the pitch.

The rondo is an excellent tool to help deliver those messages, improve fitness and manage the objectives of your age groups.

Under 12

We would always consider any player under the age of 12 to be in their technical development stage. Between 5-12 the players are playing for fun and also honing their skills to play the game.

We use the rondo to aid the development of their technical ability.

Building-Up

It is important that we start from the beginning with the Rondo at this age, depending on the stage of their development.

The "start" would be Rondos with low numbers and higher overloads such as 4v1, 5v2, 6v2. This is to encourage success and also limits the failure (defender winning the ball or ball going dead), allowing the coach to discuss the technical detail, such as the passing lines and body shape in more detail to help the players progress.

To encourage success, size is critical. If the rondo is too small from the outset in pre-season, then the players could consistently fail, reducing motivation and improvement. Making the rondo bigger to begin with and reducing as they become more proficient is always a safer bet.

There are many different ways a coach can adjust Rondos to make them more difficult. For example, 3v1, 4v2, 6v3. These changes reduce the time the team in possession have on the ball, forcing them to improve both technically.

Age specific

Rondos with players under 12 should never move past their game format age. This means that if the game is 7v7 for them, the rondo overload (attacking players on the outside and inside versus the amount of defenders) shouldn't move past their format of 7 players.

We have to consider game format for realism. For example, a rondo with 15 players on the outside as attackers isn't realistic to the amount of passing options they have on the field. Thus training inside game rules is important.

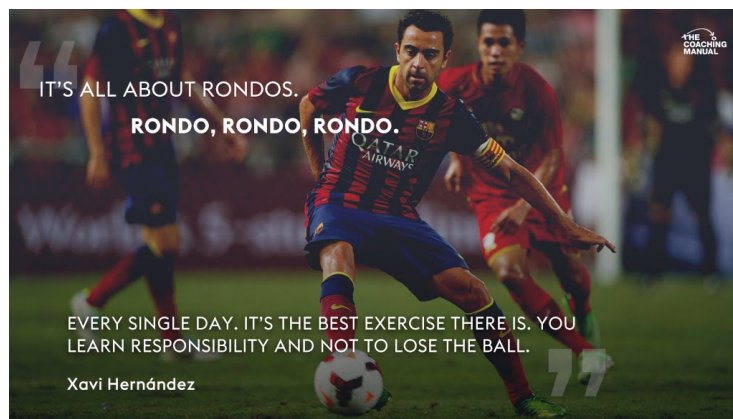
Challenging

In younger age groups, we should challenge players to become better. Setting challenges or conditions for individual players to try and improve footwork (i.e. playing with different parts of the feet or using both feet), balance (i.e. judging the speed of a pass to adjust body), technical skills (i.e. can they execute a ball mastery techniques) or even a specific thing that a player needs to work on (i.e. playing with a different foot).

The rondo can act as a provider for these challenges, setting conditions as progressions and creating more difficult challenges for advancing players and simpler ones for players with slower progression. Either way, this'll have a positive outcome on the individual and the group in their development.

It is vital to start implementing these challenges in pre-season as the player needs to go into the season with the constant desire to improve.

Over 12s



GAME FORMATS IN SOCCER					
Format	Pitch size	Ball size	Goal size		
U7-8	5v5	30x20 - 40x30	12x6	3	
U9	7v7	50x30 - 60x40	12x6	3	
U10	7v7	50x30 - 60x40	12x6	4	
U15+	11v11	90x30 - 100x70	24x8	5	
U13-14	11v11	90x50 - 100x60	21x7 - 24x8	4	
U11-12	9v9	70x40 - 80x50	16x7 - 21x7	4	

In over 12s, fitness has a greater importance on the pre-season schedule than with under 12s. Whether that is assessing fitness or improving fitness, the rondo can help players become fitter by implementing some changes.

Time Limits

In normal rondos, when the defender wins the ball, the attacker (receiver or passer) will become a defender. If there are two in the middle the man to his right or left would join them.

However, to improve fitness we can alter the defensive changeovers through times rather than when the ball is lost. Adding time limits adds stress to the player in the middle, having to work hard for a short period of time. For example, one minute of defending.

These time periods need to be extremely short otherwise the physical demand on the player can be excessive. A good rule of thumb for defending would be no more than 75 seconds of intense work in the centre.

Size of the Rondo

The size of the rondo can also help with fitness. We can follow the same idea [as game formats for Soccer conditioning. \(https://www.the coaching manual.com/Content/5119508979122176\)](https://www.the coaching manual.com/Content/5119508979122176). However, it would be the opposite. With smaller rondos used for recovery and larger ones to improve fitness.

As pre-season progresses, we can adjust the size to a bigger area, giving more space for both attacker and defender to cover, however keeping lower numbers (4v1, 5v2).

These larger sizes with lower numbers helps endurance levels as they have more ground to cover when defending and when moving on the line to create passing angles and options.

However, we should be careful how much we increase the size. For example, going from 8x8 to 20x20 when using 4v1 is not a good idea.

As pre-season moves forward we will improve power levels whilst running in short bursts, to help replicate football specific movements, instead of running long distances.

Player Specific Conditions

We can also set player specific conditions to the rondo to help fitness and create challenges.

One way of doing this is with attackers in the central area. We can create the condition that they should touch the ball every (for example) 6 passes, or every 15 seconds.

This intense workload can only be done for short periods of time as the physical strain can be high. However, it is a good way of increasing fitness for individual players, as they always need to be available and on the move to lose the defender.

We can also ask players to consistently swap positions on the outside of the rondo. Adding time limits to the players to stay in one place not only adds physical demands to the exercise, but also concentration demands.

Constant changes in positions adds challenges to the players as increases and decreases options in a short period of time, limiting who and where they can pass to.

Physical Conditioning Rondos

Much like other football drills, we can add rondos to Strength and Conditioning (S C;) exercises. By mixing S C; and rondos, we can increase stressful situations to replicate game like scenarios. For example, replicating games that are tight in the latter minutes, when concentration needs to be high but is affected by tiredness.

Doing S C; then moving straight into a Rondo forces the player to concentrate whilst feeling fatigued.



There are many ways that we can add conditions within the rondo, and as coaches, we can be creative with our ideas to challenge the practice and increase physical demand throughout pre-season.

The rondo is an excellent way of moulding many concepts together such as game understanding, technical and tactical ideas whilst improving endurance, power, speed and mobility for all.

In the related content section of this article there are examples of Rondos that can be effectively delivered to your players in pre-season and in season.