

Tips for coaches when delivering Rondo practices

Written by Lee Fletcher

Rondos are a key coaching tool within the game because they can be used to coach the principles of the game across attacking, defending and transitional moments. Rondos can be delivered in limited spaces and can cater for any number of players.

Here are some simple tips to consider when planning and delivering Rondos;

Start off slow

On YouTube and other video platforms we can see professional teams performing rondos at tremendous speed with one touch passing. This is the pinnacle of the exercise and, as coaches, players are asked to replicate this speed of play. In reality, this is the elite end of the footballing spectrum.

When delivering rondos we need to help players understand the purpose of the exercise and why we are doing it. With this in mind, rondo's should be started at a slower pace. Coaches can also select a larger playing area than usual, in-line with the number of defenders rather than attackers that are involved. For example, a 10x10 area for a 4v1 is ideal for players who are beginning their journey.

Coaches may also begin a rondo practice by allowing players to have unlimited touches. It is important that players feel comfortable when receiving and passing and should be able to understand and recognise how many touches to take. This benefits players for the long term because it allows them to make improved decisions about when to pass, when to draw in defenders, and when to play around them.

In this video, FC Barcelona's #6 Sergio Busquets demonstrates the timing of when to pass and when to hold it, to draw in the defender to press, allowing Busquets to break the line with the pass.

Play inside the area

In small sided games, improvised calls are made for throw ins, corner kicks or pass/dribble ins. When delivering rondos, this should be no different. Coaches should restrict players to play within the boundaries given it's relevance of losing the ball in a real life scenario.

There are other factors dictating why its important for players to play inside the area, primarily linked to the principles of the game. Players need to recognise when and how to provide width, length and depth within play when in possession.

This can be seen in Pep Guardiola's teams as he encourages his players to offer width in order to stretch the opposition's defenders. This creates opportunities for penetrative passes and allows wide players to receive and play around the opposition.

Furthermore, playing inside the area requires the players to make decisions as quickly as possible to improve their technical qualities in passing and receiving the ball.

Here we can see how Bayern Munich utilise short passing to draw the Manchester City players to press and abandon their positions. Bayern players are tactically positioned close to the touchlines to provide maximum width and offer an effective option to switch the point of attack.

Body Shape

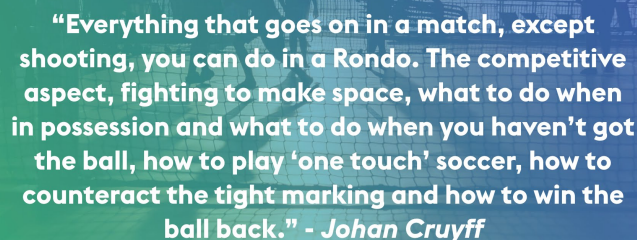
The rondo is a great tool to improve players in all aspects of the game and allows them to improve their body shape when receiving the ball. In a rondo, the outside players should always attempt to have an open body position, on the 'half turn'.

If players can position their body on the half turn it is easier for them to play forwards quickly. The position also allows them to play backwards if they are pressed quickly and aggressively. If the receiving player is always facing the ball then it is likely that the next pass will be in the direction of where the player is facing and may not be able to recognise an opportunity to penetrate and play forwards.

Here we can see how David Silva always attempts to play on the half turn in order to play forwards and penetrate or play backwards to maintain possession.

Give the defenders a responsibility

In rondos the defenders often become redundant as they are only encouraged to run hard and press the ball but should be challenged also. Coaches may discuss defensive body shape individually or collectively, including defensive players, specifically to recognise pressing cues, preventing the attacking players from playing penetrative passes.



“Everything that goes on in a match, except shooting, you can do in a Rondo. The competitive aspect, fighting to make space, what to do when in possession and what to do when you haven't got the ball, how to play 'one touch' soccer, how to counteract the tight marking and how to win the ball back.” - Johan Cruyff

Defending players also need a challenge or a target to play to if they win the ball back. Coaches can provide conditions that are related to the transition to attack phase of the game when defenders regain possession.

Counter attack: If a defensive team wins possession this should be their first thought, so this is no different in a rondo. We can do this by putting one or more mini goals behind the attackers. If the defenders win the ball they must score in the mini goal with 2 touches, for example.

Coaches may put a resting defender around the outside who can act as the first pass to simulate breaking the press to counter. To make this more difficult, the defender can move around the rondo on the outside, challenging the defenders to play with their head up when winning the ball.

If you have a 4v1 rondo, defenders can be asked to maintain possession when winning the ball as 1 x attacker presses the defender in possession, creating a 1v1 in the centre. If it is a 6v2 for example, we could ask the 2 x defenders to maintain possession and create a 2v1 situation in the middle with one attacker pressing.

The final Alético de Madrid exercise in this video shows how defenders can be given objectives when playing in possession-based exercises and these objectives can be applied to rondo activities.

Time

Often when delivering a Rondo we see the defender(s) swapping with the attacker(s) that lost possession of the ball. This is great for the warm up to encourage fun and interactions with the players.

However, it is important to give players the chance to learn the principles of the rondo equally, regardless of ability. By setting repetitions (for example 60-90 second reps), it allows all players to have equal time as an attacker and defender, allowing the rondo to play out, with players getting a feel for both attacking and defensive principles within the activity.

Make it competitive

With all this in mind it is important that the rondos are competitive and are built up to match the intensity and speed of a real game. Coaches can do this by keeping score and the occasional addition of in-challenge tasks.

Challenges can be provided for both attacking and defending players. For example, if the attackers reach 10 passes or split the defenders (a pass between two defenders) they score 1 point. If the defenders regain possession and score in the mini goals or dribble outside the area they score 1 point.

In summary, rondos can be delivered in a number of different ways to coach the principles of the game and allow players to recognise how to execute these principles. Rondos delivered in smaller spaces can also promote technical mastery and tactical awareness in order to be successful in meeting the objectives of the practice.