Finish It!
By Ihor Chyzowych

It’s a Thursday and I’m watching a U-16 boys’ team doing shooting. They are dribbling and striking balls from the top of the box with some wall passes outside of the box and a shot.

How many of us have watched as the ball has been crossed on the ground seven yards from goal – five players swing at it, but it continues to roll across the field? Or, they hit it and it goes over the cross bar? Or how many times have players tried to tee-up a power shot in the box only to have it blocked or taken away?

Why are we teaching our youth players to power shoot? Instead, we should be finishing. Players are trying to put a hole in the net, instead of just finishing and scoring.

No finishing at all. We should be teaching finishing starting at ages 7-8.

Many youth coaches focus their teams on shooting from the edge of the penalty box and further out. “Show me power and distance,” is the thinking.

Why? Because shooting high and hard will score the goal, right? Maybe at age 9, as the goal keeper is 3-feet high, anything higher than him, will probably go in.

The problem with this is three fold:
- Most goals are actually scored within the penalty box – from 12 yards and closer.
- Power shooting takes too long to set up in the box, and is less accurate.
- And, as our young players grow and continue their hard-kicking, they end up sending the ball over the cross bar, and into the parking lot.

We should be teaching our young, developing players – 12 and under -- the finesse of finishing instead of power shooting. This will build better finishers / goal scorers, putting more balls in the net, at every age.

In fact, I guarantee that one-touch finishing will get your team more goals than any amount of power shooting or power shooting drills.

So instead of power, teach your players how to hit the corner of the net – which, by the way, also happens to be out of reach of keepers 3-foot -- and taller.

Here’s what to do:

- Mark two-yard targets in either corner of the goal, using cones or a smaller net.
- Start your players in front of the goal, 6 yards out. (Then go back 1 yard at a time until your players are finishing from 12 yards out.)
- Serve the ball to your players – on the ground and from different angles. Begin serving from the goal line, about 10 yards outside the goal post. Then move the ball to different angles until you are about 7 yards out.
- Encourage your players to one-touch pass into the corners.
- Practice finishing with either foot – using the inside and outside of their feet.
- Change the angles of the serve and weight of the passes.
Repeat this at every practice, in addition to your other skill sessions, and you will see a difference in their finishing in the box.

For added training, have them dribble into the box from different angles, and place it into the corners, shooting from seven to 12 yards out. Place a passive keeper (parent or coach) in the goal so your players get used to hitting the corners with a keeper in the net.

Does it work? The teams I train score more good opportunities closer to the goal. The players place shots automatically, and don’t panic in the box. They score 1-2 additional goals per game.

So try it, let me know how it works.

Finish it!

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