

The Art of Shielding the Ball from a Technical/Tactical Perspective

By Tony Colavecchia, former AZ State Director of Coaching

One of the most essential skills to teach our young players is the art of shielding the ball in relation to trying to receive and turn with the ball whilst under pressure from an opponent. Many of the youth players that I observe in AZ when they lose possession of the ball have a tendency to lose the ball because when they are trying to turn or dribble without their body between the ball and the opponent. In addition many players naturally want to receive the ball with their strongest foot, the foot they are most comfortable with which often tends to be the foot which is closest to the opponent.

This skill of shielding the ball can benefit every player when in possession of the ball no matter what area of the field they find themselves in, or what position they play for on their team, which in turn helps their team maintain better control of the ball, play with more confidence and overall improve the amount of possession.

Another very common habit among young players is not to pass the ball to another player who they feel is marked by an opponent. In the bigger scheme of things I feel this is one of the main reasons why several teams have a tendency not to play through the midfield areas and have developed a “**direct style**” of play almost by default.

Many young players would rather not receive the ball with their back to the opponent in the middle third of the field. This does not only apply to central midfield areas but also players who could receive passes in wide positions in the midfield area.

One coaching tip I always found helpful for my players is to encourage players to pass the ball where the defender is not, sounds simple enough. Try to encourage players to read where the defender is, where he/she is standing, on what side of the attacker.

Yesterday I was invited to present a technical training session for the Blackhawks Staff Development program. I decided that I would address the art of shielding the ball from a technical and tactical perspective. This was partly spurred on by this past weekend observing many U11, U12, U13, U14 year old players participating in state league games at the Westside Soccer Complex in Phoenix, plus evaluating players participating in the morning ODP training session at Rose Mofford. (98, 97, 96, 95) I thought I would share these ideas and concepts with you as coaches.

The session would be part of the Blackhawks Staff Development training which was hosted at Velocity Fitness. The staff discussed player development concerns. In addition a session was

also conducted by the Velocity staff with regard to dynamic warm ups. We were a bit limited for space but the coaches were able to grasp the ideas and concepts. (30 yds x 15 yds)

I apologize in advance for just using examples of professional players who play in the English Premier League but these players simply highlighted the technical /tactical areas that I was trying to demonstrate and explain during the presentation. I know there are several MLS players who possess and use similar techniques.

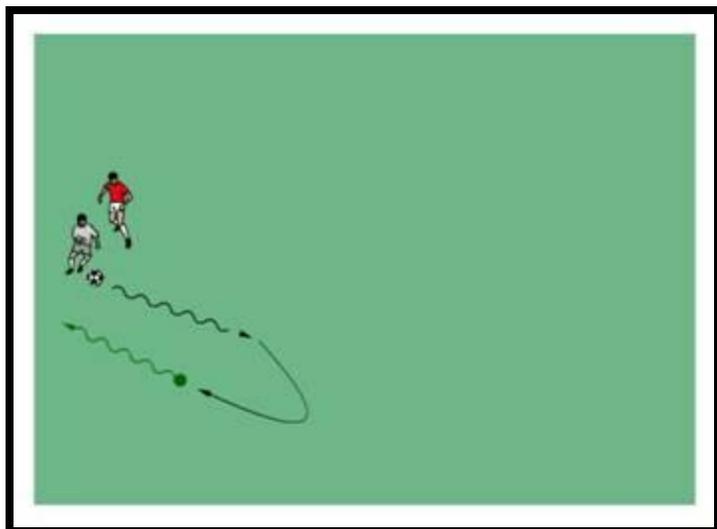
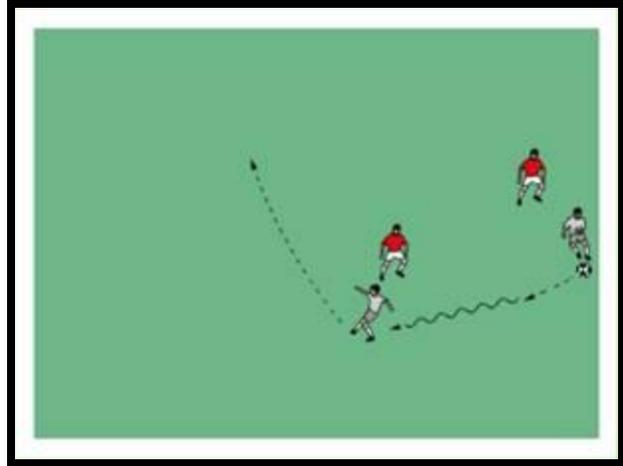
The first example of shielding the ball I wanted to use is from **Cristiano Ronaldo. (Real Madrid)** He has a habit of occasionally receiving the ball in a wide right position and coming onto the ball at speed, his first touch gets him away from the defender, then he proceeds to dribble slightly at an angle across the field. This allows Cristiano to play a variety of passes to supporting players including passing the ball forward.

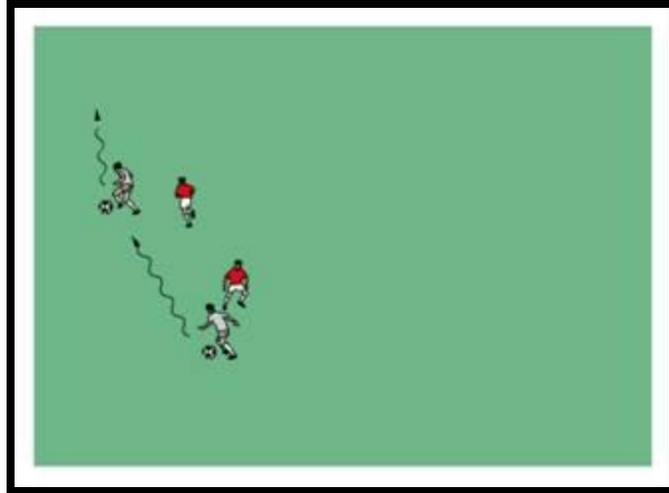
Cristiano Ronaldo dribbles inside while screening the ball. Players must learn to dribble with both feet.

Another example is **Ryan Giggs. (Man Utd)** He is one of those players who simply create space for him to try to beat the defender. Ryan will receive the ball, dribble inside from the touch line and spin turn whilst protecting the ball and then attack the space that he just created for himself. He is simply brilliant at creating space for himself and others.

Stage 1 Ryan comes back to the ball drawing the defender in field. Then spin turns to run to the space past the defender. Ryan then attempts to dribble the ball at speed down the line whilst protecting the ball.

Ryan has now turned and dribbles down the line looking to beat the defender, pass and combine with other players or do what he does best deliver the ball into the penalty area (cross).



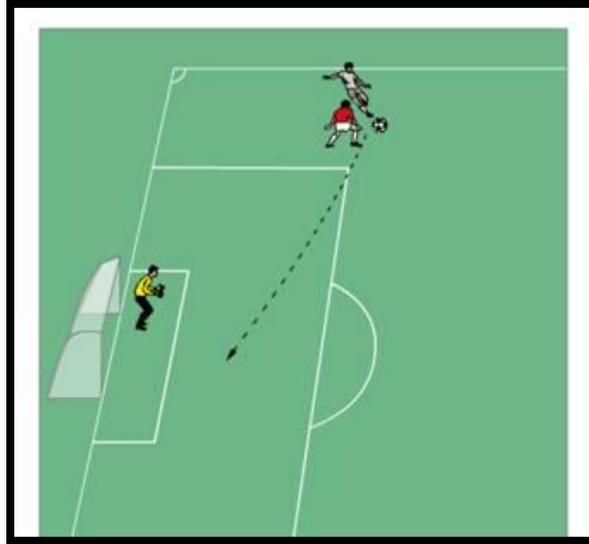


Another example of a wide player turning and shielding the ball is **Aaron Lennon. (Tottenham)** Aaron quite often gets to the end line but is forced to turn back and look for support. In doing so he dribbles the ball back down the touch line and then crosses the ball with his left foot, whilst protecting the ball (shielding the ball).

Many of our young players have a tendency to cross the ball for the sake of it, when they get into deep positions. Therefore many crosses go out of bounds because of the difficulty trying to cross the ball within a tight space, under pressure from the opponent and off balance. Aaron by dribbling back is now

in a position to reset him in the same way that Ryan Giggs does in the previous example and could even take the player on 1 v 1 having now created more space for himself.



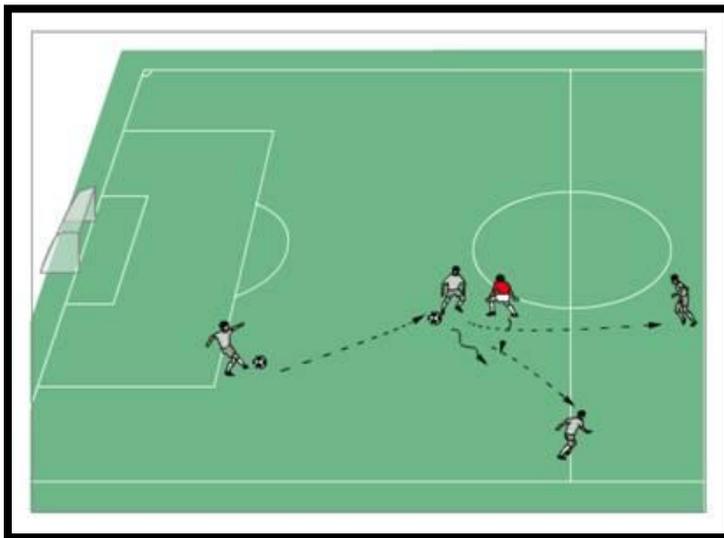


Aaron Lennon has now created space for himself to cross the ball using his left foot. This is another reason why we need to develop players who can dribble and strike the ball with both feet.

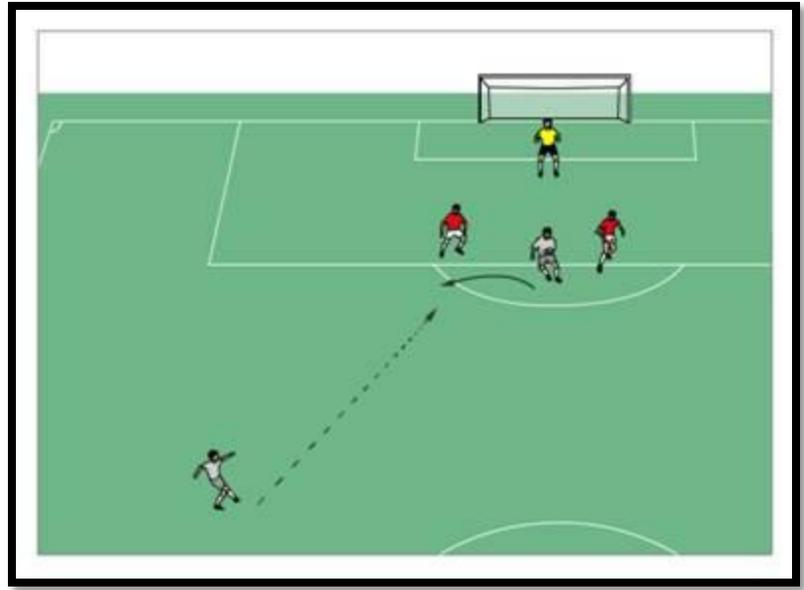
One of my favorite players to watch in the modern game is **Seth Febregas. (Arsenal)** He plays very simple and is very effective. He always wants the ball no matter how tightly he is being marked. This is a hallmark of an exceptional midfielder player. Many of our youth players who play in central midfield develop the habit of continuously playing the ball backward where it came from when under pressure from the opponent.

The “Arsenal way” places higher technical demands on its **youth players** in these situations. They want their players when receiving the ball with their back to the opponents to try to play the ball forward. Once again the technique of receiving and shielding the ball is being used with a tactical purpose.

Seth receives and shields the ball but because he slightly half turns whilst protecting the ball he can play the ball forward to wide players or to the forwards checking back for the ball.



The last example of a player using a shielding technique to create space is **Wayne Rooney. (Man Utd)** Wayne will often start in the center of the penalty area then immediately look to receive a pass in line with the near post. On receiving the ball Wayne knows exactly where he is in relation to the goal and takes a first touch in order to prepare his body and shield the ball from the defender in a half turned position. He then instinctively shoots towards the far post. In these situations Wayne tends not to blast the ball but rather to curl the ball into the bottom or upper corners.



Wayne Rooney moves to receive the ball in line with the near post to create a shooting angle towards the far post.

Stage 2 Wayne Rooney by receiving and shielding the ball is able to shoot on the half turn.

