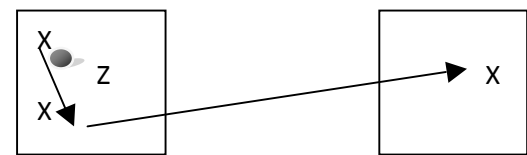
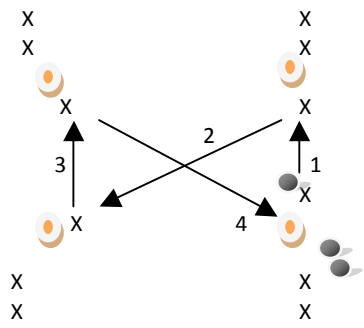


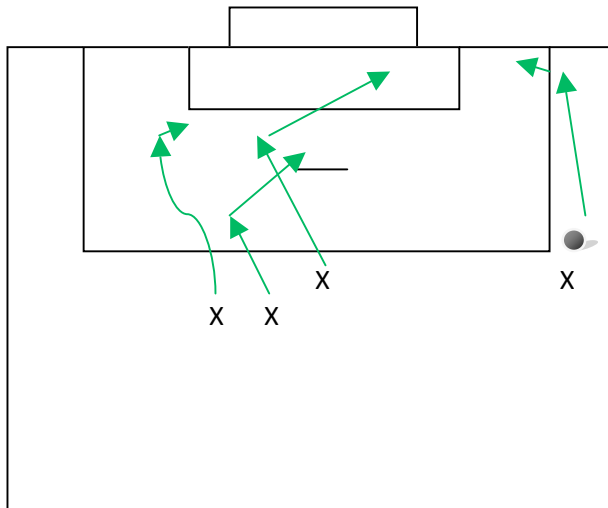
BFSC U11-U12 Training Session #15: Cross and finish.

Exercise	Environment	Description / Coach
4 corners long passing	½ field	<p>Divide the team into four groups. Each group forms a line behind of four cones placed to form a 15x15 yard grid in the center of one end of the field. Keep a ball supply at one cone. Explain that this is a passing sequence warm-up that will be expanded into a long passing exercise. The first player in line with a ball passes straight ahead to the first person in line at the cone opposite her line. She then follows her pass and goes to the end of that line. The player receiving the ball at the second cone then passes at a diagonal to the first player in line at the third cone (see diagram) and follows her pass. The player at the third cone plays straight ahead and then follows her pass. Finally, the player at the fourth cone plays diagonally back to the start and follows her pass and the sequence begins again. This is a useful warm-up to emphasize passing accuracy, quality receiving (players should receive the ball using their first touch to set up their pass with the second touch, which is to say that their first touch should push the ball in the direction that they intend to pass), and running after the pass. Play for two minutes, and then see if the players can keep two balls moving at the same time. After two more minutes, move the cones back to create a 25x25 yard space. The exercise remains the same, except that now the passes are longer and the coach can dictate what type of serve (driven, lofted, chipped) is required. The coach should require players to alternate the foot they use for passing (in the short and long phases). Once the players have the pattern for the long pass, introduce a second ball to apply some time pressure and also more repetition for the players.</p>
Fitness long passing	10x10 grids (spaced)	<p>Players work in groups of four with a ball. Place one player in a 10x10 yard grid, and the other three in a 10x10 yard grid that is set up about twenty-five yards (adjust to fit the abilities of the players) from the other grid (see diagram). Demonstrate with one group. In the grid with three players, identify a single, passive defender. This is to play at walking pace to start. The remaining two players are to pass the ball at least three times before one of them plays a long pass to their teammate in the far grid. Once the ball has left the grid, the player making the long pass stays in the grid, while the other attacker and the defender race to the far grid. The last player to arrive in the new grid becomes the defender, while the other two players are attackers. The attackers move around the grid to connect three passes while the defender provides passive resistance. Then the long pass is made and the sequence continues. It is important that players understand the changing roles before commencing the exercise. This exercise provides long passing practice, highlights the importance of providing early support to the ball when the field is changed, and also raises the players' fitness by requiring frequent, short sprints. Play for five minutes.</p>
Simple cross and finish	½ field	<p>This exercise is designed to create a very simple environment to train the basic patterns involved in crossing and finishing the ball. Place two players with a ball supply near the right touchline, near the top of the large box. The goalkeeper will be the only defender in the exercise at this point. The remaining players are divided in groups of three and gathered outside the top of the "D."</p> <p>The first thing to establish is the running patterns and crossing cues for the wide player as she prepares to serve the ball.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At first, quality runs and service are more important than speed.</li> <li>2. The server should make all of her runs to the endline at first. The idea here is to build into the players' understanding that this run creates a lot of trouble for the defense, as they are forced to retreat deep and may either lose track of runners or the ball and they are often poorly positioned to clear a cross.</li> </ol>



3. The server's last touch before crossing should be in the direction of the goal and not the endline. This is referred to as "turning the corner." Many young players serve a lot of crosses behind the goal, often because they are trying to catch up to a touch that has them facing the ball as it rolls toward the endline. If the last touch before crossing is in the direction of the goal, the player will be able to then look up at the target area and select a target for the cross, turn her hips and shoulders toward the goal, and plant her non-striking foot pointing toward the goal as well. When these cues are followed, the server has a better chance of executing a successful cross.
4. Also point out that the best crosses are often on the ground and cutting back across the defense. In other words, the ball is played back up field, into the area between the small box and the penalty kick mark (on the large field, this is referred to as the "second six").

The other point of focus here is the runs to get onto the end of the cross. There are several stages of development in learning to finish crosses, and the most basic imprint is desired here.



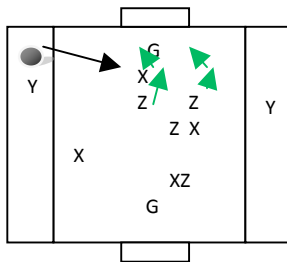
1. Impress upon the runners the tactical importance of creating space and timing the runs. The most difficult aspect of this process is getting the players to hold their runs until the appropriate time. If players arrive in the target areas before the ball has arrived, they are much easier to mark and the effectiveness of the movement will be very limited under pressure. It is often useful for the coach to hold the runners and release them a bit late so that they learn to be more patient.
2. Target areas. In 8v8 soccer, there will rarely be more than three targets for a given cross. Therefore, it is useful to teach players at this early stage to sort out runs to three critical areas.
  - A. Near post. The first player in will crash the near post. The timing of this run is very important, as its design is to preempt the goalkeeper in particular from receiving the ball. The player making this run needs to adjust her run to either get to the near post or to receive the ball near the top of the small (6-yard) box.
  - B. The second player in will arrive in the second six at the same time as the ball and typically ends up between the penalty kick spot and the top of the six-yard box. This player is very difficult to mark on a late, end-line cross.
  - C. Back-post. This player is the last player to arrive and is typically the back-side midfielder or forward. It is useful to emphasize that this player's purpose, particularly at the younger levels, is to assure that any ball that passes by the first two targets and the defenders is kept "in the mix," which is to say that she cleans the ball up by either finishing it at the back post or pushing the ball back into critical space if the cross has passed out of the target areas. The most common concern here is the that back-post player will want to close too tight to the goal, when she is often best served by remaining wider and higher until after the ball is hit and it becomes clear that she needs to adjust her position. This run becomes very important as players become more adept at serving lofted crosses to the back post, where the far target can get in to finish.
3. Bent runs. Players will want to run straight to the goal. This choice makes them easier to mark and also gives them poorer finishing angles to the ball, an element that is critical to building success and confidence in young players. Instead, players need to be shown how to bend their runs away from the ball as the crossing run is developed. This forces the defenders to give attention to either the ball or the player, but makes it difficult to do both. Also, as the players then close at speed into their target positions, their collective body positions will be "open" to the ball, meaning that the ball will come

straight at them (as opposed to from the side), giving them more finishing options and a better look at the ball (which gives them the ability to adjust their runs on approach to the ball as well).

Improving quality. Here are some additional suggestions for improving the quality of basic crossing and finishing as the exercise is developed.

1. Allow play to continue as long as the ball is knocked down by one of the runners inside the large box. This way, young players are not compelled to finish with the first touch as they learn to deal with balls driven toward the front of the goal.
2. Begin the exercise with a pass from one of the runners in the center to the flank runner. The idea here is that most crosses are set up by a ball served to the runner from a central position, so the pattern is expanded to simulate a realistic opportunity to set up a cross.
3. Create teams and keep score. Each server and group of runners are a team (and the goalkeeper is her own team, earning points for quality saves) and each team earns a point for scoring (or if there are not a lot of goals in the early stages, give a point for a first-time shot that is on the face (i.e. would be a goal but the goalkeeper made the save) and two points for a goal).
4. Be sure to switch the service to the left side (if there are enough players, arrange service from both sides and alternate the source of the runs and crosses).
5. Also be sure to alternate the servers so that all players have the opportunity to serve and learn the runs to goal (players should also alternate the runs they make to goal (i.e. back-post, near-post, etc.).
6. Encourage players to serve crosses on the ground first (to an open target), and then encourage them to try playing a long cross in the air to the back post area as they get more comfortable.
7. Train all players to communicate. The server should visually and verbally identify her target and the runners should learn to demand the ball from the server.

4v4 with neutral crossers ½ field



6v6 to full-sized goals full field

Play 5v5 with neutral crossers and goalkeepers. The crossers are required to stay in the neutral lanes on the flanks (see diagram) and no other players may enter that space. Re-starts come from the goalkeepers (place a supply of balls in each goal). The only means of scoring a goal is directly off of a cross, so teams will need to work to play in to the crossers to set up scoring opportunities. This is a good environment for training the runs for the targets and also for building the quality of the crossing. The coach should encourage early service wide to the crossers (even from the goalkeepers at re-starts) to create numerous crossing situations. Play for two minutes and then change the crossers. Crossers need to make endline runs before crossing. Coach the runners as above. Keep track of score.

Play 6v6 to goals. For the first ten minutes, give three points for a goal scored as a result of a cross and one point for all other goals. Then remove the three point bonus and let the players play.