



Leave Defences Standing

Coach your players to improve their first touch and soon they could be leaving defences standing and scoring as many goals as Robin van Persie

A message for your strikers: you don't need to have lightning pace to beat your marker and get a shot in on goal. And if they don't believe you, just tell them to watch Robin van Persie. The Dutchman uses clever movement, quickness of thought and, above all, a brilliant first touch to give him a yard of space. And as we've seen time and again, a yard is all he needs to apply a devastating finish.

Van Persie, who despite a lack of searing pace scored 37 goals in all competitions for Arsenal last season and already has more than 20 for new club Manchester United, honed his skills using the methods of coaching pioneer Wiel Coerver at first club Feyenoord. "I practised daily and I was highly aware it was effective," said van Persie of Coerver's emphasis on technique. "You noticed it in weeks."

Fifteen years later the results are clear. "He has an excellent touch and needs very little time to get a shot away and finish accurately," explains Alf Galustian, co-founder of Coerver Coaching.

Nowhere was this more obvious than

at Upton Park in January, where van Persie scored an injury-time equaliser against West Ham in the third round of the FA Cup. He controlled Ryan Giggs' long, diagonal ball with his left foot and scored with his right, all in the blink of an eye. "The first touch and his finish was absolutely world class, absolutely fantastic," said Sir Alex Ferguson, while Arsene Wenger says, "I have seen many great players over 30 years, but Robin van Persie's first touch is just exceptional."

So exceptional that Ferguson believes RvP could be the difference between United winning the Premier League title and coming second this season.

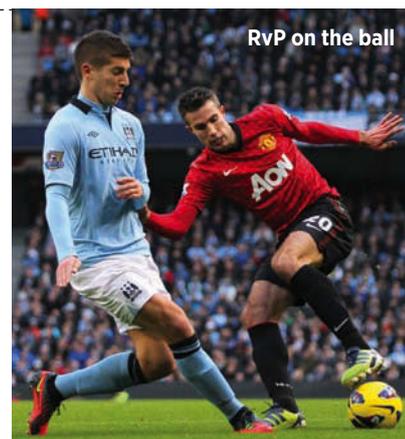
But what makes van Persie's first touch so devastating? The key, as the following drills will show, is to take the ball away from your marker and towards goal in one swift movement. As van Persie proves, if you can do that, you don't need to be blessed with great speed to find space in front of goal.

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FIRST TOUCH TIPS TO BEAT DEFENDERS

A good first touch gives players the time and space to assess what to do next – pass, dribble or shoot. It also ensures that a time-wasting second touch isn't required and allows players to operate comfortably under pressure in tight situations. To have a first touch like van Persie, your players should always...

- > Move into position to intercept the ball early
- > Select the controlling surface (boot, chest, thigh etc)
- > Place the controlling surface in the ball's path
- > Stay balanced using the arms
- > Watch the ball carefully to judge its direction and speed
- > Keep the head steady
- > Be relaxed



RvP on the ball

Sharp Shooters

Executed at speed this is a dangerous attacking move that will help your players use a delicate first touch to beat defenders and set up goal scoring opportunities

WHY USE IT

This drill helps players get to know each other – when they are going to pass, and where and when they are going to move. It works on the technique a striker will use to create and execute a goal scoring chance.

SET UP

Use four players including your goalkeeper. You need balls, cones and a goal. Position a pole or cone (or a mannequin if you have one) just outside the penalty box on the size of pitch your team plays on

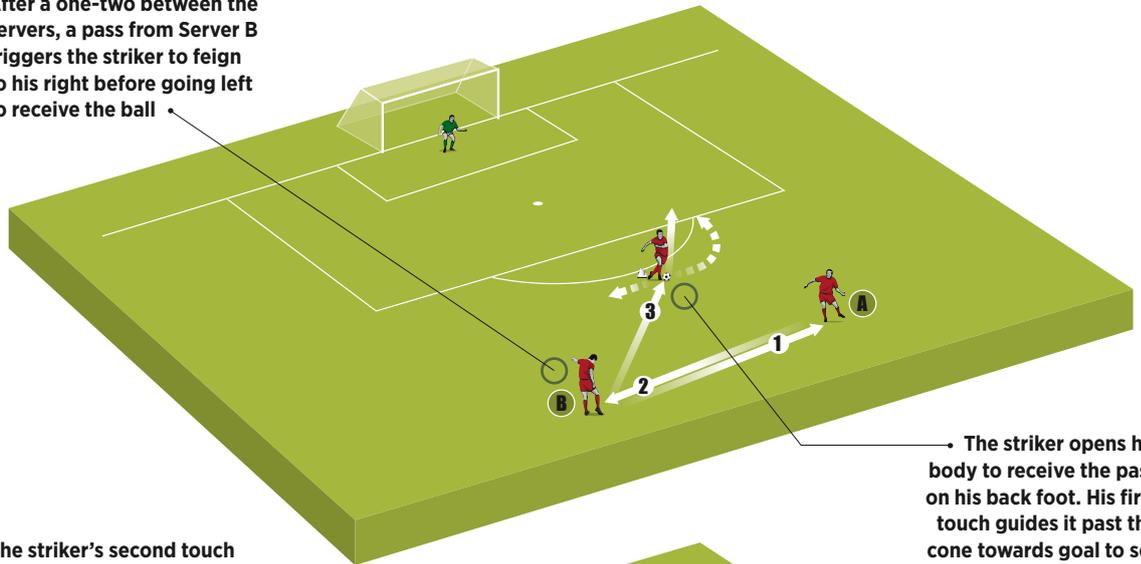
HOW TO PLAY

On the coach's command the two servers exchange passes. Server B passes to the striker's right. As the ball is passed the striker feigns to go to his right and then goes left to receive the ball, which he controls on the turn. His second touch must be a strike at goal. Work one striker for five goes and then switch players.

TECHNIQUE

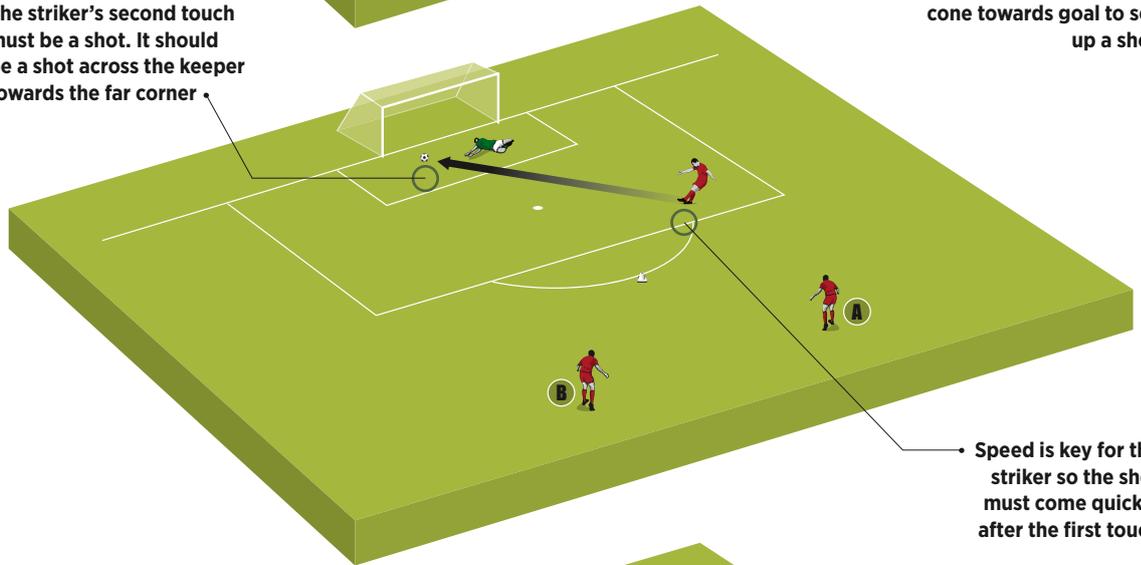
The striker's movement is vital, creating a yard of space to receive the ball, then controlling it quickly and smoothly to get past the defender and shoot. Timing is key: the timing of the pass, the dummy and the run. In a match all these parts make up the move – success comes when they all work together.

After a one-two between the servers, a pass from Server B triggers the striker to feign to his right before going left to receive the ball

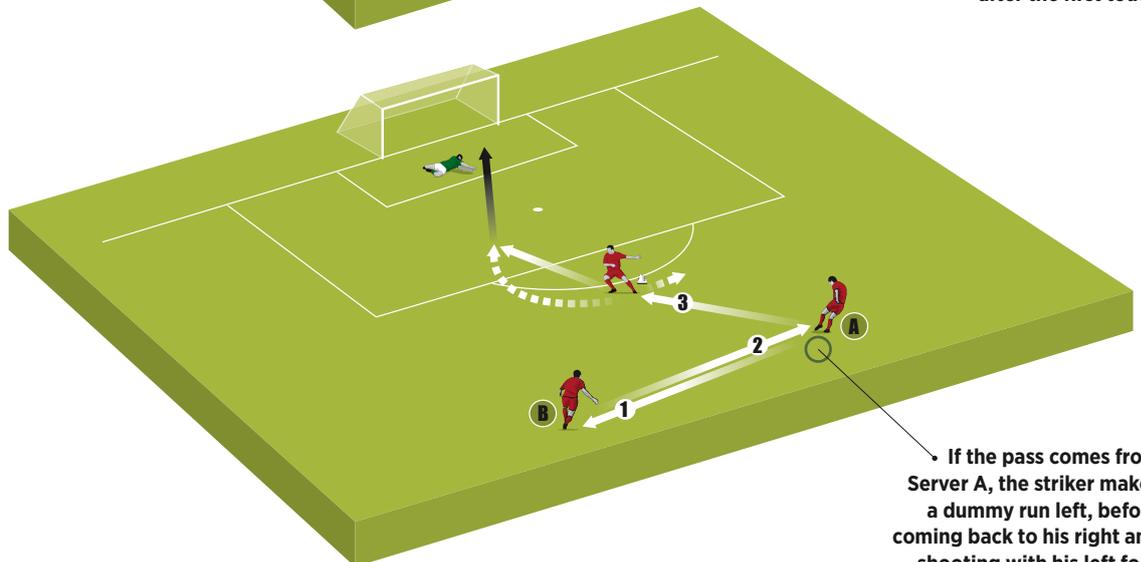


The striker opens his body to receive the pass on his back foot. His first touch guides it past the cone towards goal to set up a shot

The striker's second touch must be a shot. It should be a shot across the keeper towards the far corner



Speed is key for the striker so the shot must come quickly after the first touch



If the pass comes from Server A, the striker makes a dummy run left, before coming back to his right and shooting with his left foot

Player movement

Ball movement

Run with ball

Shot

Strike In Pairs

Help your strike partners develop an effective understanding with each other in order to create the space needed to score goals like Robin van Persie

WHY USE IT

When two strikers play together they develop an understanding. Robin van Persie uses his strike partners to create the space needed for match winning shots on goal. Follow this drill and your players could forge a similar understanding.

SET UP

You need at least eight players, plus two keepers. One striker and a defender should be in each half, with a line of second strikers for each team at the side of the pitch by the halfway mark. You need balls, bibs, cones and goals. Play a small-sided game on a 40x30-yard pitch with goals at each end.

HOW TO PLAY

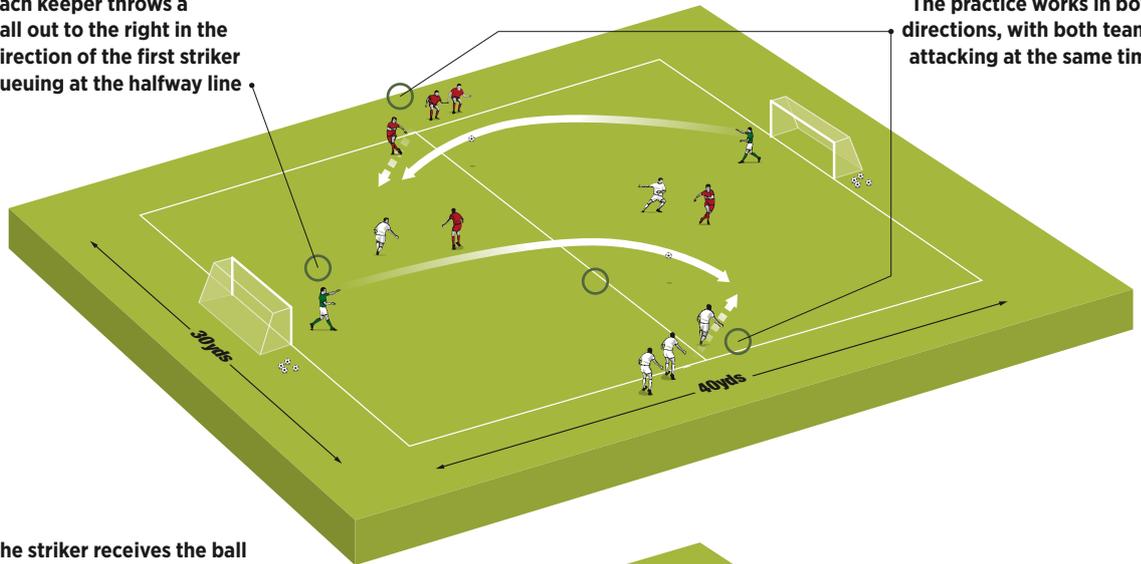
To attack at both ends simultaneously, each keeper throws the ball to the first of the strikers waiting on the sidelines. He must combine 2v1 with the attacker already on the pitch in order to set-up a scoring chance.

TECHNIQUE

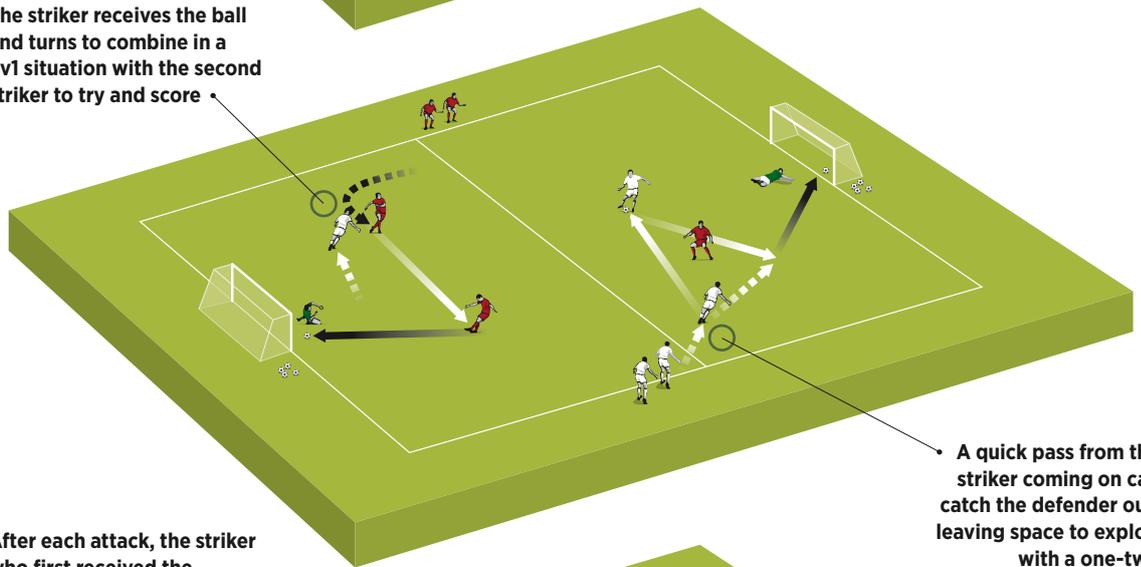
To develop a partnership between two forwards they must work intensively in training, moving into different positions to disrupt the defence. Creativity is key to opening up space and a good first touch can help to beat defenders.

Each keeper throws a ball out to the right in the direction of the first striker queuing at the halfway line

The practice works in both directions, with both teams attacking at the same time

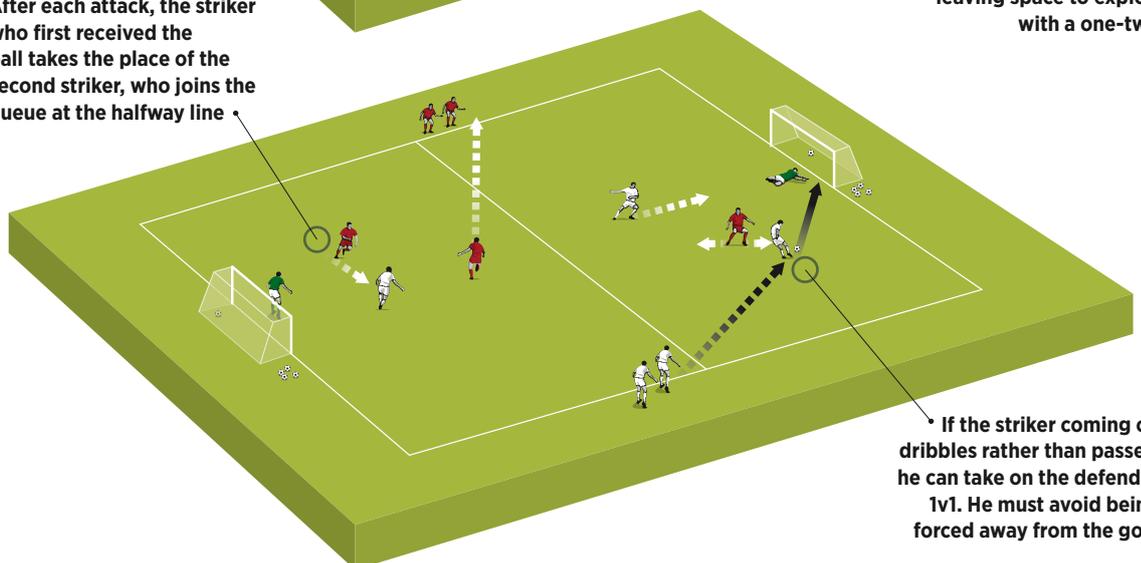


The striker receives the ball and turns to combine in a 2v1 situation with the second striker to try and score



A quick pass from the striker coming on can catch the defender out, leaving space to exploit with a one-two

After each attack, the striker who first received the ball takes the place of the second striker, who joins the queue at the halfway line



If the striker coming on dribbles rather than passes, he can take on the defender 1v1. He must avoid being forced away from the goal

Player movement

Ball movement

Run with ball

Shot