

Tips and techniques: how to coach turning

In the latest part of a series on developing basic skills, **MORITZ KOSSMANN** tells **STEPH FAIRBAIRN** how to teach the 'under-appreciated' topic that opens doors.

Two players from Ubuntu Football Academy in Cape Town, where Moritz used to coach, want the ball. One uses his body to protect the ball and turns to evade the pressing defender



PETE WARD

Moritz Kossmann defines turning as: "A change of direction on the ball while you are in possession of the ball".

Moritz is the assistant coach and chief analyst at Austrian second-tier club SV Ried, having previously been DStv Diski Challenge coach and head of youth at Cape Town City in South Africa.

In the latest of a series of articles where he explores how to develop skills beyond the basics, he talks to SCW about turning – why it is so important, how players off the ball can support the player in possession while turning, and what the building blocks of learning turning techniques are...

SCW: Why is turning so important to the game? What can it help us do?

MK: There are two considerations. The first is turning in relation to protecting the ball and trying to maintain possession on an individual level. The second is turning in terms of trying to create dynamic situations and space towards the opposition's goal.

Players like Xavi and Xabi Alonso were masters of protecting the ball and maintaining possession.

Let's say they are facing the opposition in a forward direction. They are being pressed from two different sides by different players, and so run the risk of losing the ball.

"One consideration is turning to create space towards the opposition's goal..."

In midfield, in 360-degree situations, these are action patterns that happen quite a lot. So these players would very often use their body as a shield between the opposition and the ball, thereby being able to maintain possession, because now they are more easily able to pass the ball to someone else.

If the opponent is still pressing, you can draw fouls by using your body as a shield. Then the action of pressing is over, because the opposition has to move 10 metres away.

On an individual level, there are two aims in a football action. One is to give the ball to a team-mate in a better position, and the other is to try to not lose the ball. Turning and shielding is a crucial part of that.

The second [overarching] consideration is turning towards the opponent's goal and creating attacking situations.

A common coaching point you hear is "play what see" – so you play towards where you look. But the opponent, especially as we get slightly more advanced, is also going to read what you are going to do.

One way to anticipate opposition actions is to look at where the eyes of the opponent are looking.

If I'm looking towards my right, it's more likely I'm going to pass to my right. Perhaps you, as my opponent, can then anticipate this action and intercept the ball.

A turn can punish the opponent for making that sort of anticipatory defensive action: I am looking towards one side, but I'm turning towards the other side.

The opposition has shifted over, in anticipation, towards the side I was looking to, but now I'm going somewhere else, into space, and perhaps also have open teammates ahead of me.

So a turning action in an attacking context is very often a surprising action that opens the game up. Very often, successful attacks on a team level start with a surprising turn by a player on the ball.

It is very much an initiating action towards creating more dynamic moments. So it is crucial for us to encourage our players, especially in the opposition half and in the attacking third, to make turns, because they are ways to open up the game and create dynamic moments with a lot of promise.

But it's also technically not an easy action to execute.

SCW: Is it natural for players to have one or two standard turns in their locker, that lend themselves to how they move their body and how they move with the ball?

MK: Absolutely. At any level of the game, this is what most, if not all, players are doing.

Look at Lionel Messi as an example. He doesn't perform 25 different types of turns. He has got a few standard techniques.

The genius of a football action is using the correct action in the right position, at the right moment, in the right direction and at the right speed.

Performing the turn in the moment where it's appropriate, and at the right speed, is ultimately the key. It needs to be a solution to a footballing problem.

That's where, in terms of basic technique, not having a large number of various turns you do is fine, as long as you are applying your technical solutions to the moments where it is appropriate.

SCW: Is there value in unopposed practices for turning?

MK: Absolutely. I'm not a fan of this dogmatic approach of "opposed practice is everything; unopposed practice is bad".

The starting point should be our team and our players. If we, as coaches, feel an unopposed practice for something like turning is the way to teach our players, then we have considered the needs of our players as our starting point. I have absolutely nothing against that.

It could be done at the beginning of a session, it could be done in a recovery session at a higher level. I absolutely don't mind that at all.



Michael Bradley (left) turns way from Dru Yearwood and looks around to find a way of retaining possession, during an MLS game back in 2022

REUTERS/DAN HAMILTON, USA TODAY SPORTS

SCW: How important are players off the ball when a player is turning?

MK: I think the most crucial thing is to move away from the player who is turning, because, if you remain close to them, you are attracting more opposition pressure, and could be clogging the space. The player is then more likely to turn into pressure.

"Performing the turn in the moment where it's most appropriate is, ultimately, the key..."

If I am moving away from the turning player, I might also force the opponent to mark me and move away at the same time. I'm thereby creating space for that player to turn to gather speed and make the situation more dynamic. If the situation is more dynamic, it's more likely to be in favour of the attacking team.

Obviously, communication of where opponent pressure is coming from can be very good. If I hear "right shoulder!", I know there is an opponent on my right shoulder, and I can turn around on my left shoulder. Or, if I hear "man on!", I know there might be pressure behind my back that I'm unaware of.

SCW: Talk us through, then, the building blocks of turning, from players starting their soccer journey through to a more advanced level...

MK: I think the most basic one I would teach would be the sole turn, so to turn with the sole of your foot. It is the most stable technique, because you have the ball under control all the time.

Obviously, learning techniques with both feet is also important, because it adds to the unpredictability of a player on the ball. That should perhaps be done from the youngest age up anyway.

The next turn I would teach would be the turn where I am wrapping my body around the opponent, because this is one that is very likely to happen more often.



Moritz gets some of the finer detail across to his players

I wouldn't be too prescriptive in teaching players to turn. I wouldn't be giving them 50 different turns to execute.

I would try to encourage the natural tendencies and preferences of our players by teaching them in small-sided games and allowing them to find solutions in moments.

You can perhaps provoke this by introducing various constraints to the situation, such as the "no passing back to the team-mate that gave you the ball" constraint.

Throughout their journey, but especially in the formative grassroots years, encourage players to take risks – allow them to make mistakes and then learn from those mistakes.

As a coach, don't be the centerpiece of the show: be a supporting act, a helper for our players in this process, to ask them questions about what they could have done better, especially when very similar mistakes are being repeated.

Practising turning, even in an unopposed way, and asking players to come up with unconventional terms, is a nice thing to do.

The most important thing is to allow risk-taking, because risk-taking offers a large

"Risk-taking offers a large reward if done at the right moments in the 11v11 game..."

reward if done successfully and at the right moments in the 11v11 game.

Turning is an under-appreciated and under-discussed topic when it comes to attacking. It can be a real door-opener to create promising attacking situations.

TURNING PRACTICES

Turning into space

Develops players' ability to protect the ball, turn to evade defenders and move into space. By MORITZ KOSSMANI

PRACTICE

WHY USE IT

Puts players into situations that encourage them to protect the ball, turn to evade defenders and make their way into space.

SET UP

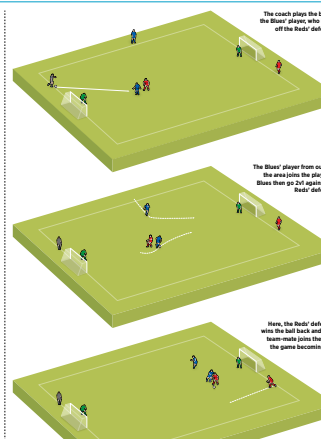
Set up an area relative to the size of your group, with a goal at each end.

HOW TO PLAY

Teams play in threes – each team has a goalkeeper, an outfielder who starts in the area, and an outfielder who starts outside it. One player starts facing their own goal, with their opposing player 'on their back'. A coach plays the ball into the attacking player. Once they have received the ball, their team-mate enters the field to join them. They then work in a 2v1 against the defender. This encourages lots of time on the ball and lots of opportunities for turns. If the defender wins it back, their team-mate goes them and the game becomes a 2v2. To mix it up, alternate the team which starts and change the starting positions the position of the coach passing the ball in, and the positions of the players on the outside.

COACHING POINTS

- How can you protect the ball when 1v1?
- What turns can you use to evade your marker?



Now use Moritz's **turning practices** on p11 and 12 >>



"I'm not a fan of coaching points that suggest an action is never appropriate. Stay away from this 'never do this' vibe..."

HEAR THE FULL INTERVIEW WITH MORITZ, INCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE COMMONLY HEARD 'DON'T TURN TOWARDS GOAL' INSTRUCTION, ON OUR PODCAST – [CLICK HERE TO LISTEN](#) 🎧