When we speak about *shape* and *speed of play* in soccer we are referring to the ability of a player to recognize his/her own body shape and that of their team in order to play the game faster. This takes into account the players’ field awareness and vision, as well as their *physical speed, technical speed and tactical speed*.

Definitions of the different types of speed required by our players:

*Physical speed (pure speed)* – the ability to overcome the distance between 2 points in the shortest amount of time
*Technical speed* – the ability to manipulate the ball with the legs and feet at speed and maintain control
*Tactical speed (speed of action)* - processing information from the game and choosing an appropriate response quickly to the situation
*Mental speed* – ability of the player to be aware of all factors, conditions and options inside and outside the game

Speed training for soccer is very different than speed training for track and field! Track and field speed training requires cyclical movement (same rhythm in same direction); while soccer speed training requires acyclical movement (arrhythmical movement…different speeds in different directions). In other words, speed training in soccer must follow the pattern of the game. Players must read visual signals and cues to stimulate action.

The application of speed in the game of soccer is determined by the following movements and actions found in the game:

- *Movement of the ball*
- *Movement of the opponent(s)*
- *Movement of teammate(s)*

Therefore, it is imperative that our “speed of play” training activities replicate the game!
Mass Youth Soccer Speed of Play Specialty Clinic

Session

1) **Inter-passing in 4's (15-20 minutes)**: Players pass the ball within their group. Three of the players position themselves about 10-15 yards apart, forming a triangle shape (one central player and two outside players). They pass the ball back and forth to each other (short passes), while the fourth player (long player) positions himself/herself centrally about 25-30 yards away. After 4-5 short passes, the long player calls for the ball. The ball is played into the long player. The two outside players move quickly to support the long player, forming the triangle shape at the other end of the grid. The deepest central player stays home. The same passing sequence continues at the opposite end of the grid. The activity continues in this manner for 3-4 minutes to develop a smooth rhythm in the passing sequence. Players consistently keep themselves and the ball moving.

*Version 2*: Only 2-3 passes prior to the long pass. Gradually increase the speed of the activity...pace of passing and movement of players.

**Coaching Points:**
Clean up technique of passing and receiving. Intelligent movement, head up, preparing to receive the ball, surveying the area, looking for their target early, anticipation, passing accuracy and pace, keeping appropriate individual and group shape, playing in the direction that you are facing.

2) **4v0 and 4v0 (15-20 minutes)**: Same activity as in #1 above, but with two groups of 4 playing on the same field and playing through each other (red and yellow groups). Each group has its own ball and only concentrates on moving up and down the grid possessing their ball only. No defending. **Variation:** Add 1 or 2 bandits (in blue) to try to steal the balls.

**Coaching Points:**
Reinforce coaching points above as they play in traffic. When bandits are added, players must make better and faster decisions to eliminate pressure and successfully possess the ball. Proper individual and group shape is crucial to this success.

3) **6v6 Zone Game (20-25 minutes)**: Play a 6v6 game on a field 40 yards wide x 60 yards long. Create zones with cones at each end approximately 10 yards deep and the full width of the field. Each team defends the zone behind them and attacks the zone opposite them. A team **cannot enter** the zone it is defending. A team **can enter** the zone it is attacking. A point is awarded to a team that successfully dribbles the ball into the zone or makes a well-timed pass into the zone as a teammate arrives to receive it.

*Version 2*: Describe a scenario and put time limits on the game to speed up play...i.e. It is a tie game with 2 minutes remaining. The red team must win the game to advance into the play-offs.
Coaching Points:
Maintain the integrity of individual/group/team attacking shape while playing under the pressure of even numbers. Talk about the tactical speed of the attacking players...speed of the 1st attacker to find forward options, if they are on; speed of the 2nd attackers to provide supporting options to the 1st attacker; overall speed of play of the group. Reinforce coaching points made throughout the session.

4) 6v6, 7v7 or 8v8 Match (25-30 minutes): Field size appropriate to age and numbers. Play the game with goalkeepers. As in Version 2 of Activity 3 above, describe a scenario that will put the pressure of time on one of the teams...i.e. With 5 minutes remaining in the game, the red team is winning by a goal; the yellow team needs a draw to advance into the championship round of the tournament.

Coaching Points:
Maintain the integrity of individual/group/team attacking shape while playing under the pressure of the Game. Coach their attacking shape as it relates to the thirds or halves of the field. Teach the goalkeeper to coach the team shape from his/her vantage point.

Cool-Down...3-Player Juggling (10 minutes) A can only juggle with his feet, B can only juggle with her thighs and C can only juggle with his head. Each player in the group has a max of 5 consecutive juggles. A, B and C must try to juggle as many times as possible as a group. If they drop the ball, they can start again. After a few minutes, change the juggling surfaces within each group.

Additional Activities

Warm-Up Activity (15-20 minutes including stretching):
Groups of three players each. B passes short to A, who passes long to C and follows pass and executes a 1-2 pass with C who passes long to B and follows pass and repeats process. After a few minutes of successful combinations have them execute an overlap instead of 1-2 pass. After a few more minutes, have them execute a take-over.

Coaching Points:
- Quality of pass; proper weight, proper direction
- The quality of the support runs, angle, distance
- Speed of play. Increase speed as performance improves
- Communication; verbal, visual, always thinking
GAME #1 - 4 v 4 + 4 (15-20 minutes): In a 30 x 40 yard grid, two teams play 4 vs. 4 inside the grid with the support of the 4 players (bumpers) outside the grid. Field size depends on players’ age, ability and training objectives. Outside players have one or two touches on the ball or two seconds. Five pass = transition: When the team in possession completes five consecutive passes, they remain in the middle while the other two teams switch roles (play is continuous). Variations: (5 v 5 + 5, 6 v 6 + 6)

Coaching Points:
- Stress speed of play and organization.
- Don’t take the same space as your teammate.
- Quality of the 1st touch
- Communication; verbal, visual, always thinking
- Keep ball moving, always

GAME #2 - 4 v 4 + 4 (15-20 minutes):
Same as game #1 but now outside players must play a long ball if they take two touches. With one touch they can play short or long. The team in possession must complete at least three consecutive passes before playing to a neutral player.

Coaching Points:
- Outside players must move along the line and offer supporting angles.
- Outside players must see the whole field and not just in front of them.
- Team in possession must execute quickly using 1-2 pass, overlap and take-over.

GAME #3 - 4 v 4 + 4 (15-20 minutes):
The neutral team occupies the four corners (which are 5x5 yard grids made of cones). Ball must be played into a grid to a neutral player and back to the team that passed it in. Every time a team regains possession they must play a short corner first (that is determined by the ball being in that half of the field). After completing a short corner, the attacking team must complete a long corner by passing from the far half of the field to either of the other two corners on the other side of the mid-line. This completes the sequence. Two goal option: Award a goal for a complete sequence. After two goals the winning team stays in the middle while the other two team switch roles (play is continuous).

Coaching Points:
- Organization, communication.
- Quick transition from defense to attack.
- Must transition from one half of the field to the other.
- Must offer several passing options to corner players.
GAME #4 - 4v4+4+GKs: Two teams play 4v4 in the field while the third team plays as neutrals or bumpers outside of the field. A win is 3 points, a tie 1 point, and loss 0 points. Each team keeps score. Play 5 minute games or to 2 goals. Winning team stays and losing team switches with bumpers. One team plays maximum 2 games in a row. Regular rules. Bumpers have 2 touches or 2 seconds and always play for the team that gave them the ball. At the end of the designated time, the winning team goes automatically to the final and the other 2 teams play for the other spot. Semi-final and final are 5 minutes. In case of a tie in the semi-final, the team with most shots on goal is the winner. Use penalty kicks to break a tie in the championship game.