



“There are three players who are better than the rest: Iniesta, Ronaldo and Messi. But the best is Messi. There is nobody who can do the things he does”

- Brazil's Neymar praises the skills of Lionel Messi

Score Like Messi

Lionel Messi may have broken all goal scoring records last year but is it possible to coach your players to emulate his skills? Can you get them to score like Messi?

In a truly breathtaking run of form last year, Barcelona forward Lionel Messi reminded world soccer why so many people regard him as one of the greatest footballers of all time, hitting the net a phenomenal 91 times in one calendar year.

While it is unlikely that your strikers will notch up anywhere near the tally achieved by the incredible Argentinian, working on some of the skills that make Messi such a formidable marksman will undoubtedly improve the fortunes of your team and help to get your forwards scoring more goals.

But what is it that makes Messi so good? Is it his composure on the ball or the simplicity of his world beating dribbling skills? Is it his incredible acceleration, the perfect timing of his runs, or the low centre of gravity that has gifted him such fantastic balance? Cynics have tried to suggest that being blessed with creative providers such

as Xavi and Iniesta hasn't hindered his goal tally, but in any team his abilities would be judged as extraordinary.

“Messi is the best player in the world,” argued Zlatan Ibrahimovic recently, himself no slouch with the ball. “He plays like he's on PlayStation, it's unbelievable. People who say otherwise either don't know anything about football or are just talking nonsense.”

If Leo himself is to be believed, his abilities originally came from a passion for the sport and a familiarity with the ball – something that most of your players should relate to. “First of all you've got to love the game,” he has said. “From the age of three I played every day: every morning, afternoon and night.”

If regular ball work has paid dividends for Messi, this is something that can be encouraged in all youngsters. There are also certain of his skills and techniques that you can coach on the

training ground, such as how to time those surging runs, when to attack the space behind a defender, and how to play the wonderful one-touch tiki-taka that he enjoys so much at Barcelona.

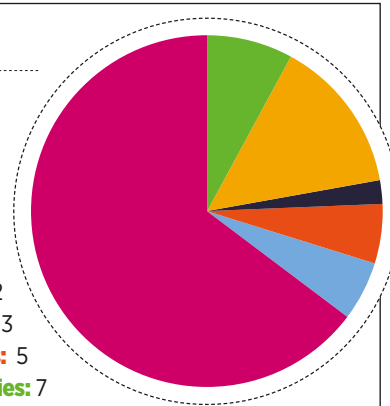
We have two activities on the following pages that will help with these skills – try them in training and soon your players could be scoring like Messi.

Words by:
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Activities by:
David Clarke

THE HOT 91

Lionel Messi scored 91 goals in 2012. This is where he scored them...

La Liga: 59
Copa Del Rey: 5
Spanish Super Cup: 2
Champions League: 13
World Cup Qualifiers: 5
International Friendlies: 7



Explode Into The Box

Exploding into the box is one of Lionel Messi's most effective attacking weapons. Get your players to try this drill and they too could be destroying defences in seconds

WHY USE IT

When attacking, runs into the box need energy, changes of pace and changes of direction. Players need to experience how short bursts of speed and movement can be explosive near the goal.

SET UP

Mark out an area of 25x20 yards, with a goal at one end and two five-yard channels at the other. We're using eight players. You need balls, bibs, cones and a goal.

HOW TO PLAY

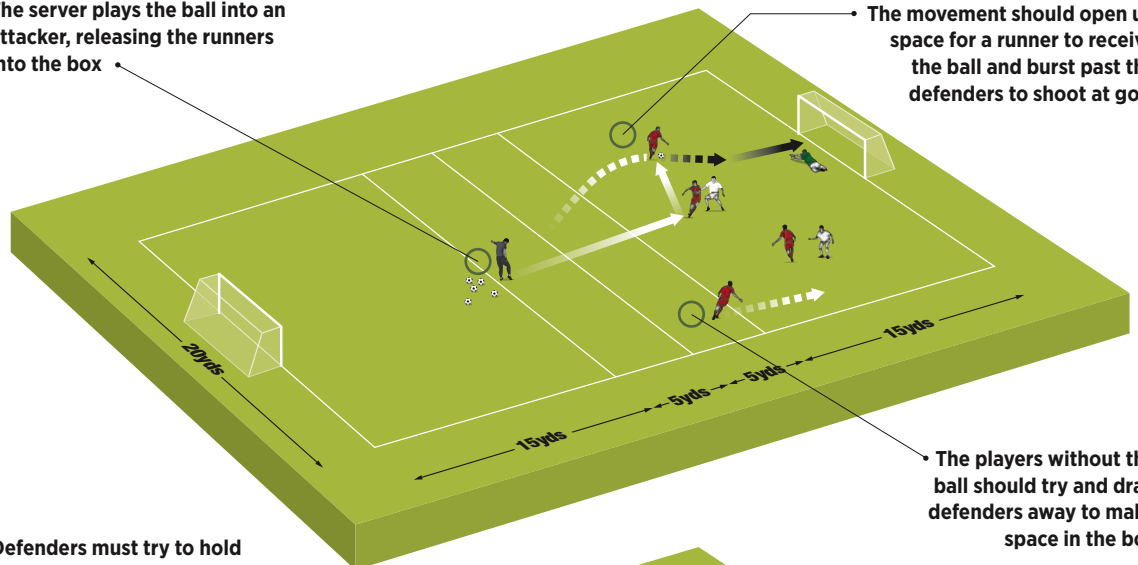
In the first channel a server has five balls ready to play into two attackers in the main area. The two players in the second area must play like Messi and burst into the box but they cannot move until one of the attackers in the main area touches the ball. Defenders score a point by returning the ball to the server. Rotate all players after five balls have been played.

TECHNIQUE

The timing and type of run from the two attackers will determine how effective the move is. Attackers must make decisions based on what they see ahead of them and where the space in front of goal is.

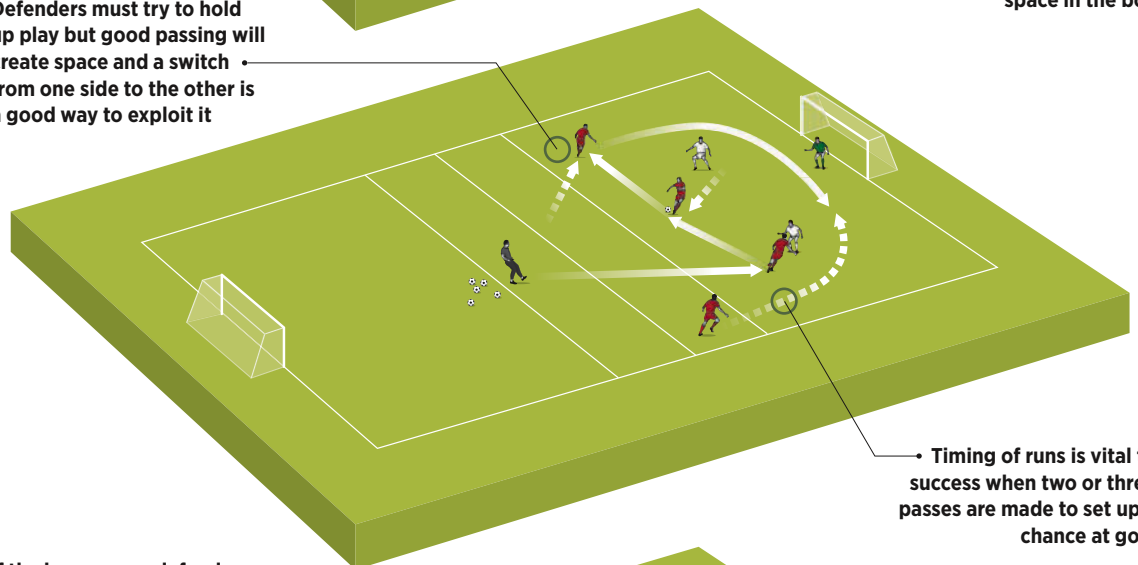
The server plays the ball into an attacker, releasing the runners into the box

The movement should open up space for a runner to receive the ball and burst past the defenders to shoot at goal



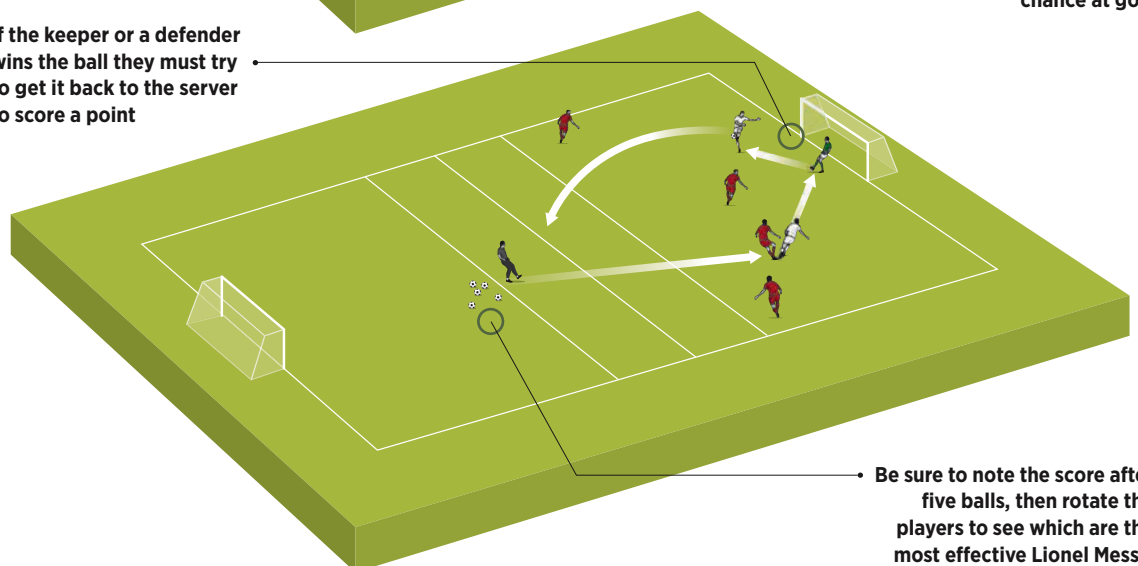
Defenders must try to hold up play but good passing will create space and a switch from one side to the other is a good way to exploit it

The players without the ball should try and drag defenders away to make space in the box



Timing of runs is vital to success when two or three passes are made to set up a chance at goal

If the keeper or a defender wins the ball they must try to get it back to the server to score a point



Be sure to note the score after five balls, then rotate the players to see which are the most effective Lionel Messis

Player movement

Ball movement

Run with ball

Shot

Goalscorer

Get your players to turn and shoot just like Messi with this attacking drill that will improve both their ball control and their shooting ability

WHY USE IT

Creating space in the penalty box with a simple turn and shot is vital to the success of any striker. It gives attackers the edge over defenders when they turn in the area

SET UP

Use an area 25x25 yards with a goal at each end. Put two passive defenders or cones on the halfway line, about 10 yards in from each touchline.

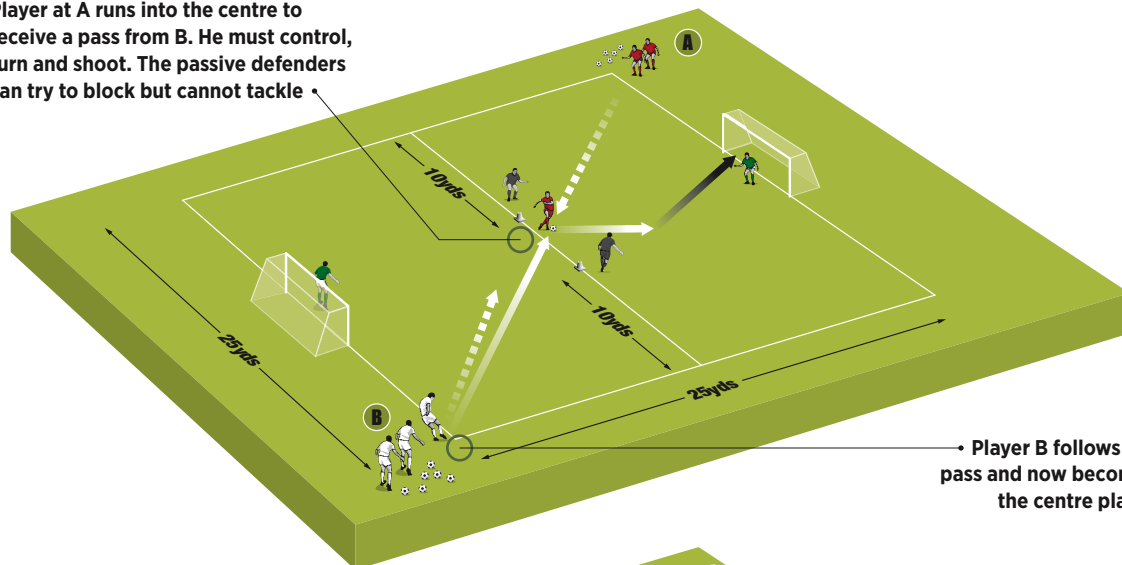
HOW TO PLAY

A pass is played into the attacker who must use only three touches to control, turn and shoot. The defenders can only shadow the players not tackle. Make the defenders active once your players are turning and shooting with ease. Because the game is continuous, rotate the defenders every five turns.

TECHNIQUE

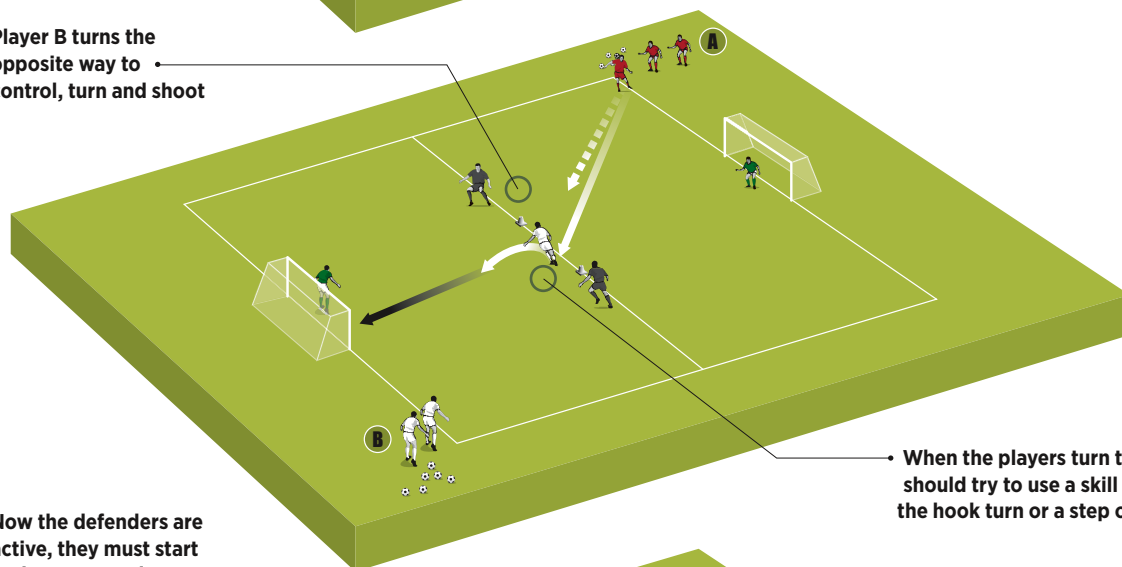
This is a great set up for players to practice using a technique like a hook turn and then using their instep or the front of their foot to hit the target. Players should be encouraged to use both feet. Speed is of great importance so encourage fast runs to the cone and quick turns. Having only three touches will help speed up the action but it requires more skill so some players may need more touches.

Player at A runs into the centre to receive a pass from B. He must control, turn and shoot. The passive defenders can try to block but cannot tackle



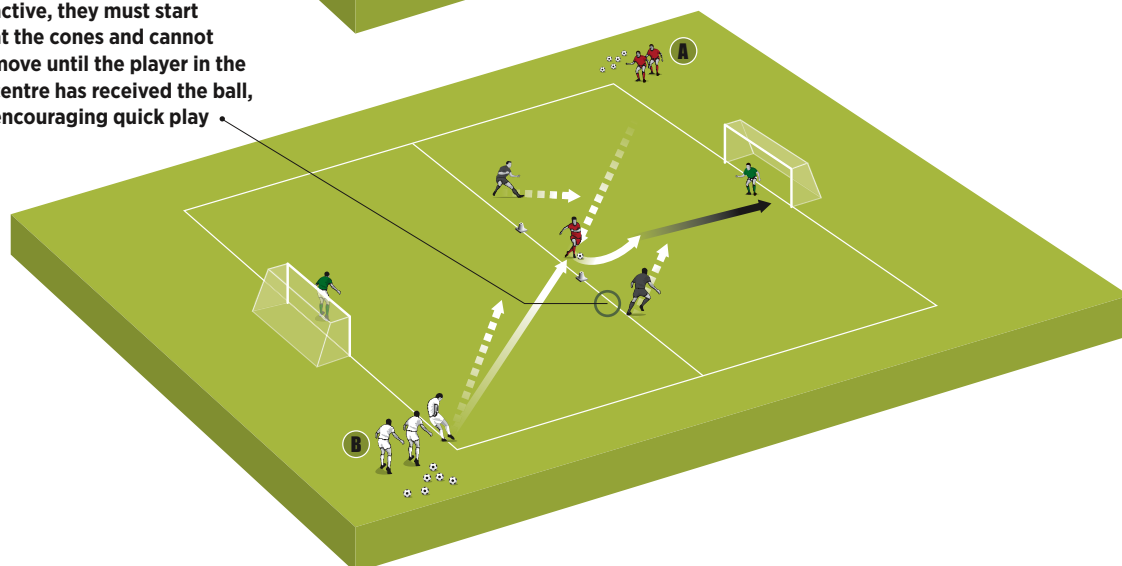
Player B follows the pass and now becomes the centre player

Player B turns the opposite way to control, turn and shoot



When the players turn they should try to use a skill like the hook turn or a step over

Now the defenders are active, they must start at the cones and cannot move until the player in the centre has received the ball, encouraging quick play



Player movement

Ball movement

Run with ball

Shot