



US Women's National Teams Program

***“Lessons Learned from the 2003 Women's World Cup
And,
How to apply them to the YOUTH GAME”***

Presented By: US Women's National Teams Program

April Heinrichs – Technical Director & Head Coach
Tracey Leone – U19 National Team – Head Coach
Chris Petrucelli – U21 National Team – Head Coach
Dave Smith – U17 National Team – Head Coach
Sue Montagne-Patberg – U16 National Team – Head Coach
Jeff Pill – National Staff Coach – Region I
Stephanie Gabbert – National Staff Coach – Region II
Dave Simeone – National Staff Coach – Region III
Greg Ryan – National Staff Coach – Region IV
Phil Wheddon – US Women's National Team – Goalkeeper Coach
Karen Richter-Hoppa – Youth Goalkeeper Coordinator

Introduction

We are pleased to provide America's soccer community with an evaluation of the needs of the youth game. This has been compiled through observations made while coaching and scouting at the 2003 Women's World Cup and evaluating talented female players at the club, state, regional and national team levels. The positive strides our young players are making in every aspect of the game has been exciting to watch over the years. Evaluations of our U14, U16, U17, U19 and U21 Youth National Team players bear out the facts that they are more athletically gifted, technically sound and tactically sophisticated than players of previous generations. However, we must constantly search for ways to improve in order to continue to develop some of the world's best players and teams. After observing our youth players and reflecting on the 2003 Women's World Cup, our staff has identified several specific topics for all coaches to address on a daily basis, including the U.S. Women's National Team, which aspires to win gold at the 2004 Olympic Games. The following list of priorities is provided to help enhance player and team development throughout the country.

It is impossible to write a post-World Cup document and include all our thoughts and analysis without it becoming a hard cover book. With that in mind, we judiciously chose topics of urgency for all levels. Please feel free to contact any one of us for further details.

Outline:

A. Technical Goals:

1. Penetrative and Final Passing
2. 1 v 1 for Penetration and Possession / Competence on the Ball
3. Finishing Techniques and Ratios
4. Heading to Goal and Flick Heading

B. Tactical Goals:

1. Quality and Timing of Runs
(How to move in relation to pressure on the ball)
2. Combination Play
(The Germans are the best; let's steal from them)
(The "Chemistry of Two")
(3 man combos between MF & FWD)
3. Possession to get Numbers in the Attack and Rhythm Training
4. Defending in lines and "Cues" to Synchronized Movement of Backs

C. Goalkeeping:

1. Playing With the Feet (back passes and clearances)
2. Reading Crossed / Flighted balls (attacking the ball)
3. The Psychological Dimension of the goalkeeper

D. Set Plays Principles:

1. Attacking Set Plays
2. Defending Set Plays
3. Throw-ins in each 1/3 of the Field

E. Systems of Play:

1. 4-4-2
2. 4-3-3
3. Flexibility within Systems

2003 Women's World Cup

Review of Team Lessons Learned

Things We Did Well:

1. Attacking Set Plays
 - Scored 11 of 15 goals
2. Flat Back 4 Shape, reading the game
 - Overall team defending
 - Midfield shape
3. Flank Play
 - In combinations
 - In a variety of ways
4. Playing in & transitioning to different systems
 - Played 4-4-2 & 4-3-3
 - 3 different "looks" in each system
5. Heading / Air Game
 - Attacking set plays
 - Defending sets
 - Flick heading

Things to Improve Upon:

1. Consistency of Combination Play
2. Attacking Out of the Back
 - Getting a back forward
 - Service forward
3. Getting Runners in the Box
4. Finishing Focus & Ratios
 - Shots to shots on goal ratio
5. Speed of Play / Possession
 - Rhythm
 - #'s around the ball in the attack

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|---|---|
| <p>6. Getting Endline
-1v1 and playing a teammate in</p> <p>7. Overall Athleticism / Fitness</p> <p>8. Versatility / Depth (of systems and personnel)
-Played 18 of 20 players
-Started 16 different players</p> <p>9. Mentality / Attitude</p> <p>10. Overcame injuries, wusa fatigue and travel</p> | <p>6. Service from Endline
-Finding runners consistently</p> <p>7. Final Pass
-Timing, accuracy & pace
-Technically and tactically</p> <p>8. Forwards turning, taking on 1v1</p> <p>9. Change of Field
-Less predictable</p> <p>10. Marking in the Box
-Defensive sets
-Run of play</p> |
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Keeping an eye on the rest of the World:

1st Germany

- Combination Play
- Final Pass (pace, timing and accuracy)
- Numbers around the ball in the Attack
- Possession team
- Best Attacking Team (3 great attacking personalities)
- (25 Goals For, 5 Goals Against)

2nd Sweden

- Balance of Direct & Indirect Play
- Perfect balance of being an Attacking & Defensive Team
- Chemistry of 2 Forwards
- Individual and Team Defending
- (10 Goals For, 7 Goals Against)

3rd USA

- Dominant Air Game
- Flank Play
- Attacking Set Plays (11 of 15 goals scored)
- Depth & Versatility of personnel and systems
- Best Defending Team
- (15 Goals For, 5 Goals Against)

4th Canada

- Physically Aggressive Team
- Youth influx
- Opportunistic on Set Plays
- (10 Goals For, 10 Goals Against)

-----(Unofficially)-----

5th Brazil

- Creativity in the Attack
- Individual Tackling presence
- Dribbling Prowess
- (10 Goals For, 3 Goals Against)

6th Norway

- Organized Defending
- Long Balls
- Counter Attacking
- Dominant Air Game
- (10 Goals For, 6 Goals Against)

7th North Korea

- Precision Passing and Possession
- Numbers around the ball in the Attack
- Unbalancing runs and service
- Balance of central, flank and direct play
- (3 Goals For, 4 Goals Against)

8th China

- Precision Passing and Possession
- Technically strong team
- Disciplined in Attacking & Defending
- (3 Goals For, 2 Goals Against)

Outline of Applicable Lessons

A. Technical Goals:

Across the USA, we must continue to place technical development as our **first priority**. It's the greatest and most urgent need in every player's development. We need coaches to commit to the full technical development of their players, by de-emphasizing winning and re-emphasizing the importance of technical sophistication with the ball. A combination of team technical training and development of self-training programs is critical to improving our players' skill level. Taking technical development one-step further, we need to help our players apply technique properly to specific game related situations.

#1 Penetrative and Final Passing

Our players need to be able to pass balls over a variety of distances with proper pace, accuracy, texture and with deception. This includes driving long balls (low and high), chipping and bending balls accurately. It also includes being able to use all surfaces of both feet. Aly Wagner is a great example of a player who has developed the ability to play quality penetration passes with the proper bend away from the defender. She can drive, bend, and chip balls through or over an organized defense creating quality-scoring opportunities for her teammates and she can do it with both feet.

Specific Application 1: Penetration Passing

- Chip, bend, drive and slip passes over and through organized defenses
- Play passes behind and on angles away from defenders and goalkeepers
- Passes must be made off the dribble in a realistic game environment

Training Suggestion:

- Play games with penetration/off-sides zones behind each team (4v4 → 11v11)
- Play with neutral playmakers (Ex: 4v4+1 → 7v7+2)
- Reward individuals who make the 'final pass' in an exercise or scrimmage

Specific Application 2: Flank Service – Accuracy and Quality of Service

- Driven balls to the near or far post
- Bending balls away from the goalkeeper and defenders
- Lofted/floated balls to the far post
- Balls cut back to the top of the box for midfielders supporting the play
- Forwards and Midfielders who can cross the ball with both feet and to target area

Training Suggestion:

- Play free flank channel games with emphasis on the quality of the service
- Increase pressure on the flank players once they can serve accurately without pressure
- Create games/training environments that reward goals scored that were initiated from the flank service

#2 One versus One (1v1)

It is important that we develop players that have the ability to draw defenders in and get past them to either shoot or pass quickly according to the demands of the situation. This is a step well beyond simply pushing the ball past a defender and beating them to it in a foot race. Continued technical development is a key factor, as the greater the comfort level a player has with the ball, the more successful she will be at beating opponents 1v1.

In addition to 1v1 for penetration, players must recognize when to simply maintain possession instead of attempting to penetrate into closed spaces. We need to help our players develop the skills required to keep the ball when under intense defensive pressure (ie shielding, wiggling away from pressure with first touch) and have the ability and sophistication to beat defenders with the pass.

Specific Application 1: 1v1 Penetration

- Positive first touch to go at defender and isolate them as quickly as possible
- Players must read the space they want to attack (Ex: Lack of cover)
- Effective use of feinting/deception
- Competence using all surfaces of the feet when going 1v1
- Explosive change of speed and/or direction
- After beating the player, eliminate the defender by cutting across her path to the ball

Training Suggestion:

- 1v1 → 5v5 with even numbers to penetration zones with 3+ touch minimum
- 6v6 → 11v11 to large goals with GKs
- Divide field into 1/3's, with middle 1/3 slightly larger than end 1/3's
- Players must penetrate on the dribble from middle 1/3 to attacking 1/3
- Use neutral player in middle 1/3 if necessary to help keep possession

Specific Application 2: 1v1 Possession / Competence on the Ball

- Receive the ball with the first touch away from pressure
- Position the body between the ball and the defender, holding opponents off with a low stance, good balance and arms out and head up
- Immediately identify and dribble to open space – wiggle away from pressure
- Use feints to keep the defenders off balance
- Use quick ball touches to prevent the opponents from winning the ball
- Keep the ball moving and change speed or direction with the ball
- Use all surfaces of both feet for tight dribbling, changing direction
- Incorporate more sophisticated deception with the ball: for example, lifting the ball over the defender's foot, use of nutmegs, etc.
- Recognize when to dribble for possession versus dribbling for penetration

Training Suggestion:

- Even numbers or numbers down games in small areas with minimum touch restrictions (Ex: 3v3 in a 15 x 20 grid)
- Even numbers with minimum touch restrictions with players on the outside to help maintain possession (Ex: 4v4 with 4 neutral players on the outside of a 20 x25 grid)

#3 Finishing Techniques and Ratios

To improve our efficiency in the final third, it starts with the technical level of each player to finish serves and it ends with how much time she actually spends in front of the goal working on finishing techniques. We generally require more chances to score goals than our European counterparts. Improving this area requires a multi-faceted approach.

- Quality: Take the time to develop finishing technique
- Concept: "Finishing" as opposed to "shooting"
- Correct attitude in the final 1/3 – Half chances, rebounds, ambition, hunger and focus
- Comfort level in front of the goal – Constantly train your players in the final third
- Create training games that provide a variety of types of finishing
- Competitive and realistic training – Pressure training in tight spaces
- Repetition, repetition, repetition! The number of repetitions directly translates into efficiency in front of the goal as an individual and eventually as a team.

Specific Application 1: Improve Your Team's Finishing Efficiency

Record the number of chances it takes your team to score. Set team goals to reduce the number of opportunities required to score a goal. Make this a priority in training your players. Some finishing keys:

- Power shot – land on shooting foot, at target. Right and left foot.
- Re-direct – quick touch in stride to change direction of the ball
- Placement – inside of foot pass when power is not a necessity
- Out of the air – strike top half of ball and aim at the goal line

Training Suggestion:

- 4v4 + neutral players (36 x 44) Narrow the field towards the endlines – diamond
- Each team has 2 unmarked flank players for crossing
- Each team has 2 "bumper" players along the endline that they are attacking
- The 2 players along the endline play one touch – knock balls out in front to finish
- Divide the group into teams, play for time, keep score (individual and team)
- Players may score in the run of play without using the flank or bumper players

Scoring:

- 1-touch goals count as 2 points
- Goals scored off rebounds as 3 points
- Goals off the run of play count as 1 point

#4 Heading to Goal and Flick Headers

Heading success has a huge impact on a team's ability to dominate a game by controlling field position, by scoring goals from flighted serves or preventing opponents from scoring goals in the air, specifically on set pieces. In addition to developing proper heading technique, players need to learn to read the flight of the ball through dealing with a lot of long services. They also must develop the determination required to win the ball in competitive situations. The U.S. Women's National Team was historically one of the worst heading teams in the world. In the 2003 Women's World Cup, we would most certainly be considered the best offensive threat and the most stubborn defensive team in the air.

Specific Application 1: Heading to Score Goals

We can all learn from Cindy Parlow, Abby Wambach, Catherine Reddick and Shannon Boxx. All of these Women's National Team players scored great goals on headers in the 2003 Women's World Cup. Keys to their success were:

- Strong, well timed runs in the box
- Reading the flight of the cross
- Getting above the ball and heading it down by striking the top half of the ball

Training Suggestion:

- Free Flank Player Games (3v1 in box → 3v4 in box)
- 5 Points for a goal from a header – 1 point for a goal with any other surface
- Increase defensive pressure as attackers have more success

Specific Application 2: Heading Punts and Goal Kicks

Winning these air balls is critical to success in any game as it allows a team to either keep an opponent locked into their defending half or allows a team to get out of their defending half in order to attack. Joy Fawcett, Catherine Reddick, Kate Sobrero, Shannon Boxx and Christie Pearce were the defensive unit that held Norway to just 1 shot on goal in 94 minutes of play, which is a remarkable achievement in any World Cup and especially against the very direct Norwegians.

- Starting position anticipating the line of flight and distance of the punt or goal kick
- Reading the flight of the ball
- Battling for position – Arms up for balance, strength and protection
- Correct heading technique – Directing header towards teammates for possession

Training Suggestion:

- Play a game in which the goalkeepers must play every ball high and long
- Require all throw-ins to be played as long services with the feet
- Require all other re-starts to be served high and long

Specific Application 3: Flick Headers

- Attackers must get touch tight and side-on
- Control the space and battle with the defender while reading the flight of the ball
- Flick accurately to teammates running in behind them
- Reward points to the player/team that flicks the ball or heads it back to where it came from

Training Suggestion:

- 1v1 with two servers on either side of the players battling for the head ball
- One player is the attacker who tries to flick on to player behind them
- The other is the defender who attempts to head back toward the server
- Play a game requiring all re-starts to use long flighted services

B. Tactical Goals:

Our tactical goals can only be achieved if we first accomplish our technical goals. Our first tactical goal, movement by attacking players, is directly linked to our first technical goal – penetration passing. Our players' runs will only be effective if they can accurately pass the ball. Which comes first, the run or pass? Always, always and always the RUN. Player movement creates options for teammates to make passes. More runs, gives the person on the ball the feeling of having more targets to choose from.

#1 Quality and Timing of Runs by Attacking Players

Attacking players need to know how and when to make different types of runs based upon the specific tactical situation. Some runs are made explosively; some are slight adjustments to current positioning. Some runs require a 40-yard sprint, others require a bend to create a passing channel, and still others require pulling away from the ball so that the defender has a difficult time seeing both the ball and you. A list of the "8 Runs in the Game" is provided below. Ever have that feeling of not knowing where to run when a teammate with the ball is either looking to you for help or dribbling at you? Here's the answer:

8 Runs in the Game (without the ball):

Checking:

- Run back at an angle towards the attacker who is in possession of the ball
- Make the run in front of the defender and into passing channels
- Timing - Check back as the player on the ball looks up

Withdrawing:

- Run made with the intent of pulling away from the goalside defender
- Receive a pass faced-up (usually wide)
- Provides player receiving the ball with the ability to face and run at the defense

Supporting:

- Run near the ball that helps the team maintain possession. Usually a short run, and more often than not a "supporting" run is a run made behind the ball.

Unbalancing:

- Run made with the intent of “stretching” the defending team - Usually made wide, in advance and on the weak side of the ball

Clearing:

- Run made to create space for a teammate
- Forces a defender to choose to stay with the runner or remain in the space

Penetrating:

- Run made at or with the intent to get behind the back line
- Timing is critical otherwise the run will be declared offside

Overlapping:

- Wide run made around a teammate with the ball, who is faced-up

Slanting:

- Initially, a lateral run is made parallel to the opponent’s back line to remain on-sides
- The runner adds an angled run to get behind the defensive restraining line
- Timing – the slanting portion of the run occurs just as the pass is played

Specific Application 1: Midfield Player is Looking to Pass

- Forwards and midfielders need to be able to read the action of the opposing team’s back line and choose the best run to make for each specific situation.
- Are their backs “dropping?” If so, a checking run back towards the midfield is appropriate and/or, one of the forwards can make penetrating or unbalancing run to take away more than one defender.
- Are their backs “holding or stepping?” If so, a penetrating, slanting or overlapping run behind the back line is appropriate.
- Does the midfielder have time to look up and assess potential options? If so, then a run that takes longer to develop is an option. If not, then making oneself available as quickly as possible (check, withdraw, support in advance of the ball) are all options.
- Our players must learn to pass and run through different seams in the defense. And, every player needs to be able to read the game’s challenges and make runs based not on what the defense takes away, but rather what the defense is giving.
- Additionally, all our players need to make runs and be aware of teammates runs to best take advantage of opponent’s mistakes or weaknesses.

Training Suggestion:

- 4v4+4 in a 20 x 20 yard grid
- Keep away, points awarded for possession and for a pass that splits two defenders.
- Build to a half field 8v6+GK to a large goal with two counter goals game
- Functionally train midfielders to make decisions under pressure and, forwards to read what the back line is doing and to move based on the pressure on the midfielder.

Specific Application 2: Midfield Player is Dribbling with Space

- A bent run to clear the space and open the passing angle is appropriate
- Forces the defender to choose to go to the dribbler or to stay with the forward's run
- The wide bent run also allows a better angle to attack for the forward
- The forward receiving the pass is "faced-up" and can run at the defense
- A penetrative run from behind the ball that is well timed can create momentum to beat the back line as they are faced the wrong way around.

Training Suggestion:

- 6v5+GK to a large goal and counters with a 25 yard offside zone behind the backs
- Midfielders must play forward into the 25 yard zone before they can penetrate
- Organize the 6 attackers as 4 – 2 or 3 – 3. Organize the 5 defenders as a 3 – 2
- Add more numbers to the defending team as the attack achieves success
- Variation: Require penetrating pass to be 1 touch

#2 Combination Play – Germany's forte

Combination play is a critical component in a team's effort to break down organized defenses. We should teach our players to combine in all areas of the field. However, we want to place special emphasis on linking our functional groups so that they can creatively combine to achieve penetration in the final third. All of our teams are quite adept at getting into the attacking third and in fact creating numerous chances on goal through 90 minutes of play, however, these opportunities are almost always created by 1-2 players. Our interest is in developing the team concept further, so that the ball is moved so dynamically and creatively that if opponents work hard to shut down one of our top players, we can beat them with ball movement and creativity.

Specific Application 1: Developing Creative Chemistry between Strikers

The Swedish coaching staff developed the attacking chemistry between their two strikers (Ljunberg and Svensson) for many years prior to the 2003 Women's World Cup. The tandem's intuitive understanding of how to create goal-scoring opportunities via combination play was apparent to all who watched them play. Some keys were:

- Positioning in angles to one another with one high and one low
- Movement with a selfless intent
- Non-verbal communication – eye contact, hand gestures, runs, etc.
- Use of flicks on the ground and from headers
- Tremendous fitness base and personal work-ethic

Training Suggestion:

- 2v2 +2 to a large goal
- Neutral players support the strikers and act as targets when defenders win the ball
- Neutral players cannot shoot or penetrate
- Add a 3rd defender as strikers achieve success 2v2

Specific Application 2: Three Person Combinations with Midfielders and Strikers

Example: 1 (High – Low – High) / (Up – Back – Through). Ball High to Striker 1 – Low to Midfielder 1 – High to Striker 2

Example: 2 (In – Out – In). Ball in to Striker 1 – Out to Wing Midfielder 1 – Switch behind Back 4 to Striker 2

Training Suggestion:

- 6v4 + GK to a large goal and counter goals with an 18 yard penetration zone
- The 6 attackers are organized as a 4-2
- The 4 defenders are organized as a 2-2
- Require that players must be played into the penetration zone via combinations
- Goals may only be scored from within the penalty box
- A striker must receive a pass prior to the team entering the penetration zone
- Increase the number of defenders as the attack achieves success

Specific Application 3: Getting Wing Defenders into the Attack via Combination Play

Example: (Up – Back – Overlap) Wing Defender 1 → Striker 1 → Midfielder 1 → Wing Defender 1 (who has overlapped) → Flank Service

Training Suggestion:

- 10 v 8 + GK to large goal and counters
- 10 are organized as 4-4-2 or 4-3-3
- 8 are organized as 3 D's and 4 M's and 1 F
- Increase the number of defenders as the attack achieves success
- Central defenders are restricted to 2 touches
- Wing defenders are unlimited

#3 Possession: Numbers in the Attack (Rhythm)

Players and teams at every level need to improve their collective ability to possess the ball and develop a playing rhythm. Across the board, our teams are either very direct, or too predictable in their eagerness to go forward. The ability to possess the ball and play with a team rhythm involves both the player in possession of the ball as well as the supporting teammates. Competency on the ball, patience in possession, creativity and the coaching support of a slow build-up style of play will contribute to our ability to get more players involved in the attack, more players in the box when the ball arrives, and create more chances on goal.

Specific Application 1: Improve Possession and Develop a Rhythm of Play

Individual Keys:

- Open body to “view the field”
- 1st touch towards support and away from defensive pressure
- Keep the ball moving – In general, play the way you are facing
- Play to feet – The game will tell you when it is “on” to play to space
- Direction of play - Play away from opponents defensive numbers

Collective Keys:

- Immediate transition from defense to a good attacking shape
- Provide superior numbers around the ball with passing options in all directions
- Proper distance and angles for all supporting players
- Speed of play – Circulate the ball quickly to keep the defense off balance
- Possess the ball long enough to get more players into the attacking third

Training Suggestion:

- 4 v 4 + 1 to end zones (35 x 30), 2 touch maximum
- 7v7+1 with GK's (80 x 50), two regulation goals, divided into thirds
 - Play 2 touch in middle and back thirds of the field
 - Play unlimited touches in the final third of the field

#4 Defending in Lines and Synchronized Movement of the Backline

Although the US has never been known for world-class defending, it is no coincidence that the US team was the best defending team in the Women's World Cup. We have worked on our individual and collective defending for 4 years. Every player knows the principles of individual defending and has learned the "cues" to our team defending. Additionally, every player can play as a wide or central defender. A great example is Catherine Reddick, a young player we inserted for Brandi Chastain during the Sweden opener - Catherine is also capable of playing left and right back. All players must understand how to apply zonal principles of defense (as a team, in the midfield and at the back) and how to apply tight man marking, especially in the penalty box through the run of play and on defensive corner kicks.

Specific Application 1: Pressuring the Ball

- Immediately pressure the ball (1-3 yards as soon as possible)
- Deny penetration by the player with the ball
- Lack of pressure allows opponents time and vision to serve or dribble behind the defense
- Keep the opponent's back to pressure if possible
- Maintain tight pressure to keep the opponent's head down
- Positioning and patience will provide opportunities to win the ball
- Do not dive in
- Pressure immediately if numbers up or even
- Delay if numbers down unless you are sure you can win the ball

Training Suggestion:

- 1v1 in a 15 x 20 yard grid w/ direction
- Teach individual principles of defending – faced up and back to pressure
- 2v2 in a 20 x 30 yard grid w/ direction
- Teach the communication between the two
- 4v4 in a 25 x 45 yard grid w/ direction
- Teach principles of pressure, cover, recover, balance (zonal defending)

Specific Application 2: Defending as a Functional Group in the Midfield

- Proper positions of midfielders in relation to the ball and opponents
- Proper pressure, cover and pinch or balance (depending on system)
- Immediately exchange roles as the ball is passed between attackers (recover)
- Covering midfielders position in passing lanes to intercept passes
- Defending in the passing lanes will help deny service to target players
- Decision to adjust covering position to track opponent runs

Training Suggestion:

- 4v4+2 or 5v5+2 - (3 Goal Game)
- Focus on pressuring, covering and pinching or balancing roles of midfielders
- Focus on midfielders moving in and out of pressure and cover roles
- Increase the amount of space to be defended as the defending groups have success

Specific Application 3: Synchronized Movement of the Backline

The US Women's National Team back four defenders were well organized and executed a flat zonal defense with extreme efficiency and precision. Understanding how to move together as a group was central to our success. Here are some ideas regarding coordinated movement of the back line.

Defensive Organization "Cues":**When to Squeeze? (Push up as a Unit)**

- Opponents play a long back pass or long square ball
- There is tight pressure on the opponent with the ball preventing a long pass
- Your team has clear possession and is moving forward with the ball
- Your team clears a long ball up the field

When to Hold?

- When the opponents "can't serve it long"
- When "moderate" pressure is applied to opponent in possession of the ball
- Opponents play a short square pass that cannot be played behind the defense

When to Drop?

- No pressure on the ball
- If opponents are "looking long"
- Opponents play a short back pass to a player who can serve long
- Anticipating opponent's long defensive clearance

Other Keys:

- Defenders standing side on in order to react to a ball played over them
- Tracking of runners when balls can be played to them in the seams
- Goalkeeper stepping with the defenders to deal with through balls

Training Suggestion:

- 10 v 10 + 2
- Require the attacking team to attempt to play behind the backline within 3 - 5 passes

C. Goalkeeping:

The performances of the goalkeepers in the 2003 Women's World Cup showed that the role of the goalkeeper has evolved greatly over the last few years. As we strive to maintain the technical and tactical integrity of our goalkeepers, we must also try to develop the "Complete Goalkeeper." We need to train our goalkeepers to play with both feet, deal with back passes and clearances as well as flighted balls. We also need to help our goalkeepers develop confidence and leadership skills in all situations. The performances of Rottenberg from Germany, Joensson from Sweden and US goalkeeper,

Briana Scurry set new levels of technical and tactical excellence while also demonstrating extremely high levels of confidence and composure in challenging situations. The following key areas need to be addressed with all the goalkeepers across America. Helping goalkeepers improve in these areas will enable us to continue to develop quality goalkeepers at every level.

#1 Playing with the Feet - “The Kicking Game”

This is an area of significant weakness for many goalkeepers. Our goalkeepers must be able to play the ball with either foot, with and without defensive pressure. She needs to be able to change the point of attack, break up the opponent’s attacks by intercepting through balls, start counter attacks with effective distribution and be relied upon as the 11th field player for support.

Specific Application 1: Dealing with Back Passes

- Read pressure on the ball
- Prepare the ball away from pressure, if there is time for more than one touch
- Play to the furthest open or safest target to maintain possession when possible
- Strike the ball on the correct surface of the foot and correct surface on the ball

Training Suggestion:

- Encourage team players to use the goalkeeper during regular exercises
- Use the goalkeeper in possession games to build confidence in technical ability
- Practice playing out of the back, under no pressure, with the goalkeeper changing the point.

Specific Application 2: Clearances

- Focus on correct contact on the ball, keep your eyes on the ball while striking
- Strike through the ball to clear the initial pressure and secondary pressure
- Recognize where the pressure is coming from (this will determine whether you have time for more than one touch and the direction in which you should clear)
- Safety first: clear the pressure first, possession is secondary
- Goalkeepers should be encouraged to take up a proactive starting position (high) in order to be prepared to come for through balls.

Training Suggestion:

- Play balls to the goalkeeper’s left and right feet under no pressure, goalkeeper should strike ball first time to target areas designated on the field
- Play balls to goalkeeper at various speeds, heights and angles, under passive pressure, to encourage the goalkeeper to execute technique with some urgency
- As above, under full pressure of a charging opponent
- Incorporate and encourage goalkeeper to read the game and clear under pressure during team activities

#2 Reading Crossed balls - Service and Pressure in the Goal Area

There are very few goalkeepers who are able to handle being pressured when attempting to catch a flighted ball. This is seen as the main area of concern for our goalkeepers. However, as we saw throughout the 2003 World Cup, this “traditional” weakness is changing. Goalkeepers such as Rottenberg (Germany), Scurry (USA), Nordby (Norway) and Jonsson (Sweden) demonstrated that female goalkeepers are dominant in the air. The goalkeeper’s ability to deal with service into the box is

dependent on a number of key technical and tactical considerations. The ability to read the flight of the ball, knowing what is going on around you, correct footwork and approach to the ball are all areas that we must focus on with our goalkeepers.

Specific Application 1: Preparing to Attack the Ball

It is common to see goalkeepers move towards the ball before they have assessed the flight of the ball and then misjudge or mishandle the ball. This can be corrected with repetition.

- Starting position - The goalkeeper should be in a position that allows her to move forward, backward and laterally to the ball.
- Early decision - Needed as to whether the goalkeeper can get to the ball; a late decision can result in confusion and mistakes. Once the goalkeeper decides that she can get to the ball, correct communication is needed and the defenders should cover for the goalkeeper.
- Footwork - Short quick steps are key to generating speed quickly to get to the ball. Small steps will allow the goalkeeper to adjust her position. The final approach steps should be large to get thrust to the ball and the leg nearest to the oncoming pressure is raised to absorb contact and protect the goalkeeper.
- Handling – The goalkeeper should square herself to the ball in order to eliminate potential handling problems. Focus should always be on the ball and not on surrounding players. The goalkeeper must grip the ball firmly and secure it before contact is made. If it is not possible to catch cleanly, the goalkeeper should look to box the ball high and away from the initial pressure.

Training Suggestion:

- Repetition of catching service from all angles under no pressure. Goalkeepers need to be comfortable under no pressure before we expect them to function under heavy pressure. This will also allow the goalkeeper to extend their range.
- Add passive pressure so that the goalkeeper has to deal with light challenges. This will develop her confidence under physical pressure.
- Match condition: focus on the goalkeeper dealing with full pressure in game realistic situations. She must be relaxed and comfortable under pressure and be able to judge when to catch and when to box.
- When dealing with flighted balls, service must be from the foot so that our goalkeepers can read the visual cues from the server.

#3 The Psychological Dimension

We must ensure that our goalkeeper's are mentally tough. Due to the demands of the game, the goalkeeper must have the confidence to leave her goal line and go for balls played into the attacking area. Goalkeepers must also have the confidence to make difficult decisions that will lead to their team's success. This requires coaches to be patient with their goalkeepers, understanding that making mistakes is part of the process of developing into an elite goalkeeper.

As coaches, we can have a tremendous impact on the psychological make up of our goalkeepers. The nature of the goalkeeper's position is unfortunate, because a mistake by the goalkeeper often results in a goal, whereas the same standard is usually not applied to the field players. We should not berate our goalkeepers for errors, recognizing that mistakes happen. Unfortunately, a goalkeeper mistake translates into a goal against. No better way to learn, than "the hard way." As coaches, it is our job to

help our goalkeepers minimize the frequency of these mistakes through quality technical and tactical training.

One of the key attributes of the goalkeeper is that of decision-making. Poor decisions can be costly. Goalkeepers need to believe in themselves and their decisions. In order to build, maintain and regain confidence goalkeepers and coaches should utilize psychological skills such as positive “self talk.” Our approach to dealing with the decision-making aspect of goalkeeping is very important. Find ways to give constructive criticism while still showing the goalkeeper you believe in her ability today and her ability to grow tomorrow.

D. Set Play Principles:

At all levels, games are often won or lost based on the execution of attacking and defending set plays. A quick analysis of the 2003 World Cup bears out this fact. The US Team won all five of the games in which we scored on a set play. Incredibly, 11 of our 15 goals scored were from re-starts. This is no accident. The team and coaching staff put tremendous emphasis on all set plays and set clear standards for evaluating effectiveness. For example, a “successful” attacking set play must result in a goal, a shot on goal, or lead to a corner kick. The WNT keeps statistics on success of all set plays and holds players accountable for “service” and “success.” Since defining, setting and measuring these goals, the US team has greatly increased our effectiveness in converting attacking set plays into goals. On the flip side, defending set plays have always been the bane of our existence. In the era where the women’s game lacked parity, many opposing teams would defend with numbers and try to be opportunistic on the counter-attack or play for set plays. For this reason alone, we have had to narrow our focus in these most dangerous of moments. In doing so, we allowed just 1 goal against a set play during the Women’s World Cup 2003.

#1 Attacking Set Plays

Specific Application 1: Free Kicks in Shooting Positions

- Take direct shots on goal
- Designate a player(s) who can strike the ball accurately, powerfully and also bend the shot around or over the wall
- Look to “frame” the goal with spare attackers, and screen the keeper
- Assign specific players to bend or drive it (right and/or left)
- Keep statistics in these two areas:
 - Success = goal, shot on goal or an earned corner kick
 - Service Accuracy = does the ball arrive where you want it?
 - US Women’s National Team Attacking Set Plays Statistics – 2003 WWC
 - Service Accuracy = 70%
 - Success = 41%

Specific Application 2: Corner Kicks

- Quality of services: Driven near, slot, far, top of the box
- Servers use signals to indicate to teammates where the ball will be served
- Number of players committed to attack the corner – can attack w/ as many as 8
- Quality of runs – near, far, slot

- Player(s) to position in front of goalkeeper – do not foul
- Positive and aggressive team mentality focussed on scoring goals on every corner
- Use of short corners to create 2v1 in flanks and draw defenders out of the box
- Quality repetitions in training with high level of intensity and focus

#2 Defending Set Plays

Specific Application 1: Free Kicks inside Shooting Range

Role and Positioning of the Goalkeeper:

- Determine and communicate the number of players in the wall
- The goalkeeper positions herself slightly to the side of the goal not covered by the wall.

Setting the Wall:

- Get one player in front of the ball (7-8 yards away) to slow play and prevent a quick kick
- A field player should set the wall allowing the goalkeeper to focus on the shot
- The outside player has their inside shoulder in line with the near post and the ball
- The remaining players line up inside of the outside defender

Number of Players in the Wall:

- In the “D” – four or five
- To the side of the “D” – three or four
- To the side of the penalty box – two
- Inside the 10 yard line - 11 on the goal line

Players Not in the Wall:

- Position one player outside the wall to cover the flank
- Position one player in line with the far post to attack the ball
- Position enough players on the weak side of the wall to man mark attackers
- Players must follow all shots back to the goal to help clear balls out of the box

Specific Application 2: Defending Corner Kicks

- Don't give away corner kicks and free kicks
- Be aware of short corners, sending 1-2 players to the ball depending on opponent
- Play a combination zone and man-to-man system. This allows your best headers to match up with your opponents top players in the air and still zone other vital spaces
- Require one player on the near and far posts
- Goalkeepers should come out for balls that they are sure they can catch or clear
- Goalkeeper must communicate with an early call “keeper” or “away”
- Be ready to tuck in behind the goalkeeper and clear second balls
- Train field players how to clear balls off the goal line

Man to Man Marking Principles on Corner Kicks:

- Defenders must mark touch tight, goal-side and ball-side of their opponents
- This position is critical and must be maintained at all times

- Defenders take a side-on stance in order to see their “mark” and the ball
- Reposition goal-side and ball-side when a ball is played over the defender

Specific Application 3: Set Plays from Outside Shooting Range

- Restraining line - Set high enough to allow the goalkeeper a clear path for balls served deep and to keep the “pack” of players further away from your goalkeeper
- Marking – Touch tight, goal side, ball side and call out mark’s number
- Dropping – Players should drop just prior to the service to cover space behind them
- Attack the Ball – Win the first ball, clearing high and wide
- Anticipate second balls - Clear them out of danger

Training Suggestion:

It is necessary when training restarts to attempt to replicate the competitive game environment. Towards this end, divide the team in half and have a “re-start competition”.

Free Kick Game:

- Pre-select the location of the kicks to be taken
- Allow each team to “practice” their restarts
- Conduct a full field scrimmage, allowing each team an equal amount of restarts
- The referee will call fouls, even if they did not occur
- Keep score

Record the Success of Your Team’s Set Plays:

The Women’s National Teams tracks all free kicks and corner kicks taken during games. Charting the success of our set plays has given our players an increased focus and produced significantly improved results.

#3 Throw-ins & Applicable Principles based on Thirds of the Field

In a recent ODP inter-regional event (players representing clubs from all over the country), the national staff tracked the success rate of the throw-in. It was found that a little over 75% of all throw-ins taken resulted in a loss of possession. Here are some principles that we have found to be helpful in improving the National Team’s possession rate on throw-ins.

Creating Positive Throw-in Options:

1. Train the thrower how and where to throw the ball: ground for 2nd bounce, foot, chest or head. (Do not allow the ball to bounce up into the receiver’s mid section).
2. Quick throw-in prior to defense getting organized
3. If the quick throw-in is not possible:
 - Create a good shape to support the player taking the throw-in
 - Defenders can create more space and time to receive a throw-in by dropping deeper
 - Forwards and Midfielders create space by checking away and coming back to the ball
 - Continue to cycle check runs out of the space if the throw is not made to the runner checking to the ball. This will open space for another runner coming to the thrower
 - Organize tandem runs with one player checking to the ball and a second player running into space created behind
4. One touch pass back to the player taking the throw-in (thrower is rarely marked)

Tactical Concerns Affecting Choice of the Throw-in:

- Attacking Third - design a long throw-in to create an immediate shot on goal or throw towards the endline to try and get behind or create an opportunity for a corner
- Middle Third - main concern should be trying to maintain possession, then penetrate
- Defensive Third - focus should be to get the ball out of the defending half or play a safe back pass in order to maintain possession

Other Considerations:

- Encourage deception - Employ a fake throw or look to another teammate, then throw it to your first choice
- Employ a one-touch restriction on receiving throw-ins unless the thrower tells the receiver to turn

Training Suggestion:

- Play all games with re-starts from the throw-in

E. Systems of Play:

The US Women's National Team has made tremendous strides in our ability to play successfully in a variety of different systems. In the 2003 Women's World Cup, the team employed four different systems. USA adopted the 4-4-2 and 4-3-3 as our primary systems of play, however we also played in a 4-5-1 and 3-4-3 when the tactical situation required an adjustment. Within the two primary systems (4-4-2 and 4-3-3) we have "3 different looks," or "shapes." Previous US National Teams would not adjust well to changing systems within a game or within a world tournament. The 2003 Women's National Team demonstrated that they had the tactical sophistication to compete successfully in a myriad of systems. They also showed we have the capability to change systems fluidly within a game, as seen in the USA vs. Sweden match. We started the game in a 4-3-3 and switched to a 4-4-2. The team scored goals in both systems and closed out the game without allowing Sweden a goal once we switched to a 4-4-2.

Outside the US team, Germany played a flexible and versatile 4-5-1 (which sometimes has the look of a 3 Front), while Sweden employed a classic 4-4-2 system and Canada endeavored a successful defensive 5-3-2 system. The 2003 Women's World Cup proved that the U.S. Team is dynamic and flexible within several systems of play. The ultimate test of a player and team's level of comfort and understanding is the ability to play tactical soccer regardless of the system the coach has chosen to employ.

USA System Overview:

- I. 4-4-2:
 - a. Diamond – 4 central midfielders
 - b. Classic – 4 flat midfielders, 2 of which are wing midfielders
 - c. "1" formation – a designated attacking and defending midfielder, with the other two as wing midfielders
- II. 4-3-3:
 - a. 1 low and 2 high center midfielders
 - b. 2 low and 1 high center midfielders
 - c. 3 semi-flat center midfielders

III. We occasionally use the 3-4-3 and 4-5-1 systems for situational tactical reasons.

* One important note is that within each system, we flex in and out of high, medium and low pressure defending.

** The next level of sophistication for our team will be the ability to play either direct or indirectly and to play around or behind teams based on what the opponent presents us as the game progresses.

The national teams program staff encourages coaches to adopt systems that are based on the strengths and weaknesses of your players rather than on a particular preference or comfort zone from having played in or coached a specific system for years. We also want to encourage coaches to employ more than 1 system in order to enhance their player's understanding of the principles of play. The best system is one that encourages players to problem-solve on the field and express themselves through freedom of movement, yet also enables the team to have predictable pressure and cover on the ball at all times.

Conclusion

As we continue to strive to improve the quality of our play, it is important to have clearly defined goals and objectives in mind. This document intends to provide a clear focus for our efforts so that we can become even more successful in the years to come. On behalf of the entire US Women's National Teams Program, we give you these thoughts – "for the good of the game." Each of us can make a difference one player, one team and one day at a time!