Talent identification for Team Alberta programs

An implementation guide of objective and subjective testing procedures in the development stage “train to train.”

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The test variety is an important part of talent development.

This document describes the testing procedures used in the Alberta Soccer development program to assess various characteristics of talented youth soccer players. These assessments are conducted to diagnose their current performance levels and monitor their development over time. Both objective performance diagnostics and subjective evaluations (in the form of an evaluation sheet filled out by independent evaluators) are utilized.

The primary aim of the motor performance diagnostics is to objectively measure the speed and skill-related abilities of each player. In contrast, the subjective performance assessment evaluates different techniques, endurance, as well as individual tactical and psychological skills. Thus, the objective and subjective test procedures, which are statistically verifiable, encompass various talent characteristics corresponding to different dimensions and competencies.

This manual aims to ensure that:

1. The structure and implementation of the objective performance diagnostics are consistent, regardless of the test location, time, or the individuals conducting the tests.

2. The subjective performance assessments are based on a uniform understanding of the talent characteristics being evaluated and the evaluation scales used.

Competencies	Dimensions	Evaluation criteria	
		Subjective	Objective
Motoric	Technique	▪ Headers ▪ Passing	▪ Ball handling ▪ Dribbling ▪ Juggling
		▪ Technique in close ▪ Technique falling ▪ Technique crosses ▪ Technique opening the game	
	Endurance	▪ Stamina	▪ Speed ▪ Agility
Cognitive	Tactic	▪ Individual tactic attacking behaviour, before, during and after a close ball action ▪ Individual tactic defensive behaviour before, during and after a close ball action ▪ Soccer IQ	
		▪ Positional play ▪ 1v1 behaviour	
Psychosocial area	Motivation, volition, social skills and capacity	▪ Motivational competencies ▪ Volitional competencies ▪ Social competencies	

Organizational Framework[1]

Accuracy, precision, and completeness are the top priorities in test setup, execution, and documentation of test data. All marking lines on the test setups must correspond to the fields they

[1] The comparability across the test results is only guaranteed if the testing stations are set up correctly and according to this standard. For this purpose, the dimension of the station setups are described in chapter 3.

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delimit. For each individual test, participants complete two attempts, and only the better of the two scores will be used for evaluation.

Test Preparation:

Several key aspects must be considered when preparing for the test:

Collection of Player-Related Data:

The following player data should be recorded:

- Anthropometric data (height and weight)
- Number of supervised training sessions per week at their club (including base training)
- Start of the player's career (how long have they been active?)

Body weight must be measured on a scale, while height should be measured with a tape measure. Both measurements should be taken without shoes. Ideally, player data should be collected on the day of testing; however, it can also be gathered within one week before the test.

Division of Test Groups:

The test protocols in which players' results will be entered should be prepared before testing. Players should complete the tests in a fixed order, which must be communicated to them beforehand and maintained throughout the testing process. Group sizes should be approximately equal, with a maximum of 15 players per group. For the test procedure, it is recommended to divide players into three groups of ten, which allows for optimal recovery time. The groups can complete the following tests simultaneously at their respective stations:

- Group 1: Agility and Dribbling (Station 1)
- Group 2: Ball Control (Station 2)
- Group 3: Ball Juggling and Speed (Station 3)

The total duration of the testing session, including setup, introduction, and organization, is approximately 90 minutes (30 minutes for setup and teardown, and 60 minutes for execution).

Selection of Test Location and Uniformity/Comparability:

The suggested environment is an artificial indoor turf facility; however, an outdoor turf or indoor sports ground may also be suitable. To minimize standard deviation during the testing, artificial turf should be used consistently for outdoor programs, while a hardwood indoor gym floor should be used for all futsal-related programs, utilizing the same stations.

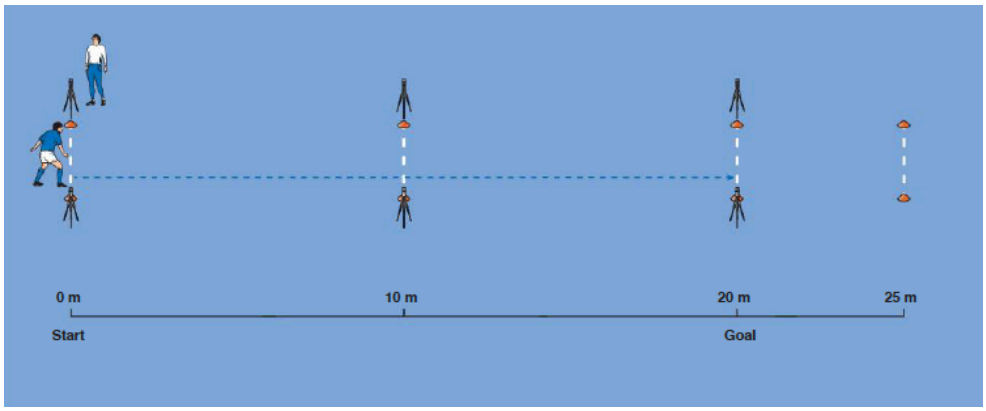
It is crucial to use standardized and identical test materials and setups at all testing locations. Only the materials listed in this manual should be used for testing. The speed, running agility, and dribbling tests will be timed using infrared light sensors. Each age group should utilize their age-specific ball sizes in

accordance with Canada Soccer Grassroots Standards. The balls should be checked for air pressure during setup, ideally maintaining a range between 0.6 and 1.1 bar.

Test Description[2]

Speed Test Procedure

The aim of the speed test (dash) is to cover a linear distance of 20 meters as quickly as possible. Three light barriers are used to detect the start, the intermediate time after 10 meters, and the total time after 20 meters. A 5-meter-long run-off zone is designed to encourage players not to slow down prematurely during the sprint (see Figure 1). The player starts from a standing position without any starting signal. They begin at their own discretion, allowing the test to measure pure sprint performance without the influence of reaction time.



To ensure the accuracy of the start, the player's front foot must be positioned precisely on the starting line to prevent false starts (e.g., running over the starting line). Care should be taken to avoid early triggering of the light barrier at the beginning, which can occur due to premature arm movement. Each player will complete two attempts, with the better time being the one that counts. The evaluation sheet will record the intermediate times (10m) and the total time (20m). Players should have at least a 60-second break between their two attempts.

Agility & Dribbling Test Procedure

The two agility and dribbling tests can be conducted using the same setup. The objective is to complete the course in the shortest time possible without making any errors, both with and without the ball.

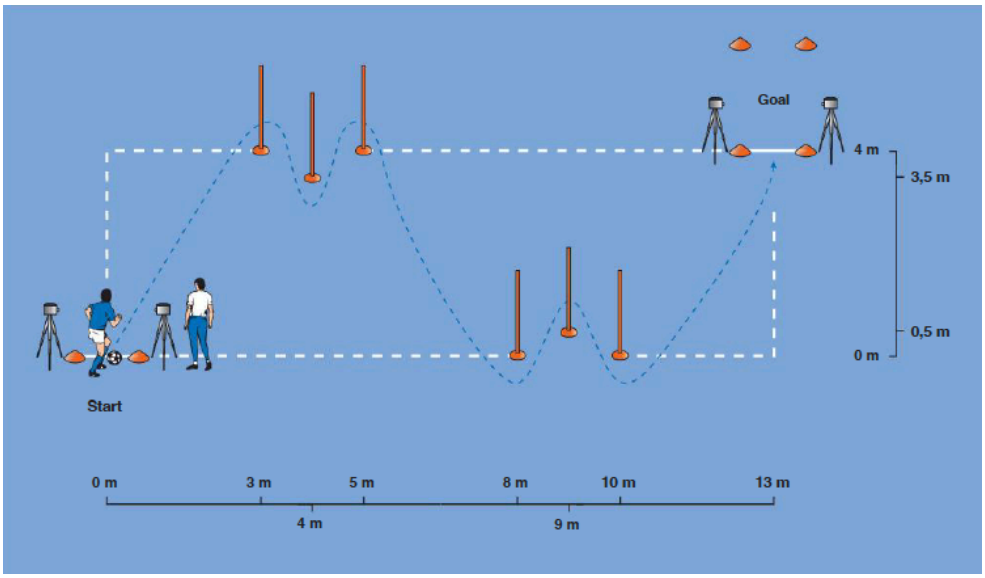
Agility

The course is marked with six poles and is designed in a slalom format (see figure 2). Timing is measured using two light barriers located at the start and finish of the course. Athletes begin standing, with their front foot placed precisely on the 1-meter-wide starting line to prevent false starts (see error patterns).

[2] The tests are designed for an indoor environment. Existing lines can be used to facilitate the setup. The outer edges are always the reference points for the lines outlined in this manual. The setup in a gym or on artificial turf depend on the local environment. The outlines in this manual are suggestions, however the order of the different tests can be adjusted.

Dribbling

For the dribbling test, the ball is placed on the starting line at the beginning. The front foot must also be positioned precisely on the starting line to avoid running toward the ball. Players are allowed to choose which foot to use. They must cross the 2-meter-wide finish line with the ball. If the ball is more than 1 meter away from the foot when crossing the finish line (whether behind or in front of the player), the attempt is considered failed. The same rule applies if a pole falls over during the round (attaching the poles to the gym floor with adhesive tape or suction cups is not allowed). If a player loses the ball, they may return to retrieve it from the spot where the mistake occurred without penalty.



Rest period

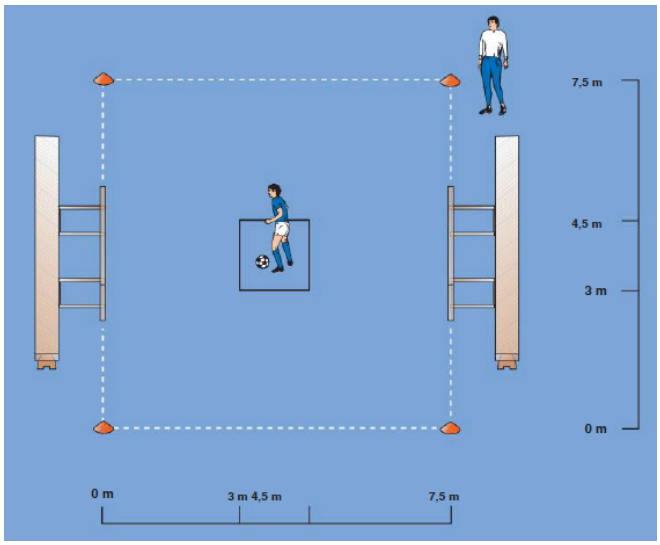
Each player has two attempts for both tests, with the better result recorded. Both attempts are noted on the evaluation sheet. Players should be given at least 60 seconds of rest between attempts.

Ball control procedure

The main objective of the ball control test is to complete six passes as quickly as possible, using two rebound walls and finishing with the ball in the designated passing area (1.5m x 1.5m) by stopping it with the sole of the foot. Passes must alternate between the passing area and the rebound walls, as illustrated in Figure 3. The player may choose which leg to use for passing.

Each rebounded ball must be received with at least one touch before being passed back to the opposite wall. Direct passes without prior reception are not allowed. Suppose the ball leaves the passing area after being received or does not return after rebounding. In that case, the player must dribble back into the passing area before continuing to the opposite rebound wall. Additionally, if the ball rolls out of the larger marked square (7.5m x 7.5m), it will be counted as a missed attempt.

The time taken from the first contact with the ball until it stops in the passing area after the sixth pass is measured (refer to the error images for clarification). The test administrator will use a stopwatch to record the time. The test begins without a signal when the player is distracted while in the passing area. The administrator should count each ball contact aloud during the test and instruct the player that upon making the sixth pass, they must stop the ball with the sole of their foot to bring it to a stop.

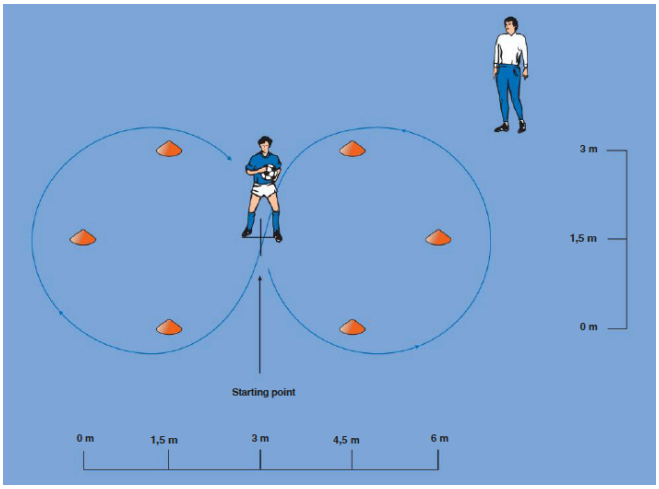


Each player will have two attempts, completing six passes each. The better of the two attempts will be counted. Both attempts must be recorded on the evaluation sheet, and a rest period of at least 60 seconds between attempts is mandatory.

Ball Juggling Procedure

The objective of the ball juggling test is to juggle through as many sections as possible. The course consists of eight sections, each representing a quarter circle (see Figure 4). A section is considered complete when a player passes a marker on the outer edge of the course or returns to the starting point, provided the ball has been touched at least once. Players earn one point for each fully completed section. They have a maximum of 45 seconds to complete the task and can repeat the course multiple times within this timeframe.

Players begin with both feet on the starting marker and can choose the direction in which to walk around the markers. The player may start at their discretion, and the timing begins as soon as the ball is dropped from their hands onto their foot. The ball must be played immediately upon leaving the hand, and juggling is permitted only with alternating feet. The ball cannot touch the floor or any body part other than the foot.



An attempt concludes either after 45 seconds or if any test conditions are violated. The number of successfully completed sections determines each player's score, with the higher score being recorded. Each player's scores from both attempts must be documented on the evaluation sheet, and each player should have at least 60 seconds of rest between attempts.

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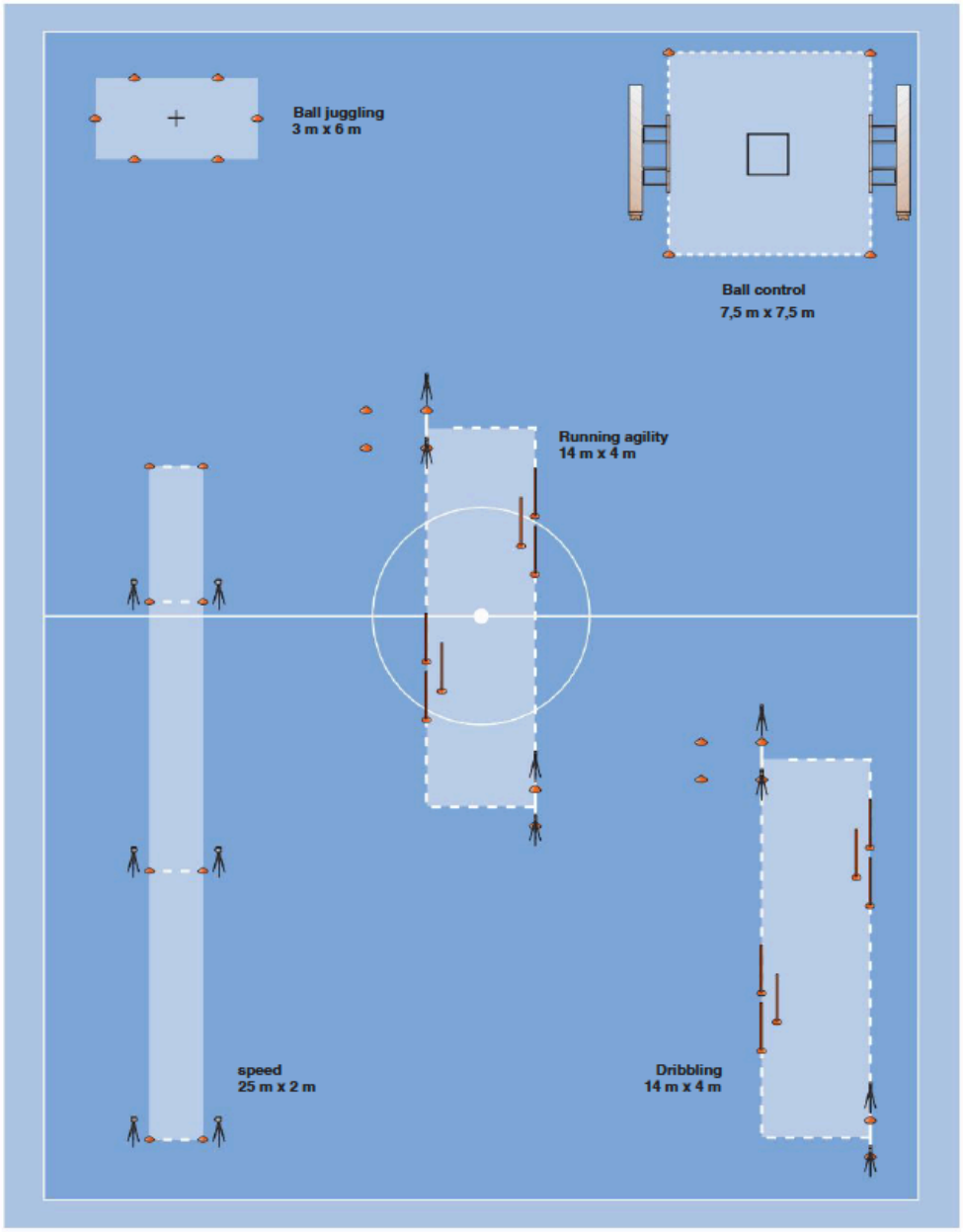
Test setup



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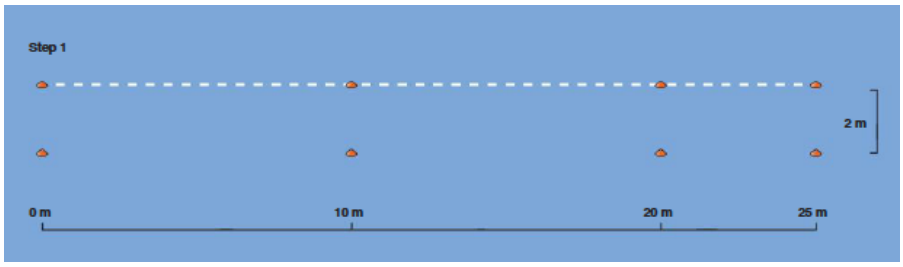
Speed /Dash

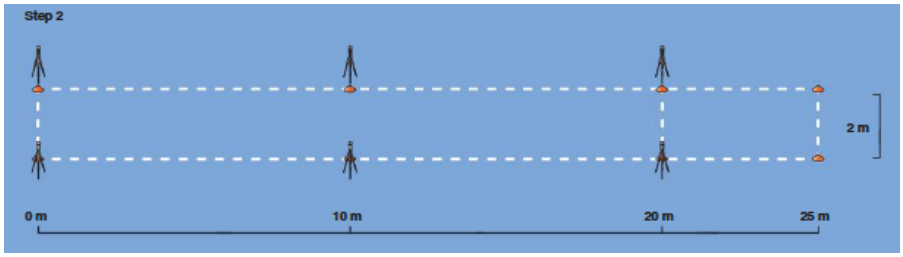
Step 1: Measuring the Distance and Setting the Boundaries

Begin by placing a measuring tape along an existing line to measure a 25-meter section. Use adhesive tape to mark the following points: 0m, 10m, 20m, and 25m. The width of the running track should be limited to 2 meters. Additionally, make a second set of marks at 0m, 10m, 20m, and 25m to define the dash area. Each of these points should be clearly marked with a marker cone.



Step 2: Setting the Starting Line

Position the starting line flush with the 0m marking and secure it with adhesive tape. Place an infrared laser directly above the 0m, 10m, and 20m markings. Ensure that the laser is set to a height of 0.80 meters from the floor to the lower edge of the measuring device, allowing for standardization.



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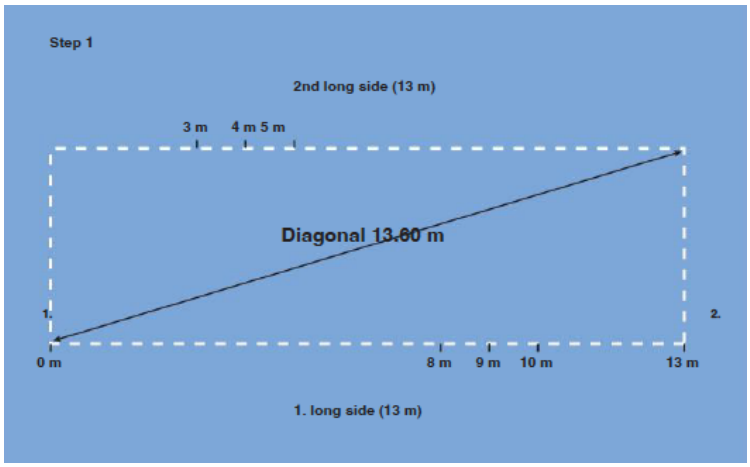
Running agility and dribbling

Step 1: Construction of the Rectangle

To construct the first long side (13m), place a measuring tape along an existing line in the gym or on the turf. The 0m mark should be positioned exactly at the intersection point of two lines that meet at right angles. Use adhesive tape to mark the following points:



- 0m
- 13m (field boundary)
- 8m and 10m (marking for poles 4 and 6)
- 9m (marking for pole 5)

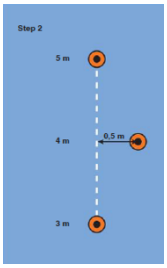
For the first short side (4m), position the measuring tape at the starting point of the boundary line, aligning it with the second existing line to ensure a 90-degree angle. Make the marking at the 4m line. Next, measure the second long side (13m) of the rectangle corner. For this, use the measuring tape at a 90-degree angle to align with the 4m boundary line. Place markers at the following points:

- 13m (field boundary)
- 3m, 4m, and 5m (pole positions for poles 1, 2, and 3)

Close the rectangle by connecting the last marks at the 13m point using the measuring tape and confirming the 90-degree angle. Finally, check the dimensions of the rectangle by measuring the diagonal lines, which should measure 13.60m.

Step 2: Positioning the Poles

Position the poles on the 3m and 5m marks. Measure 0.50m at a 90-degree angle to find the correct spot on the 4m mark inside the test area. For the second long side, position the poles on the 8m and 10m marks. Measure 0.50m at a 90-degree angle into the test area from the 9m mark. Ensure that the pole plates are centred on the marks.



Step 3: Start and Finish Lines

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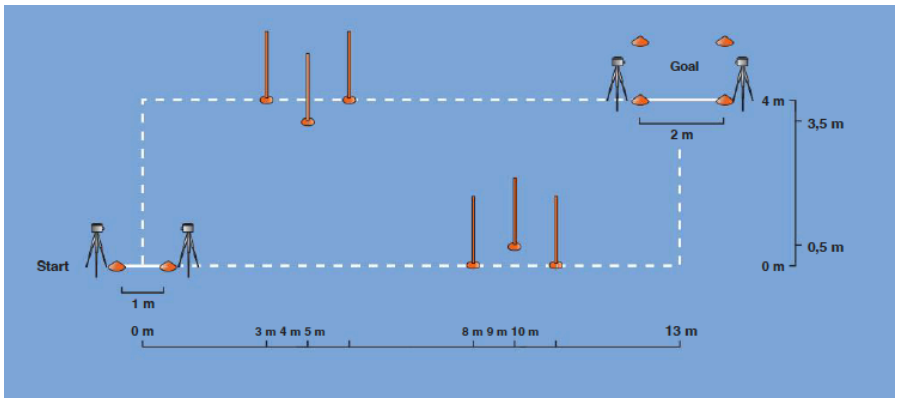
The starting line is 1m wide and is marked by two marker cones. The center of the starting line is the 0 mark on the first long side (13m). From this corner point, measure 0.50m along the extended first long side (13m) and make two marks with adhesive tape. Place a marker cone on each of these marks so that its inner edge aligns with the tape. The starting line should be marked with adhesive tape (see figure x).



The finish line is 2m wide. The center of the finish line is at the endpoint (13m mark) of the second long side. From this point, place a marker cone at intervals of 1m along the extended second long side (13m). A marker plate should be placed at each of these points with its inner side facing downwards.

The infrared lasers should be positioned exactly at the height and center of the start and finish lines. To ensure standardization, the laser barrier must be set to 0.80m from the ground to the bottom edge of the measuring device. Two markers should be placed approximately 5m behind the finish line. This setup helps ensure that players do not slow down before reaching the finish line.

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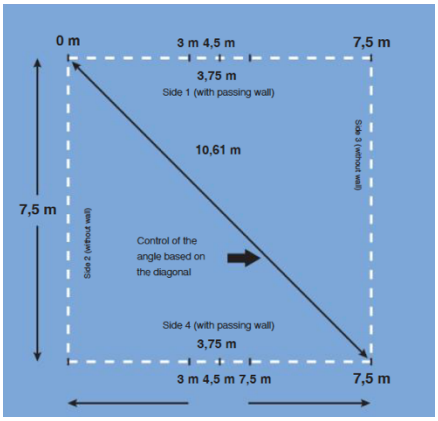
Ball Control

Step 1: Setup of the exterior square

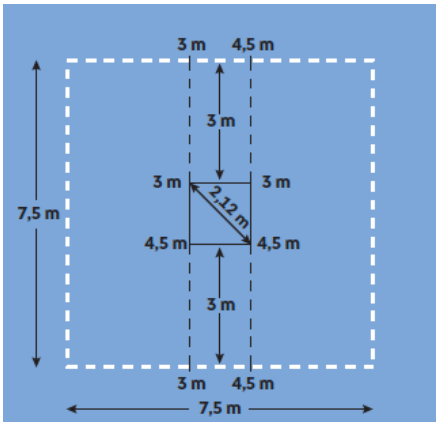


The measuring tape is attached to the outer edge of an existing line. Lines are drawn ensuring that the line is part of the field. The outer boundary is measured, and the 0m point should be exactly at the intersection of two perpendicular lines. The following points are now measured and marked with tape:

- 0m and 7.5m (field boundary of the outer square)
- 3.75m (marker for the rebound wall)
- 3.00m and 4.50m (markings for the passing box)

The second mark (without crossing the wall) is measured afterward. From the 0m point, the measuring tape is placed along the second existing line, perpendicular to the first side at 7.50m, and an adhesive tape marking is made. The third side (without the passing wall) is measured next. All four sides must meet at a 90-degree angle and be exactly 7.5m long.

Step 2: Setup of the Passing Area



The pass field is measured using tape at the respective markings, which are at 3m on the first and fourth sides of the outer area. The corner points of the pass field are marked at 3m and 4.5m. The same procedure is used to connect the corresponding 4.5m markings on the first and third sides of the outer square. The diagonal measurement of the passing square should be exactly 2.12m. The four corners of the designated area will be marked with adhesive tape, ensuring that the tape is aligned with the field boundary. The outer edge of the tape must clearly mark the boundary.

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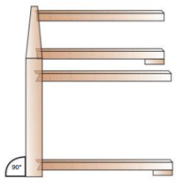
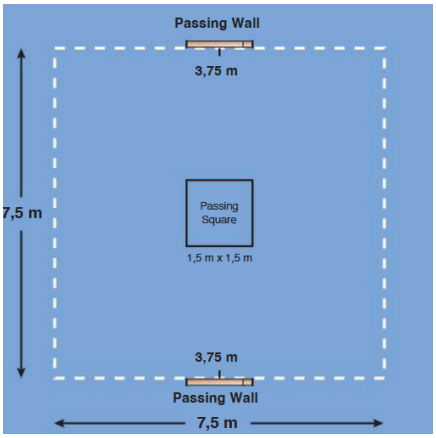
Step 3: Installing the Passing Walls

To define the position of the passing wall, the center line of the wall is crucial. The middle of the passing wall is placed exactly at the 3.75m mark between the two opposite ends of the outer test area. Ensure that the passing wall is positioned at a 90-degree angle to the ground. Additionally, the rebound wall needs to be secured to prevent it from moving backward upon impact. Place marker cones at the corners of the test area for visual guidance.





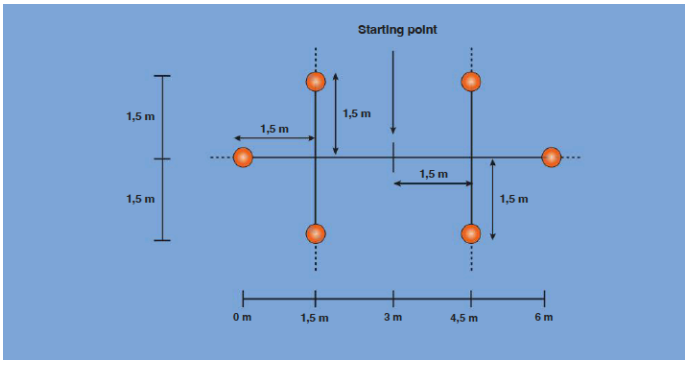
Ball Juggling

Step 1: Central marks

The measuring tape is placed along an existing line on the ground. Adhesive tape marks the points for the marker cones at 0m and 6m. A slightly larger marker marks the starting point at 3m. The marker cones are only placed at the end of the setup to indicate the other positions.

Step 2: Marking the outer perimeter

The first two outer points, a rafter square is placed at 1.5 m to define the 90-degree angle from where it goes for 1.5 m in each direction. The same procedure is applied for the second location at 4.5 m. The marker cone is placed at each of the six marked points. The outside edge must be placed inside the marked points.



Error Images

Sprint / Dash

Observing:

- Measurements are taken at the light sensors (start, 10m, 20m).
- Start from the step position, the front foot is precisely on the starting line.

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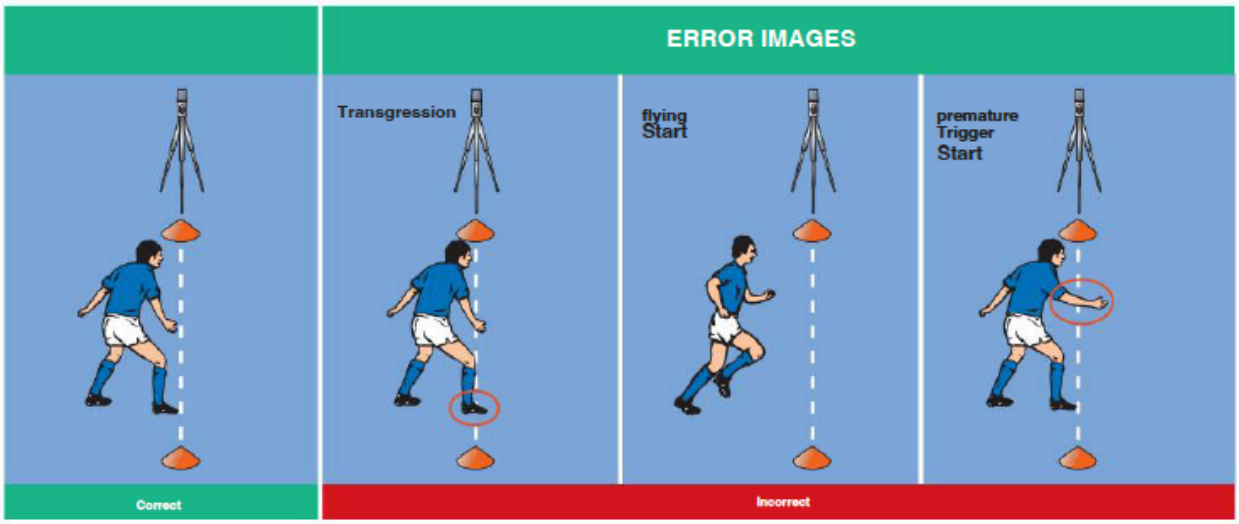
- Players start at their discretion.
- Each completes two attempts.
- 60-second break in between

Verbal instructions to the player:

- Stand at the starting line in a ready position!
- Sprint at top speed to the last marker! Run through the last gate!
- Wait until I give you the go-ahead, then decide for yourself when to start

Errors which lead to a restart

- Incorrect starting position
- Flying start (starts to run up, and this has an increased initial speed)
- Start before the light barriers are ready
- Triggering the light barriers during the takeoff due to the upper body, arm or knee initiating movement sensor.



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Agility & dribbling

Observing:

- Measurement between the two sensors at the start and finish
- Start in a half-step position
- The front foot or ball when dribbling is precisely on the starting line
- Start takes place without a signal at the discretion of the player
- Two attempts each without (agility) and with the ball (dribbling)

Verbal instructions to the player

- Stand at the starting line in a half-step position (Agility/Dribbling)
- Wait until I give you the go-ahead, then decide when to begin! (Agility/Dribbling)
- No pole may fall over! (Agility/Dribbling)
- Run through the course at the highest possible speed (Agility)
- Dribble through the course at the highest speed (Dribbling)
- The ball must take the same path as you do. (Dribbling)
- You have to dribble the ball over the finish line! (Dribbling)
- If you lose the ball, then return with the ball to the point of return and carry on with the test. (Dribbling)

Errors which leads to a restart

- Incorrect starting position.
- Start before the light barriers are ready.
- Flying start (starts to run up, and this has an increased initial speed).
- Triggering the light barriers during the takeoff due to the upper body, arm or knee initiating movement sensor.

Errors which lead to a termination

Agility & Dribbling

- One or more poles fall over.
- The player takes a different path from the one specified throughout the course.

Dribbling

- The player dribbles the ball past the finish line or crosses the finish line without a ball.
- When crossing the finish line, the ball is further away from the foot than 1 m.

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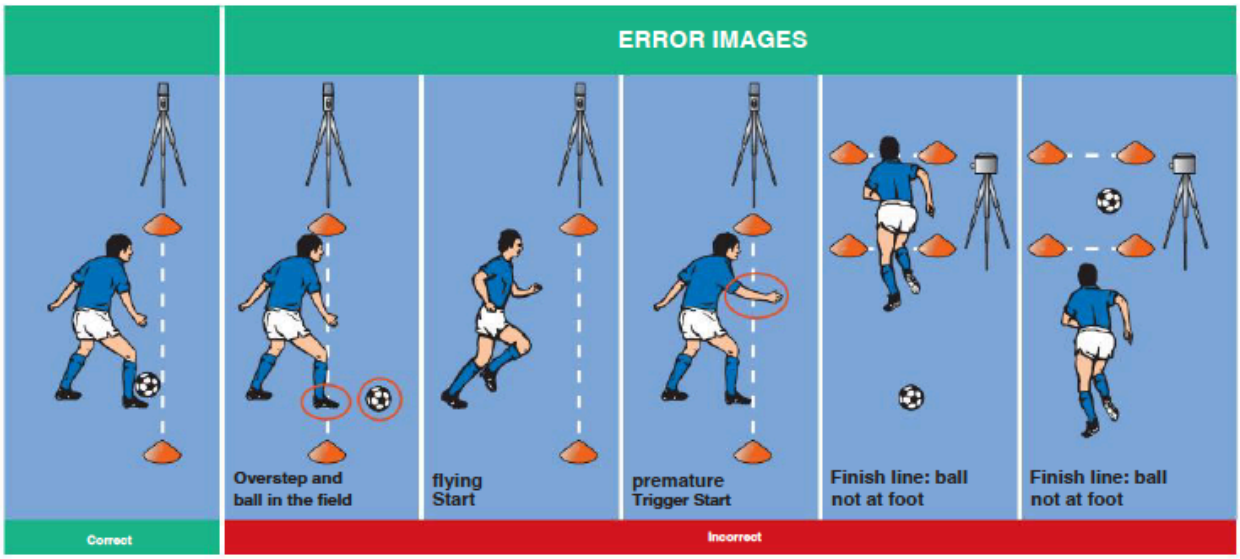

Passing

Observing:

Verbal instructions to the player:

Errors which lead to a termination:

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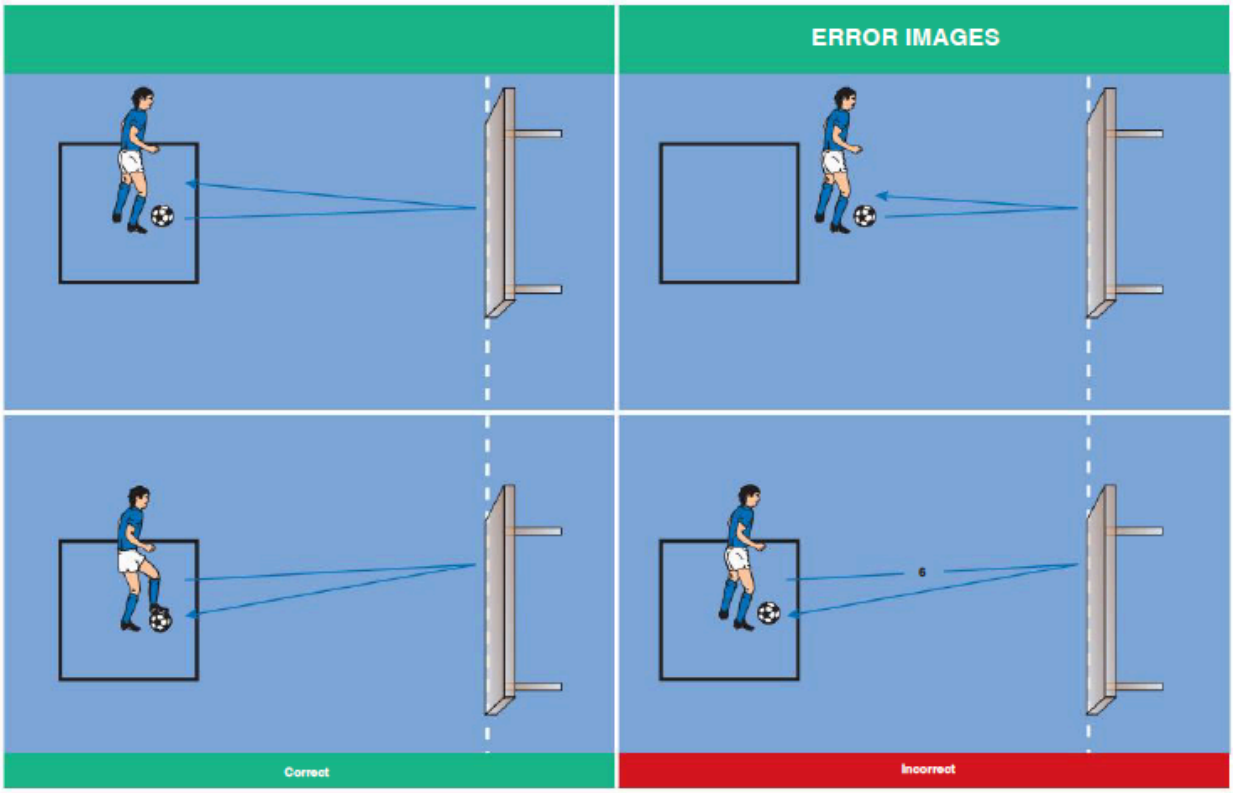

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Equipment

Speed Test:

- 8 marker cones
- Measuring tape
- Tape
- Infrared barrier system (3 measuring points)

Agility and dribbling:

- 6 marker cones
- 6 slalom poles with pole plate
- Measuring tape
- Tape
- Infrared barrier system (2 measuring points)
- Age-appropriate ball

Ball control:

- 2 tables as passing walls
- 4 marker cones
- Measuring tape
- Tape
- Stopwatch
- Age-appropriate ball
- Weight behind the table

Ball juggling:

- 6 marker cones
- Measuring tape
- Tape
- Stopwatch
- Age-appropriate ball

- 2 stop clocks
- 4 (or more) age-appropriate balls
- 6 slalom poles
- 1-4 test evaluation sheets
- 2 tables (2.20m x 0.50m)
- Pressure gauge

Total equipment list:

Full equipment list for the full test environment.

- 26 marker cones
- Several measuring tapes (20m length)
- Several tapes
- 2 infrared barrier system