**Beginning Fakes and Feints**Players: Age 6+; Materials: Cones, pinnies, balls; Players: 4+  
  
The art of feinting is delightful, and even young players can get a kick out of getting   
an opponent to "bite" on a good fake. Over the course of the season, the coach   
should introduce a new fake/feint every 6 weeks or so as a part of normal take-on   
work. Players should be encouraged to try these new feints, and some warm-up   
time should be devoted to learning the new feints. Coaches should not be   
discouraged if it takes players a while to actually use their feints in practice or in   
games. It takes time for a player to learn to "sell" the fake, and to remember to try it   
when under pressure. And, not every player will want to adopt a particular feint into   
his personal bag of tricks. Virtually all players, including top level stars, have some 4   
or 5 basic feints that they use most of the time with great success. So, don't be   
surprised that players show decided personal preferences on which moves to adopt   
and which to discard.  
  
**Warm-up**In feinting work, the muscles which are used are those which allow the hips to   
swivel from side to side (and the shoulders/arms to get in on the action of swaying   
about). These are the same muscles which are used in the more fluid kinds of   
modern dancing, so it can be fun to use music as a part of the warm-up. Start with   
some fast footwork drills to get the blood pumping, then do some stretches   
(focusing particularly on the muscles running along the flanks which allow twisting   
and swivelling movements of the hips). Also work on stretches of the quads, as part   
of any feint will include very quick acceleration moves. Along the way, do some   
rhythmic swaying, then add some push-off jumping from side to side.  
  
**Individual Work**In order to work on feints/fakes, your players will need to have learned basic take-on  
skills and how to explode by carrying the ball forward with the outside of the foot. If   
you have not covered this, you should do the practice on beginning take-on skills   
before holding this practice session.  
  
Probably the easiest feint to learn is a simple step-fake. To do this, the player has   
the ball on the front of the right foot; takes an exaggerated step to the R as if   
intending to do a sharp cut toward the R with the inside of his L foot; then   
immediately explodes to the left, dragging the ball with him on the outside of his L   
foot. This fake obviously also can be done (and should be practiced) going to the L   
and then exploding to the right. In their beginning take-on work, players learned to   
imagine that they are exploding through an open doorway to escape the monster,   
and then they are cutting back to slam the door on the monster. Initially, you may   
want to eliminate the slamming door phase so that they can concentrate on the feint   
itself. However, as soon as possible, you will want to remind them to slam the door   
on the monster.  
  
This move is very easy, and can be mastered by even very small players. To avoid   
having players running into one another as they explode, try putting them in a line   
(queue) or widely space them to that they each are facing a cone (which serves as a   
defender). Then, simply allow them to experiment on learning to fake one way and   
then explode to the other. Encourage them to turn their shoulders/hips in the faked   
direction, which will help to "sell" the fake. After working on step-fakes in one   
direction, switch feet and work on going in the opposite direction.  
  
After the step-fake, one of the easiest feints to learn is one involving the use of a   
single scissors (Barnes) move. This next move should be added after doing some   
individual and small group work with the first move. Particularly with younger kids,   
you want to give plenty of time for the first move to "set" into their brains and muscles   
before adding a new move, so don't rush things too quickly. Besides, it is no big deal   
to wait for another practice to introduce the next move.  
  
In the single scissors, the player comes directly at the attacker, moves his left foot  
around the front of the ball and plants it to the side of (and slightly behind the ball),   
while swiveling his hips as if he plans to take the ball to the left with the inside of his   
right foot. As soon as his right foot is moving over to the ball, he quickly brings his   
right foot behind the ball (so that he can carry the ball on the outside of his right foot),   
then explodes forward to the right while dragging the ball on the outside of his R foot.   
The primary difference between this feint and the simple step-fake is the movement   
of the faking foot to go in front of the ball before being planted. This is an important   
difference (both because it protects the ball better and because it confuses the   
defender more).  
  
For younger players, it may work best to show them the move, and then start working   
on the motions involved without using any ball. Simply bring the L foot forward in a  
semi-circle (toe pointed down) and take a big step to the left (bending the knee   
sharply - as the left leg will give the acceleration). While transferring the weight to the   
L leg, exaggerate the appearance of a cut to the left side. Then, as soon as the   
weight is transferred, explode right. Note that some small players may have trouble   
bringing the foot in front of the ball with any speed (due to the relative size of the ball   
to their short little legs). It is fine for them to lift the L foot over the ball if this is easier.   
Once they have the move down, add a ball and allow the players to experiment with   
doing the move. Encourage them to keep their upper bodies relaxed (almost limp),   
so that they can fluidly switch directions.  
  
**Small Group Work**Put an anchored defender (one foot must remain on a cone and the other leg should   
be waving to make it clear which leg is "dead") in the center between two cones   
which are about 15 feet apart. Have the attacker come directly at the defender; feint   
towards the side of the waving leg; and explode past the outside of the "dead" leg.   
As soon as he is around the defender, he must slam the door by cutting back behind   
him. Have him turn around and then come back from the other direction. Tell the   
anchored defender to alternate which leg is waved, so that the defender must decide   
the direction in which to start his feint. Let the attacker have about 4-5 tries, then   
switch places with the defender. It is important for players to learn to recognize this   
type of opportunity - and which way to go - because this type of situation occurs often   
in a game (for instance, a defender who is trying to back-pedal without galloping   
quite often will be "dead" or getting ready to go "dead" on a leg when the attacker   
choses to explode into a move).  
  
Next, instruct the defender to stay anchored without waving a leg, and to simply "bite"   
by lunging in the direction of the fake as soon as it is made. Illustrate to the players   
that, when the defender's body and weight are moving in the wrong direction, an   
attacker can go around the non-lunging leg because it is "dead" due to the lunge -   
and, in fact, is "more dead" on the side of outstretched leg (the one with no weight)   
than the leg where all of the weight has been placed. Why? Because it is very easy   
for the defender to pull his outstretched leg over and transfer his weight onto this   
other leg fairly quickly - but, due to his momentum, it takes a lot longer to recover and   
go back the opposite way. It is important for new attackers to understand that, when   
the defender is standing fairly straight, the "dead" leg of the attacker is the one with   
all of the weight on it. However, when already moving, the most "dead" leg is the   
non-weight bearing leg.  
  
After allowing both players to work on feints against a defender who is lunging to the  
side, add the final most common defensive error - which is to dive forward from a  
sideways-on posture. In this situation, the player is completely "dead" on the front   
foot - and essentially dead on the back foot, so the attacker has the ideal choice of   
going by him in either direction. Most commonly, the attacker will want to go around   
the defender's back in order to cut in centrally - and this approach causes the   
defender the most difficulty because the quickest way to turn is to keep going   
forward (but, to do this, he has to turn his back on the attacker, which is very high risk   
because he will not know where his mark is). As a result, practice on rolling off the   
back of the defender - but point out that the attacker always has the option of going   
down the line if this makes more sense.  
  
[Coaching Note: As you progress in teaching more take-on skills to your players, you   
will begin to teach them how to "show" the ball to the defender to try to provoke a   
lunge or stab, so that they can accelerate around him - and illustrate which moves   
tend to be best to cause defenders to "bite" in various circumstances.]  
  
**Large Group Work**Next, recruit some parents or assistants to become defenders in a "Tunnel of   
Death." Create the tunnel by putting 3-4 cone grids (each about 15x20 feet) in a row,   
with a defender standing at the top line of each grid so that he is between the 2   
cones forming the top side of the grid. If you have a large number of players, you may   
wish to set up several of these stacked grids to reduce lines. If you do not have   
enough parents for players, you can rotate players through these slots - or start by   
using flags or cones for defenders.  
  
Now, have the first player take-on the first defender and beat him, cut back to recover,  
then head directly at the second defender, and so forth. Tell your defenders to be   
very sloppy and to dive in the direction of the feint. Obviously, you are setting up   
conditions to get success. As soon as the first runner has beaten second defender   
(and is entering the final box), start the next runner.  
  
After running the Tunnel a few times, you can give more freedom to the defenders.  
However, with young players, you will need to relax restrictions very slowly in order to   
give them time to develop confidence in their take-on abilities.  
  
**Scrimmage**The very best scrimmage for take-on work is 1v1. So, put players in pairs based   
upon their ability (i.e., skilled with skilled), and put each in a grid (you can reuse the   
Tunnel grids). Put one player on one side of the grid with the ball, and put the other   
player on the other side. As soon as the on-ball player starts into the grid, the   
opposite player can enter the grid and start to close him down. The on-ball player   
must take-on the defender and try to get around him sufficiently to be able to pass   
the ball across the opposing endline. However, he cannot pass until he is at least   
even with the defender. If he does this successfully, he scores 1 point. Alternate who   
is the attacker, and play until someone has 5 points (or for X minutes).  
  
Now, find out the points scored by each player. Put the players who scored 5 against  
others who scored 5, and put the ones who scored 1 against the others who scored   
1. Play again.  
  
The final game uses a real goal (if one is available). Divide the players into two   
equal groups, and give each team numbers from 1 to X. Put players on goal line,   
with teams on opposite sides of the net. Now, as you serve a ball out into the field,   
call out "Number 5" - and both players who are No. 5 race out and try to win the ball,   
then score on the goal. There are lots of variations on how to do this (including   
elimination and non-elimination games, and games where you call out several   
numbers at once - or number the players sequentially, so that you call out 5 and 2,   
then 7 and 1, and so forth).