

LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB



COACHES MANUAL FOR OUR 6 - 8 YEAR OLD TEAMS

(2007 Edition)

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This Coaches Manual Is Written For The Following Age Divisions:

Bantams Division	6 year old boys
Microns Division	6 year old girls
Juniors Division	7 year old boys
Quasars Division	7 year old girls
Intermediates Division	8 year old boys
Protons Division	8 year old girls

Included in this coaches manual are ten practice sessions, geared for children of these ages, as well as a brief section on game tactics for both 4 vs. 4 soccer and 5 vs. 5 soccer.

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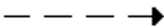
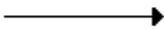

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LEGEND FOR THE DIAGRAMS IN THIS COACHES MANUAL

O	members of one team
X	members of the other team
G	goalkeeper
C	coach
N	neutral player (a player who plays for whichever team currently has the ball)
.	soccer ball
^	cones (to mark goals or boundaries)
	soccer goal
	movement of player with ball
	movement of player without ball
	movement of ball (pass or shot)

COACHING A YOUTH SOCCER TEAM

This manual contains ten different practice sessions designed for coaches of The Lower Merion Soccer Club's 6 - 8 year old divisions. Each practice session will focus on a particular skill (dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.) and assumes a maximum of 12 players at the practice.

It is important that **EVERY player brings a ball to EVERY practice** so that there is a 1:1 ball per player ratio. This is extremely important for a successful practice. The coach should also bring a few extra soccer balls. Players should bring two different colored shirts to practice: their LMSC game jersey and a white tee shirt. This will help the coach to make teams for scrimmages. United States Soccer Federation (USSF) regulations require players to wear shin guards to all games and all practices.

In keeping with the guidelines of the USSF, each practice in this manual concentrates on a specific skill. Each practice will progress from the 'Fundamental Stage' to the 'Match Related Stage' to the 'Match Condition Stage.' Every practice should always end with a small sided game so that the players can practice the specific skill in a game environment and so that they leave practice with smiles on their faces.

THE THREE STAGES OF A SOCCER PRACTICE

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE - Players practice the specific skill being addressed without pressure from an opponent. The coach should ensure that there is a 1:1 or 1:2 ball per player ratio. The key to this stage of the practice is **repetition with correct form**. The objective of this stage is for each player to get as many touches on the ball in each activity as possible. Activities in the Fundamental Stage could be done stationary, walking, jogging or running, depending on the age and skill level of the players.

MATCH RELATED STAGE - Players now practice the skill being worked on against opposition. This stage is much more 'game-like' than the Fundamental Stage. The opposition can range from 'passive' (walking or playing at way less than 100 percent effort) to 'active' (playing at 100 percent effort), depending on the age and skill of the players. Most activities in this stage will require more attacking players than defenders in order to ensure that the players can successfully execute the specified skill.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - Players compete in a game-like situation. Each team is attacking a goal and defending a goal. The Match Condition State can be one versus one (1 v 1), 2 v 2 or higher. The coach should impose restrictions (special conditions) on the game to ensure that the players attempt the skill they have been working on during the practice. It is important to keep the numbers small in this stage of practice. Two games of 3 v 3 are MUCH more productive than one game of 6 v 6 since all of the players will be more involved in the action and have many more touches on the ball.

At no time should coaches ever make winning a priority. Youngsters come out to the field to have fun. We want to develop their skills, but only as long as they are having a fun time. We must not over-coach them, we must not lecture them, we must not bore them, we **MUST** let them have fun ... always.

It is recommended that the practices run in the order that they appear in this manual. Similarly, activities within each practice should progress in the order listed. All practices in this manual list **many** more activities than can be performed in any one practice. Do not try to do every activity listed in this book during one practice. Instead, pick a few activities, ones that are appropriate to your team's level.

Schedule one practice a week, 70 - 90 minutes long. Divide the practice session equally between the Fundamental Stage, Match Related Stage and the Match Condition stage (20 to 30 minutes per stage).

Plan your practice ahead of time. Anticipate how many players you will have at the practice. Keep all players busy throughout the practice. If a different number of players show up than anticipated, adjust your practice plan so that no player will be idle for any significant length of time.

Be flexible with your practice plan. Don't rush on to the next stage of practice if the players have not had success in the current stage. If, however, all else fails during a practice, divide the players up into teams of three or four players and let them scrimmage. Often times, the game itself will be a better teacher than anything a coach can plan for at a practice.

If an assistant coach is available at a practice, have that person supervise half the team while you supervise the other half. This will give each player more individualized attention. Let your assistant coach know what your upcoming practice plan is before the practice. Talk to the assistant coach about the skills that will be taught as well as the activities that will be used in the practice.

THE CONCEPT OF ECONOMICAL TRAINING

This is a well known coaching principal which suggests that all soccer activities employ a combination of technical work (skill), tactical work (decision making), physical work and psychological (make all activities fun, challenging and lead to success).

Everything done at soccer practice should involve the use of as many soccer balls as possible. Players need to make a lot of touches on the ball and should be allowed the opportunity to make many decisions during the practice session.

Players at this age should NOT be running laps, doing calisthenics, conditioning work, etc. If practices are done properly, they will get plenty of exercise while working with their soccer ball, developing skill and learning to understand the game.

Youngsters have very short attention spans. They should not be given long lectures, their minds will quickly drift away. Give them brief instruction, then get them out on the field working as much as possible. Players at these age groups learn by "doing things," not by "listening to adults."

THE CONCEPT OF SMALL SIDED GAMES

Over the years, the United States Soccer Federation has recommended that youth soccer move away from playing full sided (11 vs. 11) soccer and towards small sided soccer. The reasoning for this is that players will be more involved in the play with small sided soccer, have more touches on the ball, make more decisions with the ball, etc. On a larger field, with more players, individual players will spend too much time during games standing around, inactive.

In recent years, LMSC switched the format of games for their 6 - 8 years old divisions to playing two simultaneous games of 5 v 5 (four field players and a goalie). Players are now more involved in the play, make many more touches on the ball and make more decisions on the field. They are always involved in the action. As a result, our players have developed at a much faster rate than in previous years.

THE CONCEPT OF NO BOOM BALL

One key concept to stress at both PRACTICES AND GAMES is the concept of "no boom ball." This is central to The Lower Merion Soccer Club's coaching philosophy. What this means is that players should NEVER be allowed to simply boom the ball down the field. When the ball comes to a player, he or she may do any one of three things with the ball:

- Dribble the ball
- Pass the ball
- Shoot the ball

Coaches are strongly encouraged to make "boom ball" a penalty in all practices, just like an intentional hand ball, tripping, etc. Do not allow your players to randomly kick the ball down the field; this does NOT develop skill. Allow the players to try to dribble through opponents. Even if the players do not succeed, they are developing their skills and eventually will be successful at taking on opponents 1 vs. 1.

Consider soccer to be like basketball. When Allen Iverson (or any other player) gets the ball from a defensive rebound, he NEVER just throws the ball down field aimlessly. Instead, he and his teammates will dribble and pass the ball down the court until they can get off a shot. This philosophy applies not only to the game of basketball, but to the game of soccer as well.

Soccer, like basketball, is a game where players pass, dribble and shoot. Randomly kicking the ball down the field is NOT a pass. DO NOT let your players play boom ball in practices or in games.

One of the central themes of The Lower Merion Soccer Club's coaching philosophy for 6 and 8 year old players is that players NEVER be discouraged from being "ball hogs." It is MUCH better for players at these ages to hold the ball too long than to give it up too early.

Possessing the ball leads to skill development. Coaches who tell players to "kick the ball down the field" are preventing players from developing their skills, preventing players from making tactical decisions and preventing players from having fun.

ALLOW THE PLAYERS TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS ON THE FIELD

Soccer players need to be able to make quick decisions on a soccer field. This is true whether the player has possession of the ball (do they dribble, pass or shoot?) or if a teammate has the ball (where should the player run to help his teammate?) or if the other team has the ball (how should the player defend the other team?)

Too often, well meaning coaches constantly shout out instructions to the players, taking away their opportunity to think and make decisions. This is especially true of the player who has the ball. Too often, when a player gets the ball, the coach, and the parents of the player, immediately yell out instructions. While well intentioned, this prevents players from thinking on the field and prevents them from being able to develop their decision making process.

In practices, coaches must allow players the opportunity to think and make decisions. If a player in practice makes a bad decision, the coach can stop the action **after** that play is over and discuss the play with the player and / or the team. Challenge the player to come up with a better idea than what he just did. See if the other players can come up with a better decision for that play.

In games, coaches should avoid shouting instructions to the player with the ball. The coaches should also ask the parents to avoid making the same mistake. Let the players make decisions. The coach can always talk to the player later about a particular play. Also, look at this from the child's point of view: the players really do not want adults yelling at them when they are playing! Would you have wanted a bunch of adults yelling at you when you were playing sports as a child? Probably not.

PRE-GAME WARMUPS

Have your players show up a MINIMUM of 30 minutes early to games. Lead the players through a skill developing, ball oriented, pre-game warmup using some of the Fundamental Stage activities found in this manual. Each player should bring a ball to use during the pre-game warmup. The pre-game warmup should also have a high ball per player ratio. Each player should have as many touches on the ball as possible. As with regular practices, **repetition with correct form** is the key to the pre-game warmup. It is recommended that in the pre-game warmup, the players work on the skill that was emphasized in the previous practice.

THE VARIOUS TYPES OF SMALL SIDED PRACTICE GAMES

This Lower Merion Soccer Club 4 vs. 4 Coaching Manual contains a wide variety of practice games and activities. Each activity emphasizes a particular theme. Most of the small sided games that can be played in practices can be divided into three distinct categories:

- **POSSESSION GAMES** - The objective of possession games is for one team (or one individual) to keep **possession** of the ball and prevent the opposing team from getting possession. There are no goals setup, there is no direction of play. The objective is simple; maintain possession of the ball. The playing area can be defined as a square, circle or rectangle.
- **END LINE GAMES** - With these type of games, each team defends one end line of the playing area and attacks the other end line. The objective is to get the ball over the end line. In addition to the element of **possession**, games now require the element of **direction**. Teams must now play in a particular direction and try to get behind the opposing team's defense. When games are played with direction, the size and shape of the playing area must be carefully thought out. Typically, a rectangular grid is preferred over a square grid, similar to the shape of a regular soccer field. Wider grids will encourage more wing play and encourage players to switch the ball from one side of the field to another. Narrower fields will encourage teams to play more "direct," going straight from one end of the field to the other.
- **GAMES TO GOAL** - The third type of small sided games are the games where goals are placed on the end lines. Now, in addition to having the elements of **possession** and **direction** in the game, the coach has added the element of **finishing**. Teams now are trying to put the ball into the opponent's net and keep the ball out of their own net. Similar to end line games, the size and shape of the grid is important. When emphasizing shooting, the field should not be long. A shorter field will allow for more shooting opportunities. When emphasizing wing play, a wider field should be used so that teams will be able to take the ball down the side of the field and cross the ball.

SIZE AND SHAPE OF PRACTICE GRIDS

As mentioned before, the size of the grid in each activity must be determined by the coach. When in doubt, the coach should make the playing area a little bit too large so that the players have plenty of space to execute their skills in game-like situations. If the playing area appears too big, the coach can adjust the size of the playing area to make the settings more realistic. This is why coaches are encouraged to use cones to define the size and shape of the playing area. Cones can easily be moved while an activity is in progress.

The table below is a general guide for the size of grids for players ages 6 - 8. The exact dimensions of the grid will be dependent on the age and skill level of the players. Each team and each activity will require a different size playing area. The coach should always start with a grid large enough to ensure initial success. If the activity appears too easy, the coach can always make the playing area smaller.

<u>Game</u>	<u>Game Without Direction</u>	<u>Game With Direction</u>
1 v 1:	10 yards x 10 yards	15 yards x 10 yards
2 v 2:	15 yards x 15 yards	20 yards x 15 yards
3 v 3:	25 yards x 25 yards	30 yards x 20 yards
4 v 4:	30 yards x 30 yards	40 yards x 30 yards

KEY ITEMS TO REMEMBER AT ALL PRACTICE SESSIONS

- Be sure that all of the players are having fun at all times.
- Be sure that each player makes as many touches on the ball as possible and has plenty of chances to practice the skill that is being taught.
- Minimize the amount of time that players are standing idle, not doing anything. Minimize the lecture time. Briefly discuss and demonstrate each activity, then get the players actively working with the soccer ball for as much of the time as possible. Soccer players learn from "actively doing" things much more than from "listening." Keep talk in clear, simple language that players of their age can easily understand.
- Do not have the players standing in lines, waiting to do something. Keep them busy as much of the time as possible.
- Maximize the ball per player ratio. Players should have their own ball to work with or share a ball with at most one other player.
- Encourage players to be creative in both practices and games. Allow them the chance to attempt the skills they have learned. Realize that it often takes many failures before the players will finally succeed at a skill.
- Finish off all practices with small sided games. Remember that two simultaneous games of 3 v 3 will result in MANY more touches on the ball for each child as compared to one game of 6 v 6. NEVER have a full field scrimmage with another team at practice. Be sure to have as many players active at all times as possible.
- Remember to use the principal of "economical training." EVERY activity in practice must involve soccer balls. Do not have the players run laps, do push ups, situps etc. Everything is done with a ball. Maintain a high ball per player ratio at all times.
- In all activities (including small sided games), place all extra balls just off the field of play, preferably just inside the goals. When one ball goes out of play, quickly put a different ball into play. Play should not stop in order for a player to retrieve a ball. Instead, get a different ball and put it into play right away. Collect the balls only after all of them have gone out of play or when a water break is needed.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED FOR PRACTICES

The coach should bring the following items to all practices:

- Player roster with phone numbers (home and cell) and addresses in case of emergency.
- Cones (12 or more) to mark out playing boundaries and / or serve as goals.
- Bicycle flags (about five feet high) to serve as goals (preferred over cones).
- Extra soccer balls (to lend to players who forgot to bring a ball) and a soccer ball pump.
- First Aid kit.

THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE OF COACHING

It is important for all coaches to remember the two main objectives of coaching. Coaches must never lose sight of these two objectives at any time. These objectives (in order of importance are):

- Ensure that each and every youngster is having fun and develops a love of the game.
- To develop the skills necessary to become a better player and be able to play at higher levels of soccer in the future.

SOME THOUGHTS ON COACHING

The following is a compilation of ideas about coaching from Rick Burns, long time head coach at Gordon College in Massachusetts.

1. Remind your players before each match to enjoy their experience.
2. A crisp 90 minute training session beats a dragged-out two-and-a-half-hour session every time.
3. On match day, step back, quiet down and enjoy watching the fruits of your labor. When the whistle blows, it's very much their show.
4. Real power comes from serving your people well.
5. Where there is a will, there is not always a way - but sometimes there is.
6. Find a kind way to tell your players the blunt truth.
7. Athletic participation is important, but it is just a temporary, wonderful phase to pass through on the way to real life.
8. Don't second-guess yourself. Make the best decision you can and move on.
9. Speak succinctly. Don't lose track of the value of being uncomplicated.
10. Balance praise and criticism - too much of either can be harmful.
11. Set your standards early and don't compromise them.
12. In these sullen, win-at-all-cost times, enjoy the occasional belly laugh. Delight is the wage of living.
13. It's unnecessary to raise your voice to be heard if your players believe you have something important to say. Your impact is greater with a whisper than a roar.
14. Teach your players the wonderful freedom that comes from learning to lose with grace and dignity and without excuse.
15. Winning is overrated and the singular quest for it leads to unhappiness.
16. Keep things simple - everything added is something lost.
17. Greeting each player personally at the beginning of training every day and saying something sincerely positive publicly about each player during the training session pays dividends.
18. Letting your players know that you care for them and that they can trust you is critical.
19. Cervantes was right: "The journey is more important than the arrival."
20. Teach your players that peace of mind is a result of giving all that they have.
21. Let your actions coincide with your beliefs.
22. Convey to your players your love of the game.
23. Don't posture - a confident person need not convince anybody of anything.
24. Don't allow one or two players to ruin things for the rest of the players.
25. The joy of winning fades immediately and precipitously.
26. Have the courage to say "no" when the right answer is no.
27. Don't script your training session down to the minute - allow room for spontaneity.
28. Convey to your players the intrinsic honor that comes from training and playing hard.
29. It is important to have your players work on their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Being great at one thing makes a difference.
30. Show some passion on occasion. They have to know you care.
31. Don't over-analyze. Sometimes as Freud told us, "A cigar is just a cigar."
32. If you don't know, say you don't know.
33. Learning through self-discovery is ego-enhancing and more likely to last.
34. Introduce a service component to your program - it's good for everybody.
35. Even in these politically correct times, don't neglect the spiritual aspect of coaching.

From Landon Donovan, USA National Team Player - As a kid you need to touch the ball as much as you can. You should always be with the ball. You should have a feeling that wherever the ball is, you can do anything with it. No matter where it is, where it is on your body, how it's spinning, how it's coming at you, the speed it's coming at you, anything. You can learn the tactical side of the game later. It's amazing to me that people put so much emphasis on trying to be tactical and worry about winning when it doesn't matter when you are 12 years old.

From Roger Neilson, former Philadelphia Flyers coach - "Here's the biggest thing I learned. The key to understanding how to be successful is to get your players to do what they don't want to do and have them love doing it."

"You have to be open-minded and listen to your players. That's why God gave us one mouth and two ears."

"Never ask a player to do something beyond his ability, because he will question your ability as a coach, not his ability as an athlete."

"Success in soccer is not doing the extraordinary trick; success in soccer is doing the ordinary, perfectly, every time."

"One of the biggest things a coach can do to make a team a winner is knowing when not to coach. Sometimes, when everyone is playing well and everyone is on a roll, you just have to open the door and let 'em go. Then, if things get carried away, you have to know when to pull in the reins."

PRACTICE SESSION # 1

DRIBBLING AND INDIVIDUAL FOOTWORK

The first practice session of the year should focus on dribbling. Prior to the practice, ask each player to bring a soccer ball. The coach should also bring a few extra soccer balls since some players might not have a ball, or forget to bring one. All players should have a ball to work with during the practice. Players develop at a much faster rate when all players have their own ball to work with.

Be sure to get players active and playing as soon as possible. Many players will be quite tentative at first, especially if they don't know anyone else on the team. Having the first practice session of the season focus on dribbling will quickly get all players involved and into the flow of the soccer season.

The objective of this first practice is to make all players confident enough to want to possess the ball and not be scared of holding onto the ball or attacking with it. This is a philosophy that needs to be preached at the first practice and maintained throughout the season. Try to develop the player's confidence in possessing the ball and attacking with the ball.

Dribbling is by far the most creative and expressive skill in the game. Players should always be encouraged to dribble, especially in the offensive half of the field.

KEY COACHING POINTS FOR DRIBBLING

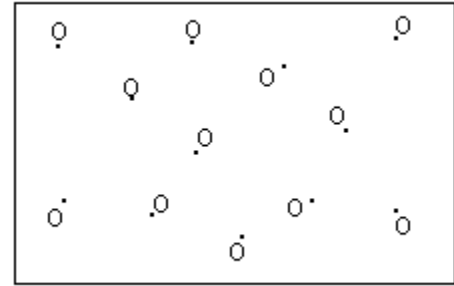
- Keep the ball close at all times, especially when an opponent is near.
- Practice using all the different foot surfaces including the inside of the foot, the outside of the foot, the sole (cleats), the instep (laces) and the heel.
- All activities should be done equally with the **left foot and with the right foot**. This two footed philosophy should be maintained at all practices during the season.
- Players must keep their heads up so they can see the field, the boundary lines and the other players on the field. Players should only glance down at the ball briefly before looking back up.
- Change direction sharply by quickly turning the hips, bending the knees and getting the foot around to the opposite side of the ball.
- Change speed quickly. When attempting to beat an opponent, players should dribble under control at the defender, make a move and then rapidly accelerate past the defender. When talking to players about beating a defender with dribbling, use the expression "change of direction and change of speed."
- Players must be encouraged to try their new dribbling moves in games.
- After playing the ball behind the defender, explode behind the defender. The next touch on the ball after that should have the player's body position such that it cuts off any recovery run by the defender. Be sure to get the body between the ball and the defender after getting around him.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

Activity 1 - Mark out an area about 25 yards square. All players should be inside this "grid" with their ball. Briefly demonstrate several basic moves of dribbling (inside of the foot, outside of the foot, instep and sole of the foot). Coaches are encouraged to look at various coaching books or coaching videos to see some of the basic moves that can be worked on. If the coach is not comfortable demonstrating, he should ask an older sibling of one of the players to attend the practice and serve as a demonstrator.

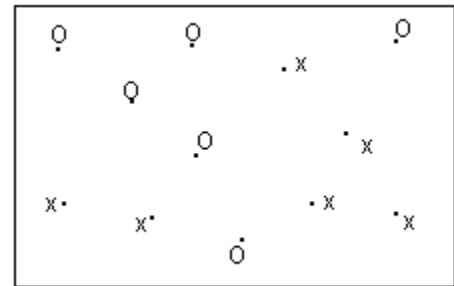
Have the players dribble freely inside the grid for awhile using the various surfaces. Encourage the players to keep their heads up to avoid collisions with other players and to see where they are going. Ask them to swing their hips hard when changing direction with the ball.

As a fun twist to this activity, the coach can shout out commands for the players to follow. One version of this is to play "red light, green light" where the players dribble around when the coach yells "green light," but then must quickly stop the ball and become motionless when the coach yells "red light." The coach can also yell out different instructions such as "left foot only," "turn with the outside of the foot," "pull the ball back with the sole of the foot," etc.



Activity 2 - Place half of the players in white shirts and half in dark shirts, all inside the grid. The white shirt players are randomly scattered around the grid holding their soccer balls in their hands. The dark shirt players each dribble their ball around inside the grid, dribbling full circles around each of the white shirt players, one at a time.

Challenge the players to dribble around as many players as possible in 45 seconds, then ask each player how many players he dribbled around. Let both teams try this several times.



Activity 3 - Still inside the same grid, have the resting team players hold their soccer balls and stand with their legs spread wide open. Challenge the other team to dribble through as many players' legs (goals) as possible in 45 seconds. Again, give each player a chance to "brag" about how many goals he scored.

MATCH RELATED STAGE

The Match Related Stage introduces the element of "opponents." Be sure all players have shinguards and be sure they have control of their legs when they try to tackle an opponent.

Activity 1 - The first game is a soccer classic called "Killer." Using cones, set up a playing area 25 yards square. Every player dribbles a ball inside the grid and tries to kick away other players' balls. Each player tries to maintain possession of his ball and may not leave his ball unattended while kicking away someone else's ball. When a player has his ball knocked out of the grid, he must immediately get his ball and do a "fun activity" such as two juggles before returning to the game. A player may not kick another player's ball out unless the player has possession of his own ball.

Be sure to NOT make this game an 'elimination' contest because too many players will wind up watching the game from the sideline as the game progresses. Always allow players to be able to re-enter the game after their ball gets knocked out.

Briefly stop the game when the players start to get tired. As an extra challenge, the coach can join in the game and "dare" the players to kick his ball out. Demand that players go after other players and not just try to 'hide' with their ball. As the game progresses, make the grid smaller, if necessary, to force the action into a more confined area.

Activity 2 - The next game is called "Team Killer." Divide the players into two teams. This game is similar to "Killer," except that one team now plays against the other team. Each player still has his own ball but may only kick away a ball belonging to an opponent. Encourage players on one team to 'gang up' on the stronger players of the other team. When the players get tired, stop the game and see which team is in possession of the most soccer balls.

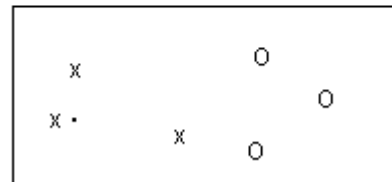
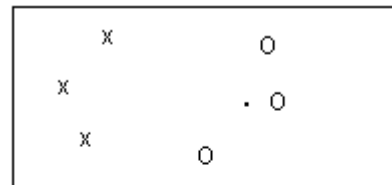
Activity 3 - The next game is called "Take Away." Divide the players into two equal teams. Set up a playing area 25 yards square. Start the game with six players in the grid, each with a ball. Six other players start outside the grid, each without a ball. The players without a ball run into the grid and try to steal someone else's ball. When a player has his ball stolen, he must try to steal some other player's ball (he may not steal back the ball he just lost). If a player forces someone to dribble outside the grid, he gains possession of that ball. Each player will constantly be taking a soccer ball from someone, then having the ball taken away by someone else. When the players get tired, the coach should stop the game and have the players in possession of a ball pick it up. The players who do not have a ball at that time have to do some fun punishment (do two juggles, imitate a dog playing soccer, etc.)

Variation: Have the players without a ball hold a shirt or pinnie. When the player steals a ball, he throws the shirt on the ground. The player who lost the ball must pick up the shirt and go after any player with a ball (including the player who just stole the ball from him).

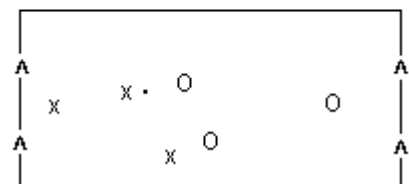
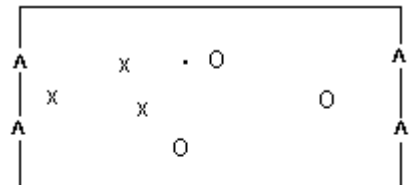
MATCH CONDITION STAGE

This final stage of the practice is where players try their skills in a game-like situation. Each team attacks a goal and each team defends a goal. This is the stage that the players find to be the most FUN. Coaches should set restrictions or conditions in the game that will encourage the players to try the new skills they just learned in practice. The most important restriction that the coach must establish is the "No Boom Ball" restriction.

Activity 1 - Set up two fields about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide. Play two games of 3 v 3 with no goalies. Goals are scored by dribbling (not shooting) the ball under control over the opponent's end line. After 10 minutes, rotate the teams around so that each team gets a chance to play all three of the other teams. If there are not enough players at practice for two games of 3 v 3, set up two fields about 20 yards long and 15 yards wide and play two games of 2 v 2.



Activity 2 - Using bicycle flags or cones, set up a 12 foot wide goal on each end line of each grid. Award three points for a goal and one point every time a player successfully dribbles past an opponent. This will encourage players to try the dribbling skills that they worked on in practice. Rotate players around so they all have a chance to play goalie. Remember to place all extra soccer balls just inside the goals so that the goalie can quickly put a new ball into play when a ball goes out of play.



COACHING POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Be sure to strictly enforce the "NO BOOM BALL" rule.
- Encourage the players to dribble the ball, maintain possession and try to beat their opponents by dribbling past them. Do not let the players be afraid of possessing the ball.
- Encourage each player to develop an attitude of trying to attack when he has the ball.
- BE SURE THAT EACH PLAYER LEAVES WITH A SMILE ON HIS FACE.

COACHING GOALS FOR THE FIRST PRACTICE OF THE SEASON

- Learn EVERY player's first and last name by the end of the practice.
- Tell players to bring shinguards, an appropriate size ball (size 3 for the Microns, Quasars, Bantams and Juniors, size 4 for the Protons and Intermediates) and two different colored shirts to all practices.
- Be sure that the players know when their next practice or game is.
- Give players a schedule for the season. This should include dates, times and fields for games, along with a practice schedule for the upcoming weeks.
- Give out a roster with all players' names and phone numbers so that the players can arrange car pools. Be sure that all coaches names, phone numbers and / or e-mail addresses are also on the roster so the players have a way to contact the coaches during the season.
- Have a team meeting at the end of the first practice with the parents. If you don't already have an assistant coach, ask for a volunteer. Also, ask for a volunteer to be Team Manager, someone who will help with phone calls, assigning half time and post game refreshments, etc.
- Be sure players leave practice knowing when and where the next practice is. Be sure ALL players have had a good time.



PRACTICE SESSION # 2

PASSING AND RECEIVING - PART I

As with all practices, this practice should use a high ball per player ratio so that the players will have a maximum number of touches on the ball. The previous practice, which focused on dribbling, started off with a 1:1 ball per player ratio. This practice will start off with a 1:2 ball per player ratio.

COACHING POINTS FOR PASSING AND RECEIVING

INSTEP (LACE) PASS

- This technique is very similar to that used to shoot a ball. The instep pass should be the first type of pass taught. This type of pass should be practiced well before the other types of passes described below. Be sure players have a lot of time to work on the instep pass.
- The instep pass is primarily used when the ball must cover a long distance.
- The non-kicking foot is placed next to the ball and is pointed at the intended target.
- The knee of the kicking foot is directly over the ball, body leaning slightly over the ball.
- The ball is struck either on the equator or slightly above the equator. Contact is made with the laces. The ball should only be struck below the equator when trying to pass the ball up in the air.
- At the moment of contact, the kicking foot should be pointing straight into the ground and should be perpendicular to the ground. The toes should be pointed straight down, towards the ground.
- On the follow through, the kicking leg should be parallel to the ground and the toes pointed directly at the target (NOT up to the sky).

INSIDE OF THE FOOT PASS (PUSH PASS)

- Turn the kicking foot outward 90 degrees (square to target), toes pointing away from the body.
- Lock the ankle by lifting the toes so they are well ABOVE the heel.
- The non-kicking foot is even with the ball, pointed at the target with the knee slightly bent.
- The ball is struck either on the equator or just above it, with the inside of the foot in order to keep the ball on the ground.
- The kicking foot follows through the ball after the kick.

OUTSIDE OF THE FOOT PASS

- This is a VERY advanced technique and should only be worked on by older players.
- Toes are turned in, towards the non-kicking foot.
- Lock the ankle by lowering the toes so they are well BELOW the heel.
- The non-kicking foot does not have to be pointing towards the intended target.
- The ball is struck with the outside of the foot, either on the equator or just above it.
- The kicking foot follows through the ball after the kick.
- This type of pass should only be used for short distances. It is often very difficult for youngsters.

TECHNIQUES FOR RECEIVING A PASS

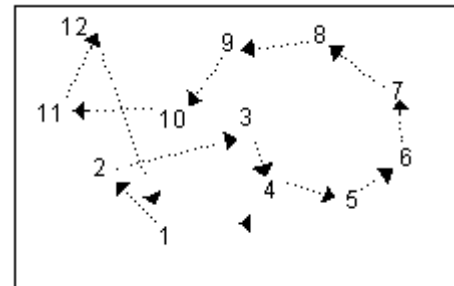
- The techniques for receiving a pass are the same as the three passing techniques described above, only the movement is done in reverse. The trick is to "give" with the pass, i.e., reverse the motion of the foot and leg as the ball arrives.
- Consider the ball to be like an egg when receiving it. The player must try to "cushion" the egg softly so as not to break it.
- Advanced players should work to receive a pass so that the ball is played slightly in the direction that the receiving player wants to go. This is known as having a "positive first touch."
- When receiving a forward pass, the receiving player should try to be facing sideways, looking in towards the center of the field. By facing sideways, the receiving player will be able to see the ball coming towards him, and see any defenders approaching from the opposite direction.

Players should work on the different surfaces when passing and receiving. Younger players might not be able to use the outside of the foot pass. Always encourage the players to practice these skills equally with their **left and right** feet.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

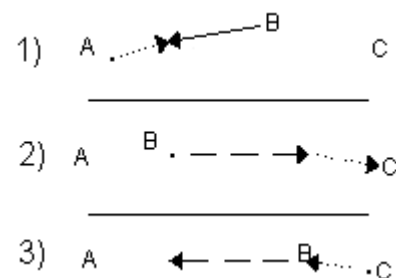
Activity 1 - Divide the players into groups of two, each pair passing and receiving a ball back and forth. The coach BRIEFLY demonstrates and explains the various ways to pass and receive a ball, starting with the instep (laces). If the coach is unable to properly demonstrate, an older sibling could be brought in to demonstrate during the practice. During this part of the practice, the players are practicing passing and receiving with no movement. The outside of the foot pass should only be done if the coach feels that the players are able to perform this technique.

Activity 2 - Set up a grid 40 yards square. Give each player a number from 1 - 12. The players should jog around inside the grid. Player 1 passes to player 2 who passes to player 3 on up. The highest numbered player passes to player 1. Start the exercise with two balls (at the feet of players 1 and 6), progress to four balls as the players get the hang of it. Be sure players are passing and receiving while moving. They should not be standing still while doing this. If the players start to get bored, have them switch to passing in the opposite order.



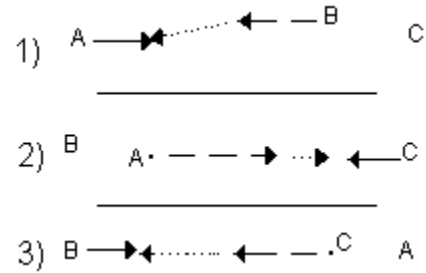
Advanced Variation: Use two different colored soccer balls. Have one ball be played 1 to 2 to 3 ... (counting up) and the other ball be played 9 to 8 to 7.... (counting down). This exercise will be very challenging to the mind and will bring about some interesting reactions and comments from the players.

Activity 3 - Divide the players into groups of three. Each group should be standing in a straight line with the players about 15 yards apart from each other. Player A starts with the ball. Player B runs towards player A, receives a pass, turns towards player C, dribbles and passes to C. Player C then passes the ball back to B who receives the pass, turns towards player A, dribbles and passes to A. Repeat 10 times, then change the man in the middle.



More advanced players should try to receive the ball facing sideways to the player passing the ball so that they can easily see what is in front of them, not just what is behind them. Receiving a ball in this manner is referred to as being "sideways on."

Activity 4 - Start with the same setup as before. Player B starts with the ball and passes to player A while both players are moving towards each other. As player A receives the ball, B switches places with him. Player A then dribbles towards player C and passes the ball to him as they switch places. Player C then dribbles towards player B, pass the ball to him and switches places with him. Continue this rotation.

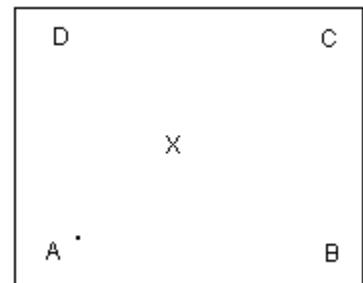


Activity 5 - "Short-Short-Long." Start with the same setup as before, except that the players are now 30 yards apart. Player B makes a long pass to player A and runs towards player A. As player B approaches, player A plays a short pass back to him. Player B then returns a short pass to player A and switches places with him. Player A then makes a long pass to player C and runs towards player C. As player A approaches, player C plays a short pass to him. Player A then returns a short pass back to player C and switches places with him. This rotation continues. The "Short-Short-Long" name comes from the fact that two short passes are made, followed by one long pass.

MATCH RELATED STAGE

We now start to challenge the players by adding opponents into the passing and receiving activities. The most effective way to teach passing and receiving in the Match Related Stage is to play some type of keepaway game. The number of offensive players and number of defensive players will vary, according to the age and skill level of the players. The size of the grid must also be adjusted to fit the age and skill level of the players. Younger, less skillful players will need to play in a larger playing area while older, more skillful players will need to play in a smaller grid to increase the pressure.

Activity 1 - Set up a grid about 20 yards square with four offensive players in the grid and one defensive player. The team of four tries to play keepaway from the one defender. At first, only allow the defensive player to walk after the ball. As the offensive players get better at passing and receiving, allow the defender to jog or run for the ball. If the players are having difficulty, make the grid larger.



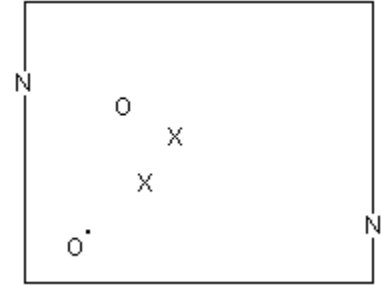
If the activity is too easy, change it to a 3 v 1 activity. The coach needs to determine an appropriate number of players (offense and defense) and the appropriate level of pressure from the defender so that the players will be able to succeed at making passes and still be challenged.

Be sure to rotate the players so that they take turns being the defender. Challenge the players to see how many consecutive passes they can make. Set up two grids so that all 12 players can participate at the same time (five or six players in each grid). We always want to minimize the number of players who are inactive at any time.

Note: Older, more skillful players such as those in the Travel Team Program play similar games to develop passing and receiving skills. The only difference is that they will play 3 v 1 or 4 v 2 in a tighter grid. More advanced travel team players will play 3 v 2 to force them to pass and receive the ball quicker and with more accuracy. Older, more advanced teams, including travel teams, will play with even numbers (3 v 3, 4 v 4, etc.) The challenge to the coach is to set up the proper environment so that the players will be able to succeed.

Be sure to encourage the offensive players without the ball to move so that they are not standing behind a defender. They should not bunch up. Instead, they should stay spread out, near their sideline and be in a position to receive a pass.

Activity 2 - Place two white shirt players and two dark shirt players in the above grid. They will play keepaway inside the grid. Place two other players on the perimeter of the grid. They may move along the perimeter of the grid. These perimeter players will play for whichever team has the ball. If the white shirt team plays the ball to them, they will try to pass the ball back to the white shirt team. If one of the dark shirt team players plays the ball to them, they will try to pass the ball back to the dark shirt team. Rotate the inside players and neutral players to keep players working and resting at an optimal rate.

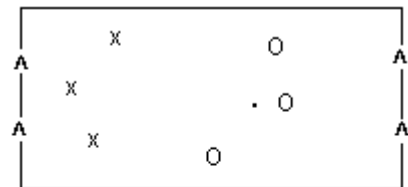


There are many varieties of keepaway games that can be set up. For example:

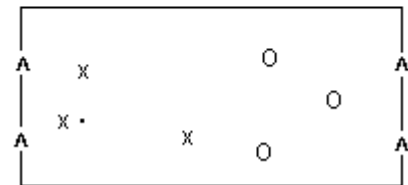
- Play 2 v 2 on the inside with four players on the perimeter (one on each side of the grid).
- The inside players may only pass to a perimeter player with the same color shirt.
- For advanced players, allow perimeter players to only one-touch pass (they may not first control the ball before passing it).
- The roles and limitations of the perimeter players must be defined by the coach (as well as the size of the grid), based on the players' abilities.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE

Activity 1 - Setup two fields about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide with 12 foot long goals on each end line. Each team has three players (two field players and a goalie). Play a regular soccer game, except that the scoring is kept as three points for a goal and one point for every successful pass. Encourage the goalies to get into the offensive action, trying to make passes and receive passes as well.



Activity 2 - Same setup as before, but require teams to make three passes before they are allowed to take a shot. In this game, the goalie must get up into the action during the passing. Remind the goalie that even if the other team steals the ball, they cannot shoot it right away since they must first make three passes.



Variation: The first time that a team tries to score, only require them to make one pass before trying to score. Once they have scored a goal, require them to make two consecutive passes before they are allowed to shoot. After they score a second time, require them to make three consecutive passes before they are allowed to shoot, etc.

The idea of the Match Condition Stage is to set restrictions that will encourage players to use the skills they have just learned in the current practice. Set up the proper size playing area, impose conditions to make the players practice the skills they just worked on, then minimize the coaching in this stage. Let the players play. Make sure they are having fun and make sure that all players go home with smiles on their faces.

PRACTICE SESSION # 3

SHOOTING AND GOALKEEPING - PART I

The one thing that soccer players of all ages like to do the most is score goals. This session will concentrate on scoring goals (shooting) and preventing them (goalkeeping) although almost every practice session in this manual will have shooting and scoring incorporated into it.

COACHING POINTS FOR INSTEP (LACE) SHOOTING

- Approach the ball with a series of short steps, followed by a final longer step.
- The non-kicking foot is placed next to the ball, pointed at the intended target, with the knee bent.
- The body is compact, leaning forward, over the ball. The chest is facing over the ball. The knee of the kicking foot is directly over the ball.
- The ball is struck on the equator, or just above the equator, with the laces. If the ball is struck below the equator, it will go up in the air. Shots are most effective when they are low, near the ground. Low shots are the most difficult for the goalie to stop.
- At the moment of contact, the kicking foot is perpendicular to the ground (toes pointing straight down) to lock the ankle. The toes should be pointed directly into the ground.
- The hips as well as the knee of the kicking foot are pointed in the direction of the shot.
- The eyes must be looking down at the ball, focused on the ball, not on the goal.
- The kicking foot follows through the point where the exact center of the ball was.
- At the end of the follow through, the kicking leg and kicking foot are both pointed at the target (not up towards the sky). The thigh should be parallel to the ground.
- Demand that the players work equally on shooting **left footed and right footed**. Players dribbling down the left side of the field should dribble and shoot with the left foot. Players dribbling down the right side of the field should dribble and shoot with the right foot.
- Shots should be aimed to the FAR post so that if the ball goes wide, or if there is a rebound off the goalie, the far winger will have a chance to get to the ball. Shots to the near post that are off target will go out of bounds with no rebound.
- Follow through towards the goal, with body weight going forward.
- Advanced players are taught to follow through so that they not only jump up in the air off of their non-kicking foot, but land ON their kicking foot, a few yards ahead of the spot where the actual contact with the ball was made.

COACHING POINTS FOR GOALTENDING

Goalkeepers should be taught to use their hands anywhere inside the penalty area. If they can get to a ball in the box before the other players, they should "move their legs to get their hands to the ball." Similarly, if there is a ball outside of the penalty area that they can get to before any other player, they should run outside of the box and play the ball just as a field player would. In 4 v 4 soccer, goalies should learn to be the first part of the offense. They should be encouraged to dribble the ball outside of the penalty area. When the goalie's team is on offense, the goalie should move well beyond the goalie box and offer his teammates a drop pass when needed.

It is important for goalkeepers to realize that this position is not just a "hands" position, but also a "feet" position. They must learn to move their feet to get to the ball when making a save. Ideally, they want to move to get their body behind every shot. Goalies should be discouraged from making kick saves.

Low shots should be caught with an underhand grip and brought in to the chest. High shots should be caught with the hands together in such a way that their thumbs are touching and their index fingers are touching, forming a diamond. After making a save, the ball should be brought in to the chest.

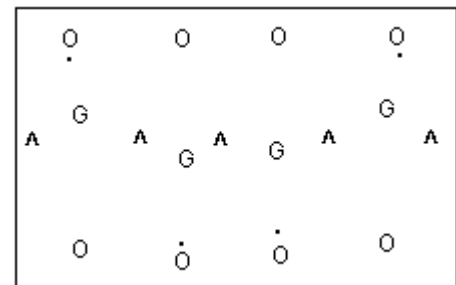
After making a save, the goalie should try to throw the ball to a teammate. If nobody is near the goalie, he may put the ball on the ground and dribble the ball up the field, starting the attack. The goalie should have his head up while dribbling so that he can find an open teammate to pass to. If there is plenty of space, the goalie may take the ball up beyond the midfield line and take a shot.

If the goalie elects to throw the ball to a teammate, he should throw it to a teammate who is near the sideline. The goalie should not throw the ball down the middle of the field if there are opponents in that area of the field.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

Activity 1 - Set up a row of five road cones or bicycle flags, each spaced 12 feet apart (the length of a standard 4 v 4 goal). This will create four goals for the players to practice shooting. Divide the team into groups of three, each working at one of the four goals.

Designate one player in each group to be the goalkeeper. The other two players, each with a ball, are the shooters. They are placed on opposite sides of the goal and alternate taking shots at the goalie. With this setup, if a player should score or shoot the ball wide of the goal, the shooter on the opposite side of the goal can easily retrieve the ball for his teammate.



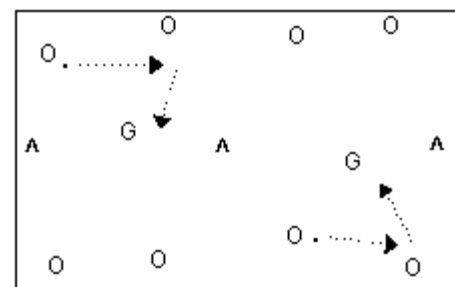
Be sure that the shooter's non-kicking foot is pointing towards the goal. Emphasize to the players that they must use plenty of hip movement to get their body weight into the shot. NEVER let the players toe the ball. Using the toes is not accurate and can lead to broken toes.

Also, be sure that the players practice shooting both left footed and right footed. Players must learn to be two footed players at a young age. Be sure they are looking down at the ball at the moment that they make contact with it.

Activity 2 - Progress from having the players shooting stationary balls to having them take several dribbles before shooting on the move. Again, it is important that the players practice all shooting activities both **left footed and right footed**. Have them dribble directly at the goal and shoot from about 12 yards out. Later, have them dribble across the goal mouth, parallel to the goal line before shooting. The non-kicking foot must be turned to point toward the goal when the ball is struck. The hips must swing hard around the ball so that the body can turn towards the goal.

Activity 3 - Progress to shooting balls passed by a teammate. Have two players on each side of each goal. One of the players passes the ball to his partner. The player receiving the ball must control the pass and then shoot. Advanced players can be taught to shoot the ball "first time," i.e., shoot the ball without first taking a touch to control the pass.

Before shooting the ball, the shooter should look at the goal and decide where to aim. He should then look down at the ball. It is important for the shooter to keep his **eyes on the ball** when striking it. The shooter should not be looking at the goal when making contact with the ball. Concentration is very important.

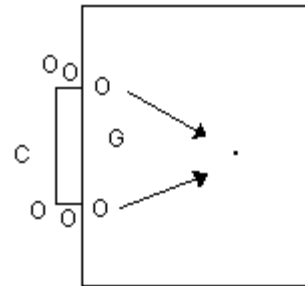


MATCH RELATED STAGE

A defender is now introduced into the activities. It is important that the coach ensures that all players are still able to get lots and lots of shooting opportunities. It is imperative that a large supply of balls be available so that players do not have to run after the ball each time a shot is taken. If possible, have someone other than a player (a parent or a sibling of one of the players) stand behind the goals, retrieving the shots that go wide of the goals.

Activity 1 - Have two or three players stand in line at each goal post and have one other player be the goalie. The coach stands behind the goal and throws a ball out into the goal mouth. The first player at each goal post runs after the ball and tries to shoot the ball into the goal while preventing the other player from doing the same.

After a goal is scored, or the ball has gone out of play, another ball is served to the next two players in line. Make the player who did NOT take the shot retrieve the ball.



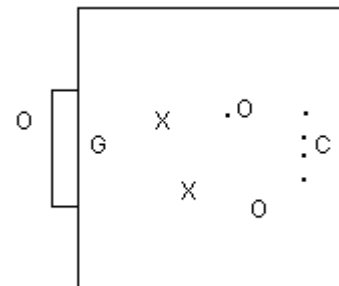
Note: Be sure that there are only a few players standing in each line. A second field should be set up so that the other half of the team can do this exercise at the same time, under the direction of the assistant coach. This will prevent players from having to wait in line to get a chance to play. Be sure that each player gets to play against a different player each time.

Variation: The coach calls out a number before throwing out the ball. That number of players will come out from each post onto the field and play. If the coach calls "two", then two players from each goal post will come out and play 2 v 2. The coach should constantly change the number called out to have an assortment of 1 v 1, 2 v 2 or 3 v 3 games. After the play is over, players go back to the end of their line.

Variation: The coach calls out two numbers such as "2, 1." This would signal the first two players from the left goal post to come out and play the first player from the right post, making the game a 2 v 1. The coach should vary the numbers to see games such as 2 v 1, 3 v 2, 1 v 3, etc.

Activity 2 - Setup two fields, each with six players and one goal. On each field, have two players in dark shirts play against two players in white shirts. A fifth player serves as goalie while the sixth player stands behind the goal, retrieving shots. Each team tries to score on the same goal while preventing the other team from scoring on the same goal. With both teams trying to score on the same goal, there should be a lot of shots. The coach stands about 25 yards away from the ball. He starts play by rolling a ball into play. The players battle for the ball and try to score.

When a ball goes out of play, the coach puts another ball into play right away. If the keeper makes a save, he should throw the ball out to an open space where the field players try to win the loose ball and shoot.



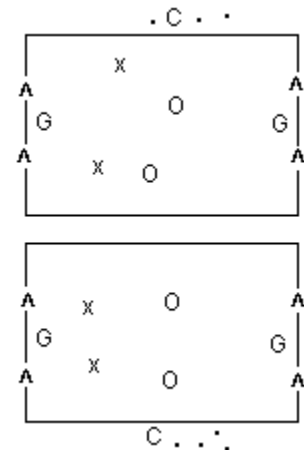
Rotate the players so they are playing with and against the other players.

Again, be sure that there are two games going on at the same time so that few players, if any, are resting. Be sure to have a large supply of balls for this activity.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE

Activity 1 - Set up two fields, each about 20 yards long and 20 yards wide. Use bicycle flags to make a 12 foot long goal on each end line. Divide the players into four teams of three players each. Organize two games of 3 v 3. On each field, have the coach stand on the sideline at midfield, with a large supply of balls. The coach rolls a ball onto the field. Each team tries to get the ball and shoot. The game continues until a goal is scored or the ball goes out of bounds. At that point, the coach throws another ball onto the field. The coach continues to serve balls until all the available balls are used. At that point, the players quickly gather up the balls and restart the game.

The fields should be set up to be rather short so that the players can attempt a lot of shots. Players should be able to shoot from almost anywhere on the field since it is so small.



Activity 2 - Play a regular game of 3 v 3 (two field players and a goalie). Teams play a regular game except the scoring is recorded as: five points for a goal, three points for a shot that the goalie stops, but cannot catch and one point for all other shots. This scoring will encourage players to shoot as much as possible.

Demand that players shoot with both feet. The coach can award double points any time that a player takes a shot with his weaker foot.

Encourage players to shoot at every opportunity. Too often, players are hesitant to shoot in games and will pass the ball away on an obvious goal scoring opportunity.



PRACTICE SESSION # 4

DRIBBLING, SHIELDING AND 1 VERSUS 1

This practice session will build on the skills learned in the first practice found in this Coaches Manual (Dribbling And Individual Footwork). The information and techniques presented in that practice should be reviewed before starting this practice session.

The concept of shielding the ball will be introduced. Shielding is the technique used to hold on to the ball while preventing an opponent from taking it away. Defensively, the "block tackle" will be introduced. This is the standard technique used by a defender to take the ball away from a player dribbling directly at him.

COACHING POINTS FOR SHIELDING

- Stand sideways (at a right angle) to the defender with the shoulder nearest the defender leaning into the him.
- The ball must be positioned next to, or just beyond, the foot FURTHEST from the defender so that the defender cannot poke the ball away. Never play the ball with the near foot when shielding the ball from an opponent.
- The head must be up in order to see what the defender is doing and to see where any teammates might be standing, waiting to receive a pass.
- Face in towards the center of the field if possible, not towards the sideline.
- Keep the sole of the foot on the ball so that the ball can be pulled back or played forward if the defender tries to run around the attacker.
- The arms can be out some, away from the body, in order to get a little bit more distance from the defender. The player with the ball must not however move his arms around to keep the defender away. The player with the ball must also be sure to not use his elbow to keep the defender away.
- Like other skills, shielding should be practiced equally with the right foot and the left foot.
- Remind players that the use of shoulders is legal but the use of elbows is illegal.

Soccer is a CONTACT sport. Players must realize that it is important to use their body and to get body position when going for a free ball, just like basketball players going for a rebound. Leaning a shoulder into an opponent is a LEGAL tactic, as long as both players are near the ball.

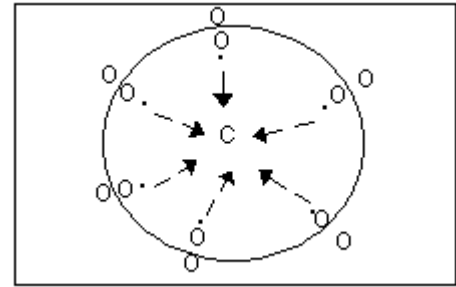
COACHING POINTS FOR THE BLOCK TACKLE

- The defender must position his body so that he is standing directly behind the ball, not off to the side of the ball.
- Place the non-tackling foot next to the ball by stepping forward.
- Crouch down to lower the center of gravity.
- Use the inside of foot. Lock the ankle by keeping the toes pointed up. Drive the foot through the ball; don't stop the foot at the ball.
- Drive through the ball across or at an angle, not straight through the body of the attacker.
- Always make contact with the TOP HALF of the ball so it does not roll over the foot.
- Move the lead shoulder forward powerfully as the foot strikes the ball.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

Activity 1 - Divide players into groups of two, each pair with one ball. Each pair of players stands at the edge of a circle 20 yards in diameter with the coach in the middle of the circle. The first player in each group dribbles the ball around the coach, around his partner, around the coach again and then back to his partner. The player's partner then repeats the exercise. Continue alternating players.

Be sure that the players keep the ball on their far foot when dribbling around the coach. They should be careful not to "show" the ball to the coach when dribbling around him.



There are many variations that can be done with this activity:

- Have the players dribble the ball left footed (clockwise) around the coach one time and right footed (counter clockwise) the second time around.
- Have the coach walk around in the circle to force players to look up and change their direction.
- Make the activity be like the game of "killer" where players may kick other players' soccer balls away. The coach may also kick balls away as the players dribble around him.

Activity 2 - Divide players into groups of two, each pair with a ball, practicing shielding. The coach should first discuss and demonstrate the various components of shielding and then let the players try shielding the ball from their partner.

The defender should not try to take the ball away, just be "passive," forcing the player with the ball to change directions and move the ball so that his body is always between the ball and the defender.

Activity 3 - To teach the block tackle, divide the players into pairs, each with a ball. Have the players in each pair stand two yards apart, facing each other, with a ball in between them. On the count of three, each player steps up to the ball and strikes the ball simultaneously with the inside of their right foot. Repeat the exercise with both players striking the ball simultaneously with the inside of their left foot. Be sure they strike the top half of the ball with their toes up to lock the ankle. Their non-kicking foot should be planted next to the ball.

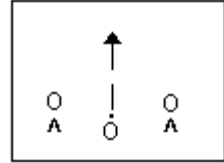
MATCH RELATED STAGE

Activity 1 - To practice shielding, play the following game. Group the players into pairs with each player standing five yards away from his partner. The players quickly pass a ball back and forth. When the coach yells "start", the player with the ball tries to shield the ball while the other player tries to steal it from him. The players try to play keep away from each other. After about 30 seconds, the coach yells "stop." The player who has the ball at the end is the winner. Switch partners and repeat the exercise.

Be sure that the player with the ball does not "run away" from his opponent, but rather uses his body to shield the ball. One of the most common mistakes young players make is to shield the ball only with his preferred foot. This approach will cause the player to sometimes have the ball at the foot nearest the defender, making the ball easy to steal. Players must learn to shield both with both the right foot and the left foot.

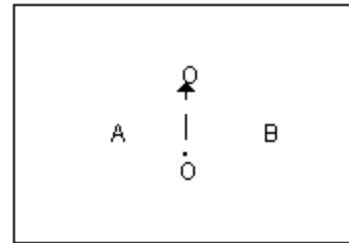
Activity 2 - Divide the players into groups of three. Place two cones on the ground, about 10 yards apart. Have one player stand at each cone. The third player stands between these two players, with a ball at his feet. The player with the ball kicks the ball about 10 yards in either direction. The other two players run out and try to get the ball before the other player, turn and dribble the ball back between the two cones.

The player not in possession tries to prevent his opponent from turning and dribbling the ball back. He should also try to steal the ball and dribble it back himself. Play continues until one of the players dribbles the ball through the cones. Whichever player successfully dribbles the ball through the cones gets to be the server for the next round of play.



Activity 3 - Divide players into groups of four. Two players (A and B in the diagram) serve as "goals," facing each other about 15 yards apart with their legs spread wide open. The two other two players play 1 v 1 for a minute, trying to dribble (not pass or shoot) the ball through either A's legs or B's legs.

A goal may be scored by either player on either goal, dribbling through the stationary players' legs in either direction. Play is continuous for the entire minute, meaning that when a goal is scored, the ball is still in play and either player can get the ball and again go to either goal.

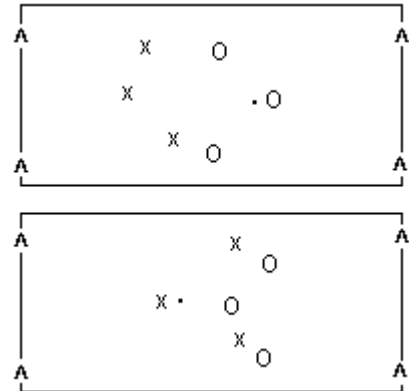


After a minute, the coach yells "stop" and the players call out their scores. The two players who just played now serve as the "goals" for the two resting players, who compete against each other. Play this game several times, but be sure players rotate around so that they never play the same player more than once.

For some youngsters, where a minute will be too long, a game 45 seconds long might be more appropriate. Be sure to strongly warn players who are serving as goals to keep their legs wide and not move them. On occasion, a "goal" player will try to help a friend by moving his legs to cause or prevent a goal. Be sure that players do not do this.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE

Activity 1 - Set up two fields about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide with a midfield line. Using corner flags or cones, set up a 30 foot long goal on each end line. These goals are much wider than what the players normally use in a game. Play two games of 3 v 3 with no goalies. Goals are scored by dribbling (not shooting) the ball under control through the goals. Initially, set the requirement that when a player is in his offensive half of the field, he must dribble the ball to the goal. He may not pass or shoot, only dribble the ball. Demand that the players use their dribbling skills to beat their opponents. Do not let them merely get rid of the ball.



If there are not enough opponents for 3 v 3 games, set up two fields about 20 yards long and 15 yards wide and play 2 v 2 with the same rules and conditions.

Activity 2 - Set up two grids about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide with a standard 12 foot long goal on each end line and a midfield line. Play two games of 3 v 3 with each team having two field players and a goalie. Set the condition that field players may not pass the ball. Once one of the field players gets the ball, he must attempt to dribble the ball the length of the field and score. Goaltenders may pass the ball if they are in their defensive half of the field. Goalies may dribble the ball down the field as well. If they do, they may not pass the ball. If the goalie crosses the midfield line with the ball, one of the field players may run back to the goal and become the goalie.

If a player either tries to pass, or tries to just blast the ball down the field, that team loses possession and a free kick is awarded to the other team.

Variation: Allow the field players to pass the ball backwards or square (sideways), but not forward.

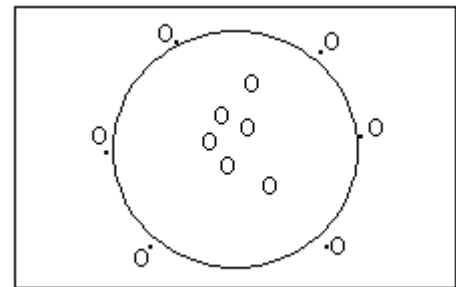
PRACTICE SESSION # 5

PASSING AND RECEIVING - PART II

This practice is a continuation of Practice Session # 2 on passing and receiving. The techniques taught in that practice should be reviewed beforehand. This practice will be more game-like than the previous session on passing and receiving so that players can develop decision making abilities and develop better field vision. This practice should move out of the Fundamental Stage quicker than previous practices and into the Match Related Stage where players compete against each other.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

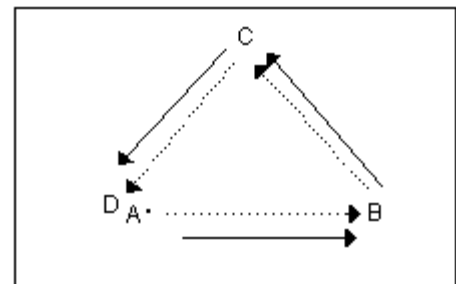
Activity 1 - Place half the team around the perimeter of a large circle about 30 yards wide, each player with a ball. Place the other half of the team inside the circle without a ball. Each player inside the circle runs towards a player on the outside. The perimeter players pass the ball to the inside player's feet. The inside players receive the ball and then pass it back to the same perimeter player. The inside players then move about randomly in the circle to receive passes from the other perimeter players. They should not simply move around in a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction.



Advanced Variation - Using the same setup above, ask the outside players to throw the ball in the air to the inside players. The inside players must either head the ball back to the server or receive the ball using whatever surface they decide is best for that service, control it with the feet and then pass it back to the perimeter player. The inside players then run to a different perimeter player for another service. The inside players should be at least five yards away from the serving player when receiving a ball. The perimeter players must vary the types of services so that the inside players have to decide which body part should be used to receive the ball. Balls should be played to the head, chest, stomach, thigh, etc. Services should be varied, they should be arcing, line drives, bouncing, etc.

Variation: Same setup as before, except that the inside players receive a ground pass, turn with the ball, dribble it away from the perimeter player and then pass it to any other perimeter player who is standing without a ball. The inside players then run to a different perimeter player who has a ball for another service. As before, an advanced variation would be to ask the outside players to throw the ball in the air to the inside players.

Activity 2 - Divide the players into groups of four. Have three players in a triangle with the fourth player standing next to the one player in the triangle who has a soccer ball. The player with the ball passes to one of the other players in the triangle. After passing, that player runs to the spot where the receiving player is standing. The receiving player tries to receive the ball with a "positive first touch", meaning it is directed towards the third player in the triangle. The player with the ball then passes to the third player and runs to the spot where the receiving player is standing. As before, the player receiving the pass must use a "positive first touch" to receive the ball, then play it to the next player in the triangle. Continue this for several minutes, then switch directions with the ball.



Activity 3 - Set up several grids 15 yards square. Place three players in each grid. Have the players in each grid pass the ball back in forth, not always in order from A to B to C. Challenge each group to make as many consecutive passes without letting the ball go out of the grid. To make the activity more challenging, require the players to use their left foot to receive and pass every other time they get the ball.

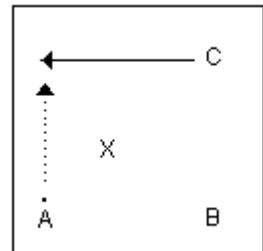
Advanced players should try to play “one touch,” meaning that they do not stop the ball before passing it to one of the other players. This is very advanced and will prove too difficult for most younger players.

MATCH RELATED STAGE

Activity 1 - Set up two grids 25 yards square. In each grid, play 4 v 1 keepaway. Play continues until the defender gets possession of the ball or the ball goes out of the grid. Rotate the players so they all have a chance to be the defender.

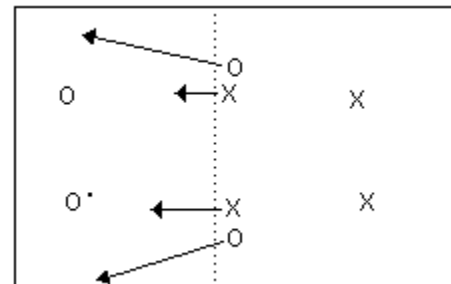
Challenge the players to make as many consecutive passes as possible. At first, limit the defending player to only walking after the ball. Once the players start to understand this activity, allow the defender to jog. Only allow the defender to play at full speed if the offensive players are able to control and possess the ball without much difficulty.

Activity 2 - If the players are able to play 4 v 1 with success, remove one attacker and play 3 v 1. Now the players will have to move around the grid to get open. Require players to always be in one corner of the grid. They must move from one corner to the unoccupied corner in order to support the player with the ball. Instruct the players to never be standing BEHIND the defender. In the diagram to the right, player C must move to the left (into a passing lane) in order to support player A, who has the ball.



Activity 3 - This is an advanced activity for 6 - 8 year olds. Set up a field 30 yards square with a midfield line. Play 4 v 4 keepaway with the white shirt team trying to keep possession of the ball in one half of the field and the dark shirt team trying to keep possession in the other half. Allow only two of the four players on each team to cross the midfield line and go into the other team's half of the field on defense, allowing the team in possession to have a 4 v 2 advantage.

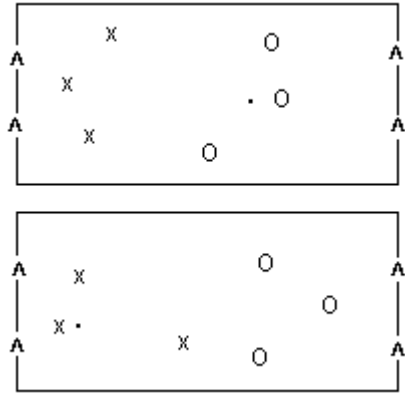
This game is quite demanding for the players who have to play in both halves of the field, so players should frequently be rotated in and out of this role.



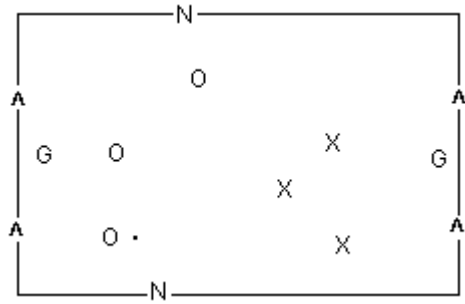
This game can also be played 3 v 3 with one or two players allowed in the other team's attacking half of the field (making the game 3 v 1 or 3 v 2). More advanced players could play the game 4 v 4 with three players allowed in the opponents attacking half (4 v 3). Adjust the size of the playing area to meet the players' abilities. Younger and less skilled players will need to play in a larger area. Older and more experienced players should play in a smaller area where the defenders can apply quicker pressure to the offensive players.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE

Activity 1 - Set up two fields about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide. Place a 12 foot long goal on each end line. Play two games of 3 v 3. There are no goalies in this game. Set the requirement that teams may not attempt a shot on goal until all three players on the team have touched the ball without the opponents touching the ball. Once all three players on the team have possessed the ball, they can take a shot on goal. This game does not require goalies since there will not be a lot of shots on goal.



Activity 2 - Set up a similar size field and again play 3 v 3. This time, each team has a goalie. Place an additional player on each sideline. The two sideline players play for whichever team has possession of the ball. Thus, when the white team has the ball, they have the option of playing the ball to either of the two sideline players, who would then attempt will try to pass the ball back to a white team player. The sideline players may not dribble the ball forward and may not take a shot on goal. The coach should encourage the players in the middle of the field to use the sideline players for help.



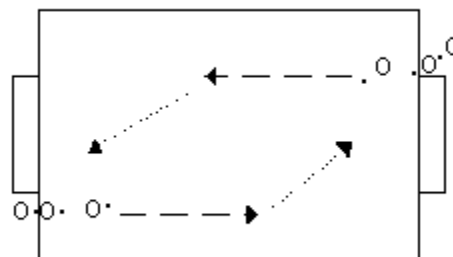
PRACTICE SESSION # 6

SHOOTING AND GOALKEEPING - PART II

This session will serve as a continuation of Practice Session # 3 in this manual which also dealt with shooting and goalkeeping. Scoring goals is one of the most enjoyable things a child can do. It is also one of the most important skills, so it should be practiced regularly, even when the theme of a practice is not shooting. Coaches should review the shooting tips and goaltending tips that were addressed in practice session # 3.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

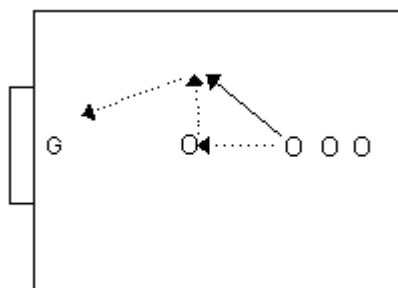
Activity 1 - Set up two fields, each about 20 yards long. Place a 12 foot long goal on each end line. Place three players on the right goal post of each goal of the two fields. Each player should have his own ball. The first player in each line dribbles about 10 yards down the field, then shoots the ball. As soon as those players shoot, the next player in each line does the same thing. After shooting, players go to the end of the other line on that field.



Encourage the players to shoot to the far post. They need to turn their non-kicking foot so that it is pointing towards the far goal post when shooting. The players need to get around the ball and swing their hips when shooting so they can get the ball across to the far post. Be sure the players are looking down at the ball when they make contact with it.

After awhile, switch the lines to the left post. Repeat the exercise, except that the players dribble left footed and shoot left footed. Be sure that the players dribble and shoot the ball with the foot that is furthest from the goal so that they can swing their hips into the ball and get maximum power.

Activity 2 - Place one player about 10 yards in front of each goal (with his back to the goal) with four other players in a line 20 yards from the goal. The first player in the line takes a few dribbles, passes to the player in front of the goal and then runs outside him for a return pass (give and go). The player receives the return pass and shoots on the run.

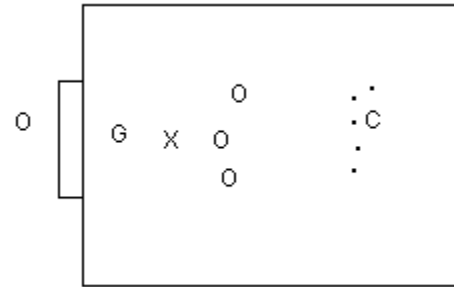


As a variation for advanced players, require that the player first-time the shot (shoot without first controlling the ball). If the pass is not accurate, the player may take an extra touch to control the ball.

Note: Be sure to have two or three groups working on this exercise at the same time (to different goals) so that players do not spend any significant time standing in line. To optimize time spent in this activity, ask an adult to stand behind each goal and help retrieve shots that aren't on target.

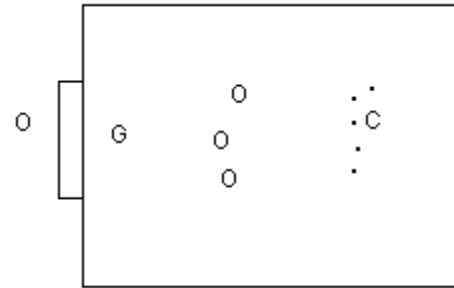
MATCH RELATED STAGE

Activity 1 - The coach stands 20 yards from a goal with a large supply of balls. Three attacking players stand 10 yards in front of the coach. The goal is defended by a goalie and a defender. A sixth player stands behind the goal, retrieving balls. The coach serves a ball to one of the attackers who must quickly receive the ball and shoot it before the defender can stop him. As soon as the shot is taken, the coach serves another ball to one of the attackers who is open. The coach continuously serves balls to an open attacking player until the supply of balls runs out or until the players get too tired. The attacking players may not pass the ball to each other. The player behind the goal should try to return as many balls as possible to the coach while play is going on.



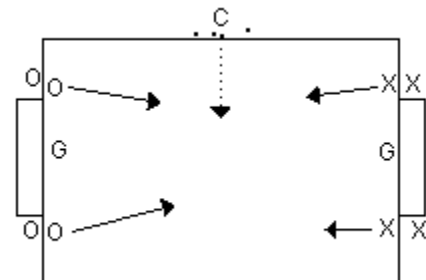
If the goalie or defender wins the ball, it is returned to the coach and the next ball is served. The object of this activity is for the players to learn to shoot quickly under pressure. The coach should try to serve the ball to a player who is not near the defender.

Activity 2 - Again have three players stand about 10 yards in front of a goal. Have one player work as the goalie. As before, the coach stands about 20 yards away from the goal and rolls balls out. This time, the three players in front of the goal compete with each other for the ball and try to get off a shot. The two players without the ball each try to steal the ball and take a shot.



The ball is in play until it goes out of bounds or the goalie gets possession of it. The three field players should be encouraged to go after rebounds. Once the ball is out of play, the three players run back to their original spots and the coach puts another ball into play.

Activity 3 - Set up a field 20 yards long with a 12 foot long goal on each endline. Have one or more players in dark shirts standing at each post at one of the goals. Have one or more players in white shirts standing at each post of the other goal. Place a goalie in front of each goal. The coach stands on the sideline with a large supply of balls. The coach throws a ball onto the field. The first player at each post comes running onto the field to play 2 v 2.



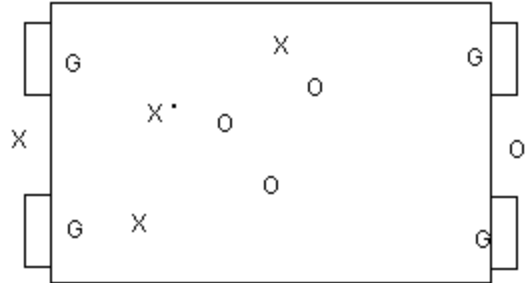
If the goalie makes a save, he distributes the ball to a player on his team. When the ball goes out of play, or a goal is scored, the players go to the end of one of the lines. The coach then serves a new ball for the next set of players to play 2 v 2. To add excitement to the game, keep score between the two teams. Kids always play harder and with more enthusiasm whenever score is kept.

Rotate the players so that they have a chance to play with and against all other players.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE

Activity 1 - Set up two fields, each only 20 yards long. Set up two games of 3 v 3 (each team has two field players and a goalie). Place all the extra soccer balls inside the goals. Play a regular 3 v 3 game. With the field so short, players should be able to shoot from almost anywhere. When a ball goes out of play, get another one into play right away.

Activity 2 - The "Four Goal Game." Set up a field 40 yards long and 30 yards wide. Using cones or bicycle flags, place **two** goals on each endline, each about 12 feet wide. Each team must defend the two goals on their end line. Each team should have three field players, a goalie in each goal and a player behind their goal, fetching shots that go wide of the goal. Every three minutes, the coach yells "switch," at which point the three field players switch roles with the two goalies and the player behind the goals.



There are four variations to the Four Goal Game. In all cases, the emphasis of the game must be on maximizing the number of shots taken:

- Each team uses one goalie to defend their two goals. For this game, make the goals slightly smaller, about 10 feet wide, instead of 12 feet wide.
- Make the field 25 yards square and place one goal on each of the four sides of the field. Each team has two or three field players and two goalies. Each team defends two adjacent goals and attacks the other two goals.
- Place a goalie in each of the four goals and allow both teams to score on any of the four goals. The team with the last field player to touch the ball gets credit for the goal. If a goalie makes a save, he throws the ball up in the middle of the field and play continues.

Be sure to keep score, the players will play harder. Be sure to use a large supply of balls. The main emphasis for all of the formats of the Four Goal Game described above is: Encourage the players to shoot as much as possible.



PRACTICE SESSION # 7

HEADING AND RECEIVING AIR BALLS

In youth soccer, the ball should be played on the ground whenever possible. Passes are easier to receive when they are on the ground, it is easier to dribble a ball when it is on the ground and it is easier to shoot the ball when it is on the ground.

Many times in a game, however, the ball will wind up in the air. It is important that young players have an understanding of how to control a ball that is in the air. Many youngsters have a fear of heading a ball. For safety reasons, it is very important that they learn the proper technique of heading a ball.

COACHING POINTS FOR HEADING

- Make contact with the top of the forehead, just below the hairline.
- Keep the eyes open, focused on the ball, as it approaches and as contact is made.
- Use the neck, lower back and legs to "attack" the ball.
- The head should move forward when heading the ball, not up and down.
- Place one foot in front of the other with the arms out to the side for balance.
- It is important to develop confidence when heading the ball.
- Teaching proper heading technique to players will lessen the chance of players getting injured.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

Activity 1 - Divide players into groups of two. One player holds a ball up a few inches over his partner's head with two hands. The second player jumps up and tries to head the ball while his partner is holding it. Repeat this 10 to 15 times, then switch roles.

Activity 2 - The player with the ball throws it up about three feet over his own head and heads it to his partner. The second player repeats the activity, heading the ball back to the first player. Encourage players to jump up and use their neck and lower back muscles to propel the ball.

Activity 3 - For advanced players only: divide players into groups of three. Have each group set up in a triangle with players about six yards apart. The first player throws the ball underhanded to the second player's head. He heads the ball to the third player. The third player catches the ball and throws it to the first player who heads it to the second player. Repeat.

Note: In all the exercises above, we are trying to build the player's confidence in heading. We want them to understand the proper way to head the ball and remove any fears they might have. It is very important that the players serve the balls accurately.

Activity 4 - Divide the players into groups of two. Have the first player lob the ball underhanded to the second player's chest. That player receives the ball with his chest and brings it down to his feet. He then passes the ball back to his partner. Repeat this several times, then switch servers. If the players are too young to properly serve the ball to their partner, the coaches should serve the balls to the players.

There are two ways to receive a high ball with the chest. When receiving a high arcing ball, the player should arch his back so that his chest is facing up, towards the sky. If the ball is a low line drive right at the player, he should lean forward a bit so that the ball will deflect straight down to his feet.

Repeat this activity, but have the services go to the receiving player's thigh. The receiving player controls the ball with his thigh, let's the ball settle on the ground, then passes it back to his partner. When controlling the ball with the thigh, the player should lift his thigh up high, then lower the thigh slightly to cushion the ball as the ball arrives.

Repeat this activity, but have the receiving player control the ball with the instep (laces of the shoe). The receiving player should lift his foot high in the air to meet the ball and then lower the foot as the ball arrives.

Alternatively, the player can wedge the ball into the ground (pin it) with either the sole of the foot (cleats), the inside of the foot or the outside of the foot.

Activity 5 - One of the favorite individual activities of all soccer players is "juggling." This is where a player uses various parts of his body to keep the ball up in the air for as long as possible. Top level professional players can keep the ball up in the air for well over a thousand touches. Below is a simple progression to teach young players how to juggle.

Have the player throw the ball up in the air slightly so he can kick the ball with his foot. After kicking the ball with his laces, the player tries to catch the ball before it hits the ground. If the player succeeds in doing this, he repeats this action with his other foot.

Once the player can successfully do this with each foot, he then throws the ball up and tries to kick the ball twice before catching it. This will be a lot more difficult. When the player is able to do that, have him repeat this with his other foot. When the player is able to do that, have him throw the ball up, kick the ball once with the right foot, once with the left foot and then catch the ball. If he can do that, have him throw the ball up and kick it once with his left foot, then once with the right foot and then catch it.

More advanced players then try to make three juggles in a row, either with the same foot, or alternating feet. If players can do three juggles, they then try to get four, then five, etc.

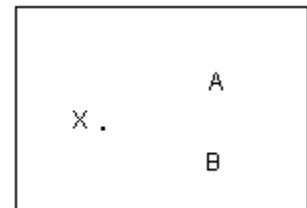
The coach can also challenge the players to try and use their thighs, chest and head in juggling. Again, challenge them to do simple things at first, such as make two juggles with their thighs before catching the ball, or do one thigh, one foot, then catch the ball. If possible, ask an older sibling of a player with soccer experience to attend the practice and demonstrate these juggling skills.

MATCH RELATED STAGE

Activity 1 - Divide players into groups of three. Two of the players stand about ten yards apart, each facing the third player who has a ball in his hands. The server throws the ball up between the two other players. The two players try to control the ball and make a return pass to the server while preventing the other player from doing the same.

Again, vary the serves. Not all balls have to be served directly between the players. Some can be played over their heads, some to one side, etc. The point here is to create a friendly competitive activity for the kids to receive air balls under pressure of an opponent.

Activity 2 - Using a similar setup as before, allow the player who gets control of the ball to pick the ball up after gaining full control of it. That player then serves the ball to the other two players in the group. Each time, the player getting full control of the ball gets to serve the ball to the other players.

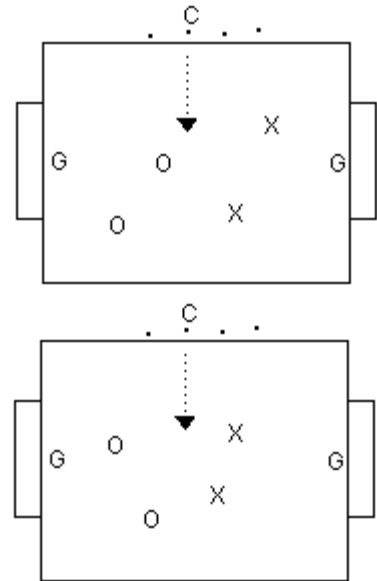


MATCH CONDITION STAGE

Set up two fields, each 30 by 20 yards, with 12 foot long goals on each end line. Play two games of 3 v 3 (each team has two field players and a goalie). The coach stands on one sideline at midfield with a large supply of balls. Play starts with the coach throwing a ball up in the air for any player to receive. The ball is live and each team tries to score.

When a ball goes out of play, or a goal is scored, the coach restarts the game with another air ball. When the goalie makes a save, he must play the ball high in the air in the middle of the field for the field players to try and receive.

Variation: Shorten the field to 20 yards in length so that the players can work on receiving balls and quickly shooting. Be sure to have a large supply of balls to serve. Encourage the players to shoot as quickly as possible. Being able to receive a ball and quickly shoot is a difficult skill at the older ages when there are many opponents defending the goal.



PRACTICE SESSION # 8

WING PLAY AND CROSSES

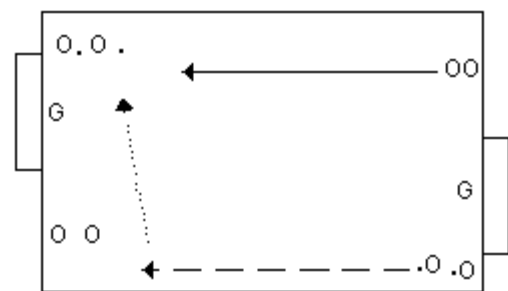
One aspect of soccer that has not been covered yet in this manual is wing play. Many goals in soccer are the result of players redirecting crossed balls from the wings that come into the goalmouth. This practice will introduce the players to the concepts of wing play and crosses.

COACHING POINTS FOR WING PLAY AND CROSSES

- On crosses from the right wing, the dribble and cross should both be made with the right foot. On crosses from the left wing, the dribble and cross should both be with the left foot.
- Crosses should be played across the goalmouth, away from the goalkeeper.
- Wingers should play as close to the sideline as possible so that they will have plenty of room to dribble and work the ball down the wing.
- When crossing the ball, the non-kicking foot (the foot nearest the goal) should be turned in so that it is pointing towards the goal mouth.
- The winger should turn his hips hard when crossing the ball so that he can get around the ball and keep the cross from going over the goal line or to the goalkeeper.
- When possible, the player should make his last dribble down the wing angled towards the goal so that he can more easily turn his body around the ball.
- The crossed ball can be made on the ground or in the air. Crosses should have plenty of power.
- Crosses can be made from just along the goal line (base line crosses) or up the field, well away from the goal line (early crosses), or anywhere in between.
- All activities should be practiced from both sides of the field. Always use the foot that is closest to the sideline, swinging the hips around the ball.
- Players receiving a crossed ball should never stand stationary in the goal mouth. Instead, they should time their runs into the goal mouth to arrive with the ball. If a player runs in too early, he should immediately run out of the goal mouth and then circle back in.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

Activity 1 - Set up two goals 25 yards apart. Have the goals slightly off center, as shown in the diagram. At each goal, have a line of players at one goal post and a second line of players just inside the sideline. The first player in the line nearest the sideline dribbles a ball down the wing and crosses it to the player coming from the line nearest the goal. The player receiving the cross tries to either one-touch or two-touch the crossed ball into the goal.

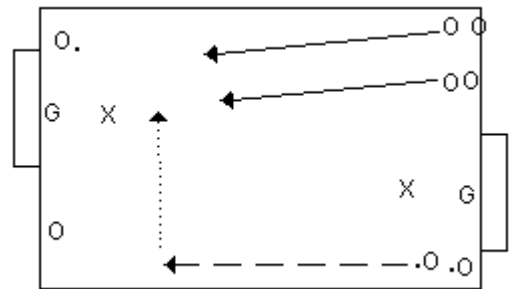


Have the players vary the crosses that are made. Some crosses should be made from the end line while others should be made earlier, closer to the midfield line. When the cross is made from near the end line, be sure that the ball is crossed back, away from where the goalie can get the ball.

Some crosses should be made along the ground while others should be up in the air, possibly to be headed in. The coach should ensure that this activity has some crosses made from the right side of the field (right footed crosses) and some from the left side of the field (left footed crosses).

MATCH RELATED STAGE

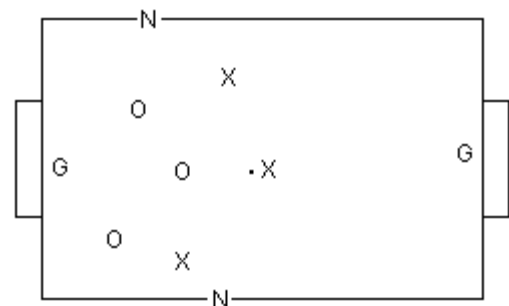
Activity 1 - Use the same setup as in the Fundamental Stage, except that two attackers run into the goal mouth for the crossed ball and compete against a goalkeeper and one defender. If the defender or goalie wins the ball, the play is over.



Activity 2 - To make the above activity more game-like, have three attackers go for the cross against two defenders (same setup as before). Give the attacking team two points for a goal and one point for a shot on goal. Give the defending team one point if they can control the crossed ball, dribble it away from the goal and over the midfield line.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE

Activity 1 - Play on a standard field (about 40 by 30 yards) with regular goals (12 feet wide) on each end line. Each team has one goalie and three field players. Place one additional player on each sideline of the field. These sideline players will play for whichever team has possession of the ball.



Set the requirement that when a team wins possession of the ball in their defensive half of the field, they must pass the ball to one of the wingers. The winger then dribbles down his sideline and crosses the ball into the goal mouth. The defending team may not steal the ball from the sideline players. Once the cross is made, the ball is live.

Activity 2 - Same game as above using the two sideline players but remove the restriction that the teams must use a flank player. Also, allow the defending team to try and steal the ball from the winger. Encourage both teams to use the flank players, but do not require them to use the flank players. Award two points for a goal that is scored when a player receives a cross and shoots. Award one point for other goals. Also, award one point for every cross that results in a shot on goal.

PRACTICE SESSION # 9

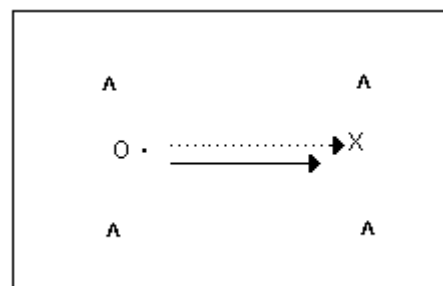
INDIVIDUAL COMPETITIONS AND FUN GAMES

In this practice, we set up some small competitive 1 v 1 games for the players. Players should be encouraged to use their dribbling skills in these games to beat their opponent. It is important that the players rotate opponents so that they are not playing against the same player all the time.

To make the games more competitive, coaches should keep track of players records in the various games and announce an overall winner at the end of practice.

GAME # 1

Place a pair of cones six yards apart and a second pair 10 yards from the first pair. One player stands between the first set of cones with a ball, a second player stands between the second set of cones without a ball. The object of the game is for each player to try to dribble the ball up to within two yards of the opponent's two cones and hit either cone with the ball. Long shots may not be taken, the player must be within two yards of one of the opponent's cones when trying to knock over a cone.

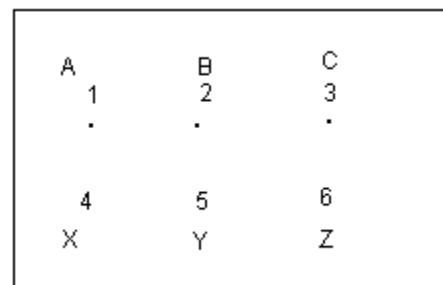


The game starts with the player in possession passing to the other player and immediately running at him to steal the ball back. The game continues until one of the players strikes a cone. Be sure to have several games going on at once. There are no out of bounds for this game, the ball is always in play until a goal is scored. Optimally, players should be playing one game, resting one game and then playing again. Add one point on the scorecard for the player who scores. Rotate the opponents so that each player gets to play against all the other players on the team at least once.

GAME # 2

This is another 1 v 1 game, but involves a lot of players involved in one activity. Have three players standing in a line, each about five yards apart. These players stand with their legs far apart to create small goals. Three other players stand facing those players, about 10 yards away. They also serve as goals. The other six players pair off to play three simultaneous 1 v 1 games. The three players facing in the one direction can score on any of the three goals on the opposite side. Each game is independent of the others, i.e., players may only play their own ball, not one of the other groups' balls.

The diagram to the right illustrates this game. Player 1 plays against player 4 while 2 plays against 5 and 3 plays against 6. Players 4, 5 and 6 each try to dribble their ball through the legs of either player A, B or C while players 1, 2 and 3 each try to dribble their ball through the legs of players X, Y or Z.



Each of the three 1 v 1 games start at the same time, on the coaches command and are continuous for one minute. Players try to score as many goals as possible during that time. When the coach stops the games, the players who served as the goals play the next round, while the players who just played, serve as the goals for them. This time, player A plays X, B plays Y and C plays Z while players 1, 2 and 3 serve as goals on one side of the field and 4, 5 and 6 serve as the goals on the opposite side.

GAME #3

This game is called “1 v 1 v 1” since three players will be competing against each other. Before starting this activity, the coach should review the coaching points of shielding from practice session # 4.

Divide the players into groups of three. Each group sets up in a triangle, with the players about four yards apart from each other. Each group has one ball. Have them pass the ball around from one player to the other until the coach yells “go.” At that point, the three players each try to get possession of the ball and keep it away from the other two players. After about a minute, the coach yells “stop.” At that point, the player in possession picks up the ball. Whichever player is able to pick up the ball is the winner and gets a point.

After a brief rest, switch the opponents around and repeat the game. The coach should encourage the players to shield the ball and not allow them to merely run away from the other two players when in possession.

GAME #4

The next game is a 1 v 1 game that involves goalkeeping and shooting. The coach should set up two fields for this game so that many players will be active. Each field should be about 15 yards long with standard 12 foot long goals on each end line. Put a goalie in each goal. The other players form two lines, each on the same sideline, about five yards apart. The coach stands in between the two lines with a large supply of balls.

When the coach rolls out a ball, the first player in each line runs out to get the ball, beat his opponent and score on the far goal. If the player scores, he gets one point and gets to play goalie until he gets scored on. If the goalie makes a save, he plays the ball to the field player on his team. He tries to score on the opposite goal. If the ball goes out of play, both field players go to the end of the two lines and neither player gets a point.

Be sure that players get a chance to play against different players during this game. Also, be sure to set up two fields so that players are always busy and not standing idle, waiting in line.

NOTES ON THESE TYPES OF COMPETITIONS

- The coach should keep score during all these games and add up the scores from all of the competitions. At the end of the practice, announce who the top players are. Be sure to NOT announce the players who finished with the lowest scores.
- The philosophy of this type of tournament play is that children by nature love to compete. They will play with more enthusiasm and work harder in these types of activities than they will when they are not keeping score.
- Be sure that all players rotate around equally so that they are not always paired against the same player each time.
- Try to avoid letting players know who is in last place and who is in next to last place. The players will want to know the scores and standings throughout the practice. It is best to only announce the top three or four places in the standings at any particular time to minimize any embarrassment to the players at the bottom of the score sheet.
- As with all practices, be sure that the players are busy, but not too busy. We want them to be as active as possible, but we want to avoid turning them off with too much activity. Allow them to have sufficient rest time and water breaks (especially in hot, humid weather). This is especially true in 1 v 1 games where some coaches will work the players too hard and not give them enough rest, while other coaches will have the players idle too much. In 1 v 1, it is best to have the players play for one minute, then rest for one minute and repeat.

PRACTICE SESSION # 10

SMALL SIDED COMPETITIONS AND FUN GAMES

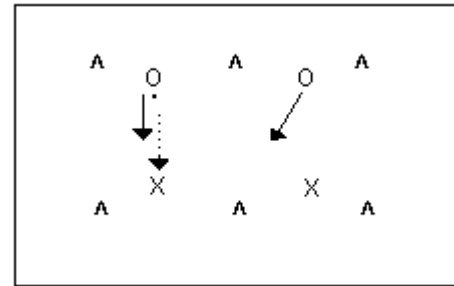
Now that the players have had a chance to learn the basic skills of the game, it is time to let them try out these skills in some fun, competitive small sided games. The objective is to let the kids practice their skills in SMALL SIDED competitions.

As with all types of competition, the players will have more enthusiasm and play harder if score is kept. Keep score for each team or each individual (similar to the previous practice). The coach should be bring a pen and a scorecard to keep scores of all games.

GAME # 1

This game is similar to the first game from the previous practice where two players played 1 v 1, trying to knock over one of the opponent's two cones. This is a 2 v 2 variation of that game.

Place three road cones in a line, each five yards apart. Place another set of three cones in a line about 10 yards from the first set. Two players stand inside one of the sets of cones and play against two other players who stand inside the opposite set of cones.



The object of the game is for each pair of players to try to dribble the ball up to within two yards of one of the opponent's three cones and hit the cone with the ball. Long shots may not be taken, the player must be within two yards of one of the opponent's cones when trying to knock over a cone.

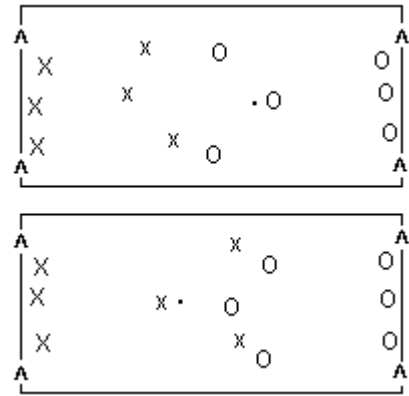
The game starts with one team passing the ball to the other team and immediately running at them to steal the ball back. The game continues until one of the teams strikes any one of the opponent's three cones. Be sure to have two games going on at once to keep all players active. There are no out of bounds for this game, the ball is always in play until a goal is scored. Optimally, players should be playing one game, resting one game and then playing again. Add one point on the scorecard for the players on the team that scored. Rotate the teams around so that each player gets to play with and against all the other players on the team at least once.

GAME # 2

This game is known as the "change teams" game. Play on a standard 4 v 4 field, about 40 yards long by 30 yards wide. The coach will need a set of colored pinnies or something to identify which player is on which team. Initially play 4 v 4 (three field players and a goalie) with one player on the sideline. Play a normal game until one team scores a goal. At that time, the player not in the game goes onto the field and plays with the team that was scored on. Now the game is 5 v 4. Continue playing, but now, each time a goal is scored, the player scoring the goal switches over to the other team. The game will continuously change from 5 v 4 to 4 v 5. Occasionally, the game will become 6 v 3 when the team playing shorthanded scores a goal.

GAME # 3

This game is known as the "Big Goals" game. Play on a standard 4 v 4 field, about 40 yards long and 30 yards wide. Using bicycle flags, set up a very large goal on each endline (about 24 feet long, twice the length of a standard 4 v 4 goal.) Each team has six players. Three of the players will be field players and three of the players will be goalies, defending the very big goals. The goalies are limited to play on the goal line or at most one yard off of the goal line. They may not travel onto the field. Every three or four minutes, when the ball goes out of bounds, or when a goal is scored, the coach yells "switch" and the field players quickly switch places with the goalies.

**GAME # 4**

Assuming 12 players are at practice, set up a World Cup competition. Divide the players into four equal teams of three players. Let each team pick a country name such as Brazil or Italy. Set up two fields about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide, each with goals about 12 feet long. Play a set of 10 minute games, then switch opponents and play another set of games. Keep track of each country's record. Like all games, keep the extra balls just behind the goals so that the players don't waste time chasing after shots that go well beyond the goal line.

GAME # 5

This game is actually an individual competition. As above, set up two fields, each about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide with 12 foot long goals. Divide the players into four teams of three and play a 10 minute game. At the end of the 10 minute game, get the score on each field. Players on each team are given a score equivalent to their team's goal differential (goals scored minus goals allowed). The coach then randomly divides the players up into four different teams and two more 10 minute games are played. Again, each player is given a score equivalent to his team's goal differential. The coach should add the scores of each player up from each game. At the end of the practice, the player with the highest score is the winning player for the day.

Example: First set of games: A, B and C defeat D, E and F by the score of 5 - 2. Players A, B and C each get +3 while D, E and F each get a score of -3. In the other game, players G, H and I each get one point for defeating players J, K and L (who get -1) by the score of 4 - 3. The coach then divides the players up into different teams: A, E and L play vs. B, H and K while C, F and I play against D, G and J.

NOTES ON THESE TYPES OF COMPETITIONS

The important thing to remember is to keep the practice going as a "fun competition." Be sure to announce the top scores after each individual game. Keep a scoreboard on a piece of paper and let the players know who is in the lead after each competition. Players will play harder and play with more enthusiasm when scores are kept.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND FUN GAMES

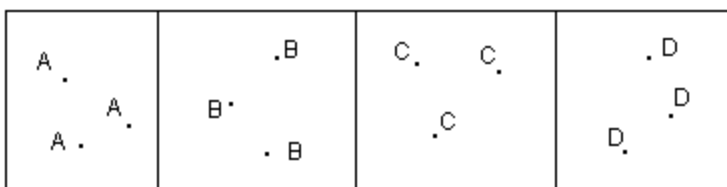
This section of the LMSC Coaches Manual contains many fun and productive activities that can be used in practice. If desired, coaches can substitute these activities in place of others already listed in this manual.

Exercises are categorized by the particular skill that is being emphasized. There are sections on:

- Dribbling And 1 versus 1 Activities
- Passing And Receiving Activities
- Shooting And Goalkeeping Activities
- Fun Soccer Games

DRIBBLING AND 1 VERSUS 1 ACTIVITIES

Dribbling Activity 1 - Set up four grids in a row, each 10 by 10 yards. Place three players in each grid, each with a ball. Number the grids 1, 2, 3 and 4. Have the players dribble inside of their grid, performing a designated dribbling skill. When the coach calls out two numbers, the players in those grid numbers must quickly dribble through the grids to the other grid that the coach called out.

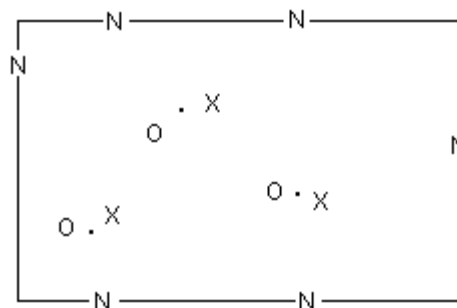


As an example, if the coach calls "1 and 3", the three 'A' players switch grids with the three 'C' players. Each group dribbles through the grid occupied by the three 'B' players. Players should keep their heads up while dribbling to avoid running into other players.

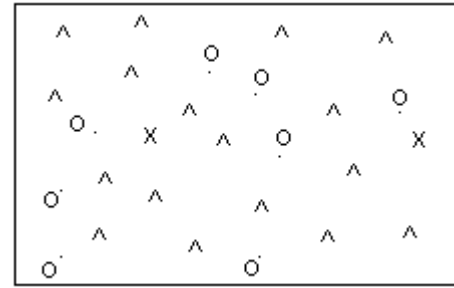
Variation: Allow players to kick away the soccer balls of players not in their group as players dribble from one grid to another.

Dribbling Activity 2 - Set up a 30 by 20 yard grid. Inside the grid are three pairs of players who each play 1 v 1 inside the grid. Players try to keep possession of their ball and not allow their opponent to take possession. Six other players are on the perimeter of the grid, resting. After one minute, switch players on the outside with the inside players. Repeat this game several times. Be sure that players do not always play against the same opponents.

Variation: The inside players may pass to any perimeter player for a give and go pass. The perimeter players should move around on their sideline so they can be in a good position to support the players on the inside of the grid.



Dribbling Activity 3 - Set up a grid 30 yards square with 16 or more large cones inside the grid. Eight players inside the grid try to dribble their balls and knock down the cones. Four other players are inside the grid without a soccer ball. Those players run around as fast as they can and set the cones back up again. The players with the balls try to knock down all the cones while the players without the balls try to have all the cones set up. Adjust the number of players who set the cones up so that there will not be a time when all the cones are knocked down.



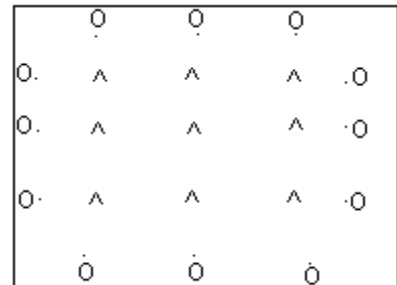
Variation: Require the four players setting up the cones to dribble their ball around from cone to cone.

Dribbling Activity 4 - Set up a grid 30 yards square. Place six players inside the grid in dark shirts, each with a ball. Place the other six players in the grid in white shirts, each without a ball. The six dark shirt players dribble around the grid while the white shirt players act as passive defenders, trying to get in the way of the dark shirt players, forcing them to dribble around them. Do not let the white shirt players take the balls away from the dark shirt players.

Progress to allowing the white shirt players to walk around or jog, lightly kicking away or poking away the soccer balls. Do not let them blast the ball away. When a player loses his ball, he must immediately go get his ball or another ball outside the grid and return.

Progress to allowing the defending players to play at full speed.

Dribbling Activity 5 - Set up a grid 20 yards square. Place three players on each of the four sides of the grid, each with a ball. On command, all the players dribble their ball across the grid to the other side of the grid, trying not to run into anybody.



Variation: Set up nine cones (in three rows of three) in the middle of the grid. Each player must dribble a complete circle around each of the three cones placed between him and the other side of the grid. Players must also avoid running into the other players who are dribbling at the same time.

Dribbling Activity 6 - Set up a grid 30 yards square. Six players stand inside the grid in random places with their legs apart. The six other players are divided into groups of two and play 1 v 1. There will be three simultaneous games of 1 v 1. The goals for this game are the legs of the six players standing inside the grid. Players must try to dribble the ball under control through any of those six players' legs (going in either direction). The last person to touch the ball when a goal is scored gets credit for the goal. The ball is in play continuously for one minute, then players switch roles. Keep score for added excitement.

PASSING AND RECEIVING ACTIVITIES

As mentioned before, the best way to develop passing and receiving skills is by playing keepaway games. The key for the coach is to determine the correct number of offensive players and defensive players in each activity, as well as an appropriate size playing area. These parameters will be based on the age and skill level of the players. Below are some more passing and receiving games.

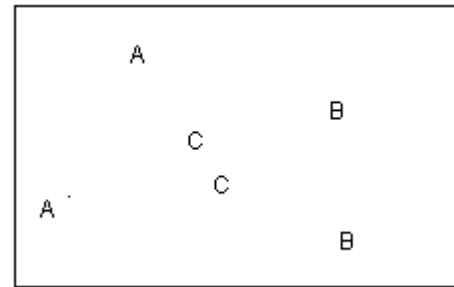
Passing Activity 1 - Play 3 v 3 keepaway in a 30 yard square grid. Count the number of passes that each team makes. The first team that is able to complete four passes (not necessarily in a row) is the winning team and gets credit for a goal. After a team is able to do this, the pass count for both teams goes back to zero. The other team then starts with the ball for the next round.

Variation: Each team tries to make two passes. When a team is able to do that, the teams start the game over. That team then has to make three passes in the next game to win (the other team is still trying to make two passes). When a team is able to make three passes in a game, they must then try to make four passes in the next game.

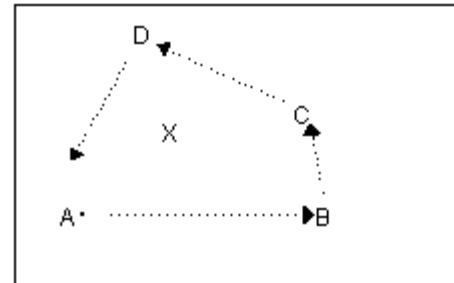
Variation: Add a neutral player in the middle of the field. The neutral player plays for whichever team is in possession of the ball. Alternatively, the coach could add one or more neutral players on the perimeter of the playing area.

Passing Activity 2 - Place six players in a 30 yard square grid. Two players wear red shirts, two wear white shirts and the other two wear blue shirts. Designate one color to be defense, the other two colors combine on offense to play four against two keepaway. After a couple of minutes, have a different color be the defending team. Keep track of which set of four players is able to make the most number of passes before the ball either goes out of bounds or is controlled by the defending team.

Variation: Play in a smaller grid with four players. Play 3 v 1, alternating who the defender is. Again, see which team is able to "beat the current record" of passes made before the ball goes out of bounds or is controlled by the defender.



Passing Activity 3 - Set up a 20 yard square grid with five players. Play 4 v 1 keepaway. Require the offensive team to always pass in order from player A to player B to C to D and back to A. This will force each offensive player to think a couple of passes ahead of the play and get into a position to support the player from whom he is receiving a pass. As an added challenge, the coach could yell "Down" to change the passing rotation to D to C to B to A and back to D. Yell "up" to return to the original order.



Passing Activity 4 - Have five players form a circle about 10 yards in diameter. Place one other player inside the circle. The five players forming the circle play keep away from the player in the middle. See how many passes they can make before the ball is stolen or goes out of the circle.

Variation: Prohibit players from passing the ball to either of the adjacent players. The offensive players should move along the perimeter of the circle to "get open."

Variation: More advanced teams often play with two players in the middle of the circle (5 v 2).

Passing Activity 5 - This is an activity for older, more advanced players. This game involves not only possession of the ball, but adds the element of direction. Set up a 20 by 15 yard grid. Have two attacking players work together against one defender. The objective of the activity is for the team of two to be able to dribble the ball over the end line that the defender is guarding. Play starts with the defender passing the ball to either of the attacking players standing at the other end of the grid. The attacking players bring the ball up the field and try to dribble the ball over the defender's end line. If the defender wins the ball, he tries to dribble it over the attacking team's endline.

Variation: Play the same game as before in a 30 by 20 yard grid only with 3 attackers playing against 2 defenders.

Variation: Using a pair of cones, give the team with more players a smaller goal to dribble through. The team with fewer numbers tries to dribble the ball over the other team's endline for a point, but the team with greater numbers will need to dribble through the of cones which define a smaller goal.

Passing Activity 6 - "Make It, Take It" - Set up a 30 by 20 yard grid. Have two teams play 3 v 3 against each other. Add one or more neutral players in the middle of the field. The neutral player(s) play with whichever team has possession of the ball. Each team tries to dribble the ball under control over the opponent's end line. When that happens, the team that scores keeps possession and attacks the opposite end line.

Variation: Instead of a neutral player in the middle of the field, use a neutral player on each sideline of the field.

Variation: Set the condition that players may not dribble the ball forward. To advance the ball up the field, they must pass the ball.

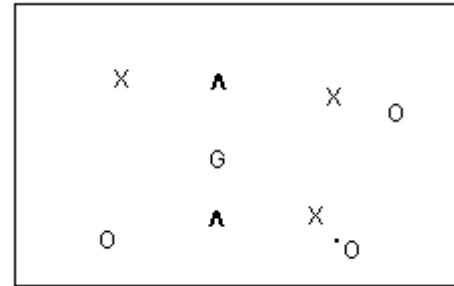
The purpose of the above passing games is to place the players in a more game-like situation. These activities add the elements of direction and counter attack to the passing game since the opposition can take the ball and score going the other way. If desired, the coach can impose restrictions such as a three-touch limit or no forward dribbling. This will force the players to try to make more passes but might be too advanced for many younger teams.



SHOOTING AND GOALKEEPER ACTIVITIES

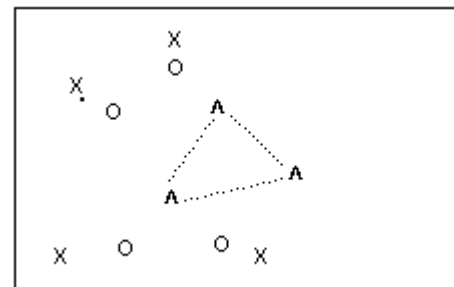
Players will enjoy almost any game that involves lots of shooting. Be sure to keep a large supply of balls in each goal for all activities. This way, a new ball can quickly be put into play after a shot.

Shooting Activity 1 - Using bicycle flags or corner flags, set up a 12 foot long goal with no net in the middle of the field. The ball is always in play on both sides of the goal. Both teams may score going in either direction of the goal. The last person to touch the ball gets credit for the goal. Use one goalie who must cover both sides of the goal. Field players may not run through the goal. When a goal is scored or a shot goes wide, the teams still try to get the ball and take another shot. This game can be played with two or three teams on the field.

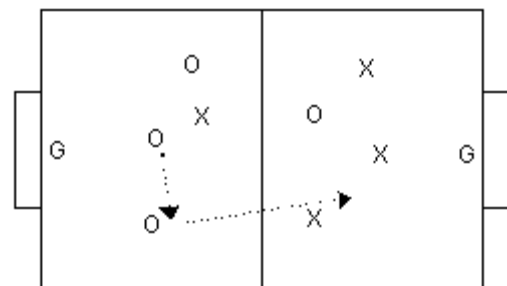


Shooting Activity 2 - Same setup as the previous exercise, except that one team may only score from one direction of the goal and the other team may only score from the opposite direction. Now each team will try to dribble or pass the ball from their defensive half of the playing area into their offensive half.

Shooting Activity 3 - Set up three goalposts in a triangle, each 12 feet apart from the others. This creates three different goals. Play a game of 3 v 3. Each team may score on any one of the three goals. This game can use one goalie for each goal, or one goalie who has to constantly move and guard all three of the goals. Do not allow the field players to run through the goals.



Shooting Activity 4 - "Power Shooting Game." Set up a field 20 yards long with a midfield line. Each team has one goalie plus three players in their defensive half of the field and one player in their offensive half of the field. Players may not cross the midfield line. The team with the ball tries to pass the ball between the three defensive players until one of them can take a shot from the defensive half of the field. All shots will have to be a minimum of 10 yards so the players will hopefully learn to drive the ball hard.



The one player in the offensive half may also try to score but he will most likely be forced to drop the ball back to one of his teammates for a long shot. The attacker's main job is to put pressure on the opponent's three back players as they attempt to shoot.

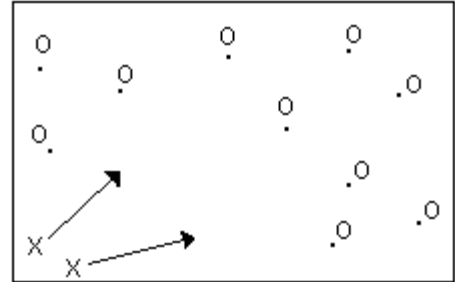
The coach will need to adjust the length of the field to match the size and power of the players.

Shooting Activity 5 - Play a regular small sided game with the standard size goals setup about 25 yards apart. Place a goalie in each net. The only change in the rules is that the team in possession can score in either goal. If the goalie makes a save, he throws the ball into the middle of the field. Both teams compete for the ball and play continues.

FUN GAMES

The following games do not fit into any particular "theme," but are games that players will enjoy playing and will help develop their soccer skills.

Activity 1 - "Jaws Game." Set up a grid 30 yards square. Place 10 players inside the grid, each with a ball. Two other players, without soccer balls, start outside the grid, each holding a shirt in their hand to identify them. On command, these two players run in and try to kick the other players' soccer balls out of the grid. When a player has his ball kicked out, he remains in the grid, lending support to the other players and helping to keep all the balls inside the grid.



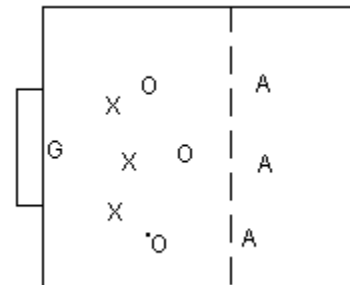
Initially this is a dribbling game since each player starts with a ball. After a short time, as the balls start to leave the grid, the game turns into a passing game. By the end, when only one ball is left in the grid, the game has changed to a 10 v 2 passing game.

The ratio of attacking players to defensive players must be adjusted to fit the skill level of the players. Have the coach time each pair to see how long it takes them to knock all the balls out of the grid. When the game ends, pick two new defenders and challenge them to beat the best time.

Activity 2 - "Half Court Soccer." This game is similar to half court basketball. The game is played 3v3 with a 12 foot long goal placed on one endline. The team that is on offense tries to score on the one goal. If the defending team steals the ball, they must take the ball out past a 20 yard line marked with cones. That team then turns around and becomes the attacking team. This game can have one goalie playing against both teams or have one goalie for each team, both playing in front of the same goal.

There are several variations to this game:

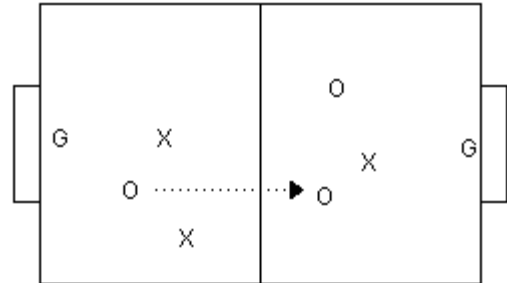
- Place a third team of three just outside the line marked by the cones, spread out along that line. For a team to change from defense to offense, they must win possession and pass the ball to one of the players standing on the other side of the cones. The player who receives the pass must immediately return the pass to a member of the team that just won the ball. After this pass is made, the offense may not pass back to one of the players on the other side of the line a second time.



- When the defending team wins the ball and plays it to one of the players on the other side of the line, the team standing outside of the cones goes into the playing area and attacks the goal. The team that was on defense takes their place on the other side of the line. The team that was on offense immediately becomes the defensive team.
- The following setup will allow the team with the ball to have an extra player and is more suited to younger, less skilled teams that need a numerical advantage. The defending team only has two players defending the goal (in addition to the goalie). Their third player stands beyond the 20 yard line, making the game 3 v 2. When the defenders win the ball, they must play it up to the midfielder on the other side of the line. Once the midfielder gets possession of the ball, his team goes on offense. The other team must have one player go on the other side of the 20 yard line. All three members of the team now on attack play against the two remaining defenders.

Activity 3 - "Defense vs. Attack." Play on a field about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide. Place a 12 foot long goal on one endline (not both). One team has four field players and tries to score on the goal. The other team has two defenders and a goalie. They get one point each time they can win the ball and dribble it over the opposite end line. The coach should vary the number of attacking players and the number of defending players to make the game competitive.

Activity 4 - "Two Zone Game." Set up a grid 30 by 20 yards with a goal on each endline. Mark off a midfield line. Each team has two players in their offensive half of the field. They also have one field player and one goalie in their defensive half. Players may not go over the midfield line, the ball must be passed over the midfield line from the defensive unit to the offensive unit. The attacking team will always have a 2 v 1 advantage. This game will enable players to concentrate on attacking skills or defensive skills.

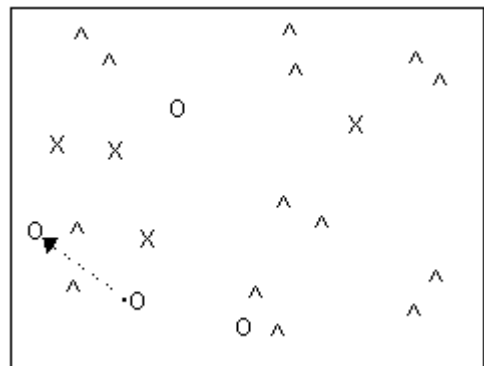


There are many variations to the game:

- Play the game with equal numbers, i.e., each team has two attackers in their offensive half and two defenders plus a goalie in the defensive half. This should only be done with advanced players or older players.
- Play the game 2 v 2 in each half but allow any defender who steals the ball to dribble it over the midfield line and join the attack. The defender must sprint back to his defensive half as soon as his team loses possession.
- A neutral player may be added. This player can go back and forth over the midfield line and play with the attacking team.

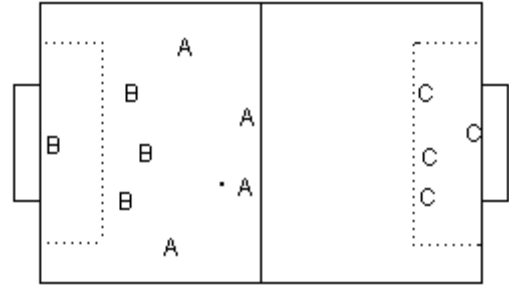
Activity 5 - "The Numbers Game." Divide players into two teams of four. Play a regular scrimmage on a regular 4 v 4 field (about 40 yards long, 30 yards wide). Each team starts with one goalie and three field players. When a team is scored on, they bring on another field player. If however, that team already has four field players, the team that just scored must instead take a player off the field. The game will constantly change from 4 v 4 to 5 v 4 to 5 v 5. On occasion, the game will even get to 5 v 3. The coach will have to be alert to keep the proper number of players on the field.

Activity 6 - Using road cones, set up seven small goals, distributed randomly, inside a field about 30 yards square. Each goal should be about 6 feet wide. Divide all the players into two teams. Goals can only be scored by having a player dribble the ball through one of the goals, in either direction. To get credit for a goal, the player must still have possession after he has gone through the goal. The ball is still in play after a goal is scored.



Variation: Goals can only be scored by having a player the ball on the ground through any one of the goals, in either direction, to a teammate. To get credit for a goal, the receiving player must be able to possess the ball after the ball goes through the goal. The ball is still in play after a goal is scored.

Activity 7 - "4 v 4 v 4." Set up a regular field 40 yards long and 30 yards wide with a midfield line and a 12 foot long goal on each endline. Divide the players into three teams of four. Team A starts with the ball on the midfield line, attacking the goal defended by team B. Team C is positioned inside of the other goalie box. When team B wins the ball and gets the ball over the midfield line, they attack the goal being defended by team C. The players on team C must wait inside the opposite goalie box until the ball is carried over the midfield line. The players on team C may then move out the goalie box and try to win the ball back. Team A then goes to the edge of the goalie box at the goal they were attacking, they cannot cross over the midfield line to win the ball back.



When a team is attacking a goal, all four players join in the attack. When they are defending a goal, they have three field players and a goalie.

Variation: Play on a smaller field with each team having three players. Now each attack will have three players attacking two field players and a goalie.

Activity 8 - "Protect The Lead." Play a normal scrimmage with one rule change. When a team scores, they are not allowed to score again for the next five minutes. Their job is to try and protect the lead by possessing the ball and preventing the other team from scoring. The team that is down by a goal tries to tie up the score before the end of the five minutes. Since the team that just scored cannot score another goal during this time, the other team should have their goalie go up the field and join the other field players. If the team does get a tying goal, they resume normal play until one of the teams scores another goal. At that point, the team that scored tries to protect the lead. This game teaches the players how a team's style of play can change, based on the score and the time remaining in the game.

Variation: The first time a team scores, challenge them to protect their lead for three minutes. If they are able to do that, challenge them to protect their lead for six minutes the next time they score. Keep incrementing the time requirement by two or three minutes each time they score and are able to successfully protect their lead.

Activity 9 - "One And Done." Divide the players into three teams of four players, each wearing a unique shirt color. Have two of the teams play a regular game against each other. The third team is off the field, retrieving stray soccer balls. When a team allows a goal, they come off the field and are replaced by the team that was off the field. Continue replacing the team that allows a goal with the team that is currently off the field.

Variation: Have the team not on the field spread out along the two sidelines, serving as neutral players. They may receive passes from any player on the field and then try to pass the ball back to the team that passed the ball to them.

Variation: If neither team scores within five minutes, replace the team that has been on the field the longest amount of time with the team that is currently off the field.

GAME TACTICS FOR 4 V 4 SOCCER

This Coaches Manual has constantly stressed the need for coaches to focus on skill development and not worry too much about game tactics. Players do need to have an understanding of basic game tactics in order to execute the skills that they are being taught. This section of the Coaches Manual will deal with simple game tactics for 4 versus 4 soccer. These tactics should be touched upon, but not given too much time during the season.

SYSTEMS OF PLAY

In regular 11 versus 11 soccer, there are many different systems of play and many different ways to align the players. The most common alignments are the 4-3-3 (four defenders, three midfielders and three attackers) and the 4-4-2. Different teams will use different alignments, depending upon the strengths of the players on their team as well as the strengths of their opponents.

For 4 versus 4 soccer, teams should play in a diamond shape with a goalie, two midfielders and a forward. It is important that the goaltender also help out as a field player. When a team is on offense, the goalie should be an option for a drop pass.

As always, the most important "tactic" to be taught is the "NO BOOM BALL" tactic. Players must always be reading the game, making quick, intelligent decisions and trying the skills learned in practice.

TACTICS IN THE OFFENSIVE THIRD OF THE FIELD

Play in the attacking third of the field should be "risk oriented." Players should be encouraged to use their dribbling skills to beat opponents and shoot. They should be encouraged to shoot whenever possible. They should be encouraged to go "1 on 1" with a defender and should never be criticized for trying to do so, even if the defender takes the ball away.

When shooting, players should aim for the far post rather than the near post. With this, if a shot goes wide, the ball might stay in play for a teammate to redirect into the net. Similarly, a shot to the far post which is stopped by the goalie can lead to a rebound in the middle of the goalmouth. All this is in contrast to a shot to the near post which, if wide, will go out of bounds or, if stopped by the goalie, will only lead to a rebound in the corner of the field, not in the goalmouth.

If a player has the ball well off to the side of the field and cannot get the ball into a position to shoot, the player should try to cross the ball. Crosses can be made on the ground or in the air. Coaches must emphasize that crosses be played across the goalmouth, AWAY from the goalie. The player crossing the ball should use the foot furthest from the goal. The non-kicking foot should be turned in so that it points towards the goalmouth. This will enable the player to turn his hips and get around the ball. Be sure that the crosses do not go to the other team's goalie.

The three field players should not be limited to playing either the left side of the field or the right side of the field. They should be encouraged to constantly go from one side of the field to the other side, with the flow of play. It is important however that the coach not allow all three field players to be standing together in one part of the field.

As stated before, when the team is on offense, the goalie should be up near the midfield line. The three attackers should consider playing to the ball back to the goalie whenever they are facing away from their opponent's goal, under pressure, and cannot go forward. The goalie should attempt to "switch the point of attack" by receiving a pass from a player on one side of the field and playing the ball to a teammate on the opposite side of the field.

TACTICS IN THE MIDDLE THIRD OF THE FIELD

Play in the middle third of the field should be somewhat less "risk oriented" than play in the attacking third. Players should still be encouraged to dribble the ball, but should look to pass the ball to an open teammate whenever possible. At no time should they be allowed to just kick the ball downfield without a purpose.

All three field players will need to be able to get up and down the field. When the team is on attack, the three field players must be spread out and in position to support each other. Similarly, when the opponents are on attack, all three field players must get all the way back into their defensive third of the field and defend in a diamond shape.

When one of the two midfield players passes the ball upfield to the forward, the two midfielders must immediately run up and support their teammate, offering a "return pass" option to the attacker. All three field players should be encouraged to dribble past opponents when they are in a 1 v 1 situation in the offensive half of the field.

TACTICS IN THE DEFENSIVE THIRD OF THE FIELD

Players in the defensive third should take a "safety first" approach. Players should never dribble the ball inside of their penalty area unless they are trying to get the ball out to the sidelines, before taking it upfield. Players should try to pass the ball out of the defensive third rather than dribbling the ball. Either way, the ball should get out of the goalmouth as quickly as possible, towards the sidelines and then up the field. This does NOT mean that they simply boom the ball down the field. They should instead dribble the ball if there is open space, or pass the ball to a teammate positioned further up the field.

Players in their defensive third should NEVER pass the ball into the middle of the goalmouth when an opponent is near. The ball should always go out towards the nearest sideline. Players must be careful when passing the ball back to their goalie since the rules prohibit the goalie from picking up a pass (when played from the foot of a teammate) with his hands.

When opponents are positioned in the goalmouth, waiting for a pass or cross, the defenders should mark (guard) the opponents closely. Defenders should position their body so that they are standing next to an opponent, and positioned between the opponent and the middle of the goal. This is referred to as being "goal side" of the opponent. At all times, defenders should be facing both the ball and the opponent. Defenders should NEVER be positioned in such a way that they cannot see the ball. Coaches will have to be patient with this concept. Young players do not have the attention span or discipline to mark opponents very much.

It is important that all three field players never be on the same side of the field since the other team might be able to pass the ball to an unmarked teammate on the opposite side of the field. Even when the ball is out near the sideline, the defensive team should have a player positioned directly in front of the goal. This is the most dangerous area of the field, and the area that must be most closely guarded when the other team has the ball.

One of the key concepts of defending is for the defending team to always put pressure on the ball. No matter which opponent has the ball, the defending team must have a player guarding him, trying to get the ball from him. Defenders should be taught to fight hard for the ball and never let the opponents have the ball without any pressure. By applying pressure, the opposing player will have a limited amount of time to figure out what to do with the ball. The opposing player will most likely not have enough time to find a teammate to pass to, not have enough time to get off a good shot, etc. Lack of pressure by the defending team will allow the opposing player to have enough time to make a good play with the ball. Never let this happen.

For more advanced players, the coach should teach the concept of backing up a teammate on defense. When possible, the defender guarding the player with the ball (known as the "first defender") should have a teammate behind him (known as the "second defender"), ready to pickup the man with the ball if the first defender gets beat.

THE TRANSITION GAME

Two stages of the game that are very important, yet rarely coached are the transition from defense to offense (counter-attacking) and the transition from offense to defense (counter-defending).

Counter-Attacking: When a team wins the ball, they should immediately look to play the ball up the field. This should be done by either dribbling or passing. The reason that it is important to play the ball up the field as soon as possible is that the other team is not yet organized defensively. Teams are most likely to be scored on when they are not ready to defend.

When a team counter-attacks, they should immediately try to play the ball forward and score. As the play starts to go forward, all three field players should get up into the action. This is especially true of the two field players who do not have the ball. They need to immediately support their teammate who has the ball. Hopefully they can get run up the field, in advance of the ball, or wide of the ball and offer a passing option to the teammate with the ball. The goalie should also move up the field to support the three field players. Coaches need to stress to the players that they should never stay back in the defensive third of the field when their team is on the attack.

The important principals of counter-attacking are:

- play the ball up field as fast as possible
- try to get a shot off before the opponents are able to get back on defense
- get up in support of the player with the ball

Counter-Defending: The moment that a team loses the ball is the time that they are most vulnerable to being scored on. It is important that when a team loses the ball, they prevent the other team from going forward. This will give the rest of the team a chance to get back on defense. The first thing that needs to be done is to have one of the players put pressure on the opponent who just won the ball. If the team can steal the ball back, that is great. If not, the player must immediately put pressure on the opponent with the ball and prevent him from playing the ball forward. During this time, the other field players need to get back on defense as fast as possible.

The important principals in counter-defending are:

- pressure the player with the ball
- delay the opponent's attack
- get back on defense as fast as possible

GOALKEEPER TACTICS

Goalkeeper tactics have already been covered in this manual. Goalies should be encouraged to move around in the goalie box to pick up any ball with their hands that they can get to. Goalies must learn to "own" their entire goalie box. Going one step further, they should be encouraged to leave their goal box and play the ball with their feet if they can get to the ball before an opponent. They should not try to dribble past opponents. Instead, the goalie should try to pass the ball to an open teammate near one of the sidelines.

Goalies should also be taught to distribute (punt or throw) the ball upfield to the nearest sideline. To be safe, they should never distribute the ball down the middle of the field.

When an opponent has a breakaway, the goalie should come well off his goal line to cut down the angle. If possible, he should sprint out to take the ball off the opponent's foot if the opponent dribbles the ball too far in front of him. The worst thing a goalie can do on a breakaway is stand on the goal line and try to block the shot. He is much better off going out to smother the shot or even prevent the shot. If that is not possible, the goalie should still out of the goal at speed in an attempt to intimidate the opponent and force him to shoot the ball too early. This will usually result in the shot going wide of the goal or directly into the goalie's body.

TACTICS ON RESTARTS

In high level soccer (high school and above), teams devote a lot of practice time to restarts (corner kicks, free kicks, throw ins, etc.) Younger teams should not spend any significant time working on restarts since overall skill development is MUCH more important. Still, it is necessary to touch upon the most basic principals of restarts.

OFFENSIVE CORNER KICKS: The player taking the kick wants to put the ball into the goalmouth, away from the goalie. When possible, a ground pass to a teammate should be used. If no teammate is open, the ball should be played in the air into the goalmouth for a teammate to try to run in and head or kick the ball into the goal. The players in the goalmouth should start 8 - 10 yards away from the goal line and run in on the kick. They should not be standing still in the goalmouth, waiting for the ball. They should not be standing behind the goalie since they will most likely not get the ball there.

DEFENSIVE CORNER KICKS: The goalie should stand just in front of the goal line, in the middle of the goal. One of the field players should stand tight against the near post, ready to kick or head away any ball that is kicked along the goal line. The player guarding the near post should be positioned on the inside part of the post so that if an opponent other than the player taking the corner kick redirects the ball towards the near goal post, the defender will be able to kick it away. The other two field players should be positioned about three yards in front of the goal, ready to get the corner kick and clear it away from the goalmouth. When possible, the two defenders should tightly mark an opponent, being sure to be "goal side" (between the opponent and the goal) of that man.

OFFENSIVE FREE KICKS: If possible, the player taking the kick should shoot to the far post. If that is not possible, he should look for a teammate to pass to. A free kick does not mean "blast the ball down-field" since this goes against the NO BOOM BALL philosophy. If a free kick is taken out on the wings, in the offensive half of the field, the free kick should be treated like a corner kick where the kicker will either play the ball into the goalmouth for a teammate to try and redirect into the goal, or play the ball on the ground to a teammate.

DEFENSIVE FREE KICKS: If the ball is near enough for the kicker to shoot, the defending team should form a wall of two or three field players between the ball and the goal, five yards from the ball. These players should try to block the kick. They should keep their hands in front of their bodies for protection and keep their heads down to avoid being hit in the face. Any player who is not in the wall must mark any opponent who might be able to receive a pass. All three field players need to come back and defend whenever the opponents get a free kick near the goal.

If the other team has a free kick near one of the sidelines, they should have one player positioned five yards in front of the kicker to block the kick. The other two field players should be back on defense, guarding the area in front of the goalmouth, as well as guarding the other two opponents.

SUMMARY OF GAME TACTICS

The above summary of game tactics for 4 v 4 youth soccer is designed to give coaches an overview of how a team should play on game day. Coaches should not spend a lot of time teaching game tactics to young players. Most of the youngsters will be too young to comprehend these tactics. Similarly, they will not have the patience to sit and listen to these tactics being taught at practice. These tactics should be touched upon at some point during the season, but not stressed for any length of time.

Too often, coaches try to stress complicated tactics to try and win games. It is important to remember that the role of the coach is NOT to win games, but to develop each player's skills and allow the players to make use of these skills in games and practices. Keep the teaching of tactics to a minimum.

GAME TACTICS FOR 5 V 5 SOCCER

This section of the Coaches Manual is very similar to the "Game Tactics For 4 v 4 Soccer" section. When teams are playing 5 v 5, there are four field players and a goalie. Similar to the previous section, coaches need to focus on skill development and not worry too much about game tactics. Players do need to have an understanding of basic game tactics in order to execute the skills that they are being taught. These tactics should be touched upon, but not given too much time during the season.

SYSTEMS OF PLAY

In regular 11 versus 11 soccer, there are many different systems of play and many different ways to align the players. The most common alignments are the 4-3-3 (four defenders, three midfielders and three attackers) and the 4-4-2. Different teams will use different alignments, depending upon the strengths of the players on their team as well as the strengths of their opponents.

For 5 versus 5 soccer, the field players should play in a diamond shape with a one defender, two midfielders and a forward. Goaltenders should also help out as a field player by calling for a drop pass whenever a field player is facing him and is unable to turn to play the ball forward.

As always, the most important "tactic" to be taught is the "NO BOOM BALL" tactic. Players must always be reading the game, making quick, intelligent decisions and trying the skills learned in practice.

TACTICS IN THE OFFENSIVE THIRD OF THE FIELD

Play in the attacking third of the field should be "risk oriented." Players should be encouraged to use their dribbling skills to beat opponents and shoot. They should be encouraged to shoot whenever possible. They should be encouraged to go "1 on 1" with a defender and should never be criticized for trying to do so, even if the defender takes the ball away.

When shooting, players should aim for the far post rather than the near post. With this, if a shot goes wide, the ball might stay in play for a teammate to redirect into the net. Similarly, a shot to the far post which is stopped by the goalie can lead to a rebound in the middle of the goalmouth. All this is in contrast to a shot to the near post which, if wide, will go out of bounds or, if stopped by the goalie, will only lead to a rebound in the corner of the field, not in the goalmouth.

If a player has the ball well off to the side of the field and cannot get the ball into a position to shoot, the player should try to cross the ball. Crosses can be made on the ground or in the air. Coaches must emphasize that crosses be played across the goalmouth, AWAY from the goalie. The player crossing the ball should use the foot furthest from the goal. The non-kicking foot should be turned in so that it points towards the goalmouth. This will enable the player to turn his hips and get around the ball. Be sure that the crosses do not go to the other team's goalie.

The four field players should not be limited to playing either the left side of the field or the right side of the field. They should be encouraged to constantly go from one side of the field to the other side, with the flow of play. It is important however that the coach not allow all of the field players to be standing together in one part of the field.

Similar to 4 v 4 soccer, the field players should consider playing to the ball back to the goalie whenever they are facing away from their opponent's goal, under pressure, and cannot go forward. The goalie should attempt to "switch the point of attack" by receiving a pass from a player on one side of the field and playing the ball to a teammate on the opposite side of the field.

TACTICS IN THE MIDDLE THIRD OF THE FIELD

Play in the middle third of the field should be less "risk oriented" than play in the attacking third. Players should still be encouraged to dribble the ball, but should look to pass the ball to an open teammate whenever possible. At no time should they be allowed to just kick the ball downfield without a purpose.

The two midfielders will need to be able to get up and down the field. When their team is on attack, the field players must be spread out and in position to support each other. Whenever possible, they should be in a diamond shape with one player staying up top, one player back and two players going all the way up the field and all the way back on defense. It is important that the two midfielders know that they must not only get up into the attack, but get back on defense as well.

When one of the two midfield players passes the ball upfield to the forward, the two midfielders must immediately run up and support their teammate, offering a "return pass" option to the attacker. All field players, except the last player back, should be encouraged to dribble past opponents when they are in a 1 v 1 situation.

TACTICS IN THE DEFENSIVE THIRD OF THE FIELD

Players in the defensive third should take a "safety first" approach. Players should never dribble the ball inside of their penalty area unless they are trying to get the ball out to the sidelines, before taking it upfield. Players should try to pass the ball out of the defensive third rather than dribbling the ball. Either way, the ball should get out of the goalmouth as quickly as possible, towards the sidelines and then up the field. This does NOT mean that they simply boom the ball down the field. They should instead dribble the ball if there is open space, or pass the ball to a teammate positioned further up the field.

Players in their defensive third should NEVER pass the ball into the middle of the goalmouth when an opponent is near. The ball should always go out towards the nearest sideline. Players must be careful when passing the ball back to their goalie since the rules prohibit the goalie from picking up a pass (when played from the foot of a teammate) with his hands.

When opponents are positioned in the goalmouth, waiting for a pass or cross, the defenders should mark (guard) the opponents closely. Defenders should position their body so that they are standing next to an opponent, and positioned between the opponent and the middle of the goal. This is referred to as being "goal side" of the opponent. At all times, defenders should be facing both the ball and the opponent. Defenders should NEVER be positioned in such a way that they cannot see the ball. Coaches will have to be patient with this concept. Young players do not have the attention span or discipline to mark opponents very much.

It is important that all three field players never be on the same side of the field since the other team might be able to pass the ball to an unmarked teammate on the opposite side of the field. Even when the ball is out near the sideline, the defensive team should have a player positioned directly in front of the goal. This is the most dangerous area of the field, and the area that must be most closely guarded when the other team has the ball.

One of the key concepts of defending is for the defending team to always put pressure on the ball. No matter which opponent has the ball, the defending team must have a player guarding him, trying to get the ball from him. Defenders should be taught to fight hard for the ball and never let the opponents have the ball without any pressure. By applying pressure, the opposing player will have a limited amount of time to figure out what to do with the ball. The opposing player will most likely not have enough time to find a teammate to pass to, not have enough time to get off a good shot, etc. Lack of pressure by the defending team will allow the opposing player to have enough time to make a good play with the ball. Never let this happen.

For more advanced players, the coach should teach the concept of backing up a teammate on defense. When possible, the defender guarding the player with the ball (known as the "first defender") should have a teammate behind him (known as the "second defender"), ready to pickup the man with the ball if the first defender gets beat.

THE TRANSITION GAME

Two stages of the game that are very important, yet rarely coached are the transition from defense to offense (counter-attacking) and the transition from offense to defense (counter-defending).

Counter-Attacking: When a team wins the ball, they should immediately look to play the ball up the field. This should be done by either dribbling or passing. The reason that it is important to play the ball up the field as soon as possible is that the other team is not yet organized defensively. Teams are most likely to be scored on when they are not ready to defend.

When a team counter-attacks, they should immediately try to play the ball forward and score. As the play starts to go forward, the forward and midfielders should all get up the field into the action. The players without the ball need to immediately support their teammate who has the ball. Hopefully they can get run up the field, in advance of the ball, or wide of the ball and offer a passing option to the teammate with the ball. The defender should also move up the field to support the other three field players. Coaches need to stress to the players that they should never stay back in the defensive third of the field when their team is on the attack.

The important principals of counter-attacking are:

- play the ball up field as fast as possible
- try to get a shot off before the opponents are able to get back on defense
- get up in support of the player with the ball

Counter-Defending: The moment that a team loses the ball is the time that they are most vulnerable to being scored on. It is important that when a team loses the ball, they prevent the other team from going forward. This will give the rest of the team a chance to get back on defense. The first thing that needs to be done is to have one of the players put pressure on the opponent who just won the ball. If the team can steal the ball back, that is great. If not, the player must immediately put pressure on the opponent with the ball and prevent him from playing the ball forward. During this time, the other field players need to get back on defense as fast as possible.

The important principals in counter-defending are:

- pressure the player with the ball
- delay the opponent's attack
- get back on defense as fast as possible

GOALKEEPER TACTICS

Goalkeeper tactics have already been covered in this manual. Goalies should be encouraged to move around in the goalie box to pick up any ball with their hands that they can get to. Goalies must learn to "own" their entire goalie box. Going one step further, they should be encouraged to leave their goal box and play the ball with their feet if they can get to the ball before an opponent. They should not try to dribble past opponents. Instead, the goalie should try to pass the ball to an open teammate near one of the sidelines.

Goalies should also be taught to distribute (punt or throw) the ball upfield to the nearest sideline. To be safe, they should never distribute the ball down the middle of the field.

When an opponent has a breakaway, the goalie should come well off his goal line to cut down the angle. If possible, he should sprint out to take the ball off the opponent's foot if the opponent dribbles the ball too far in front of him. The worst thing a goalie can do on a breakaway is stand on the goal line and try to block the shot. He is much better off going out to smother the shot or even prevent the shot. If that is not possible, the goalie should still out of the goal at speed in an attempt to intimidate the opponent and force him to shoot the ball too early. This will usually result in the shot going wide of the goal or directly into the goalie's body.

TACTICS ON RESTARTS

In high level soccer (high school and above), teams devote a lot of practice time to restarts (corner kicks, free kicks, throw ins, etc.) Younger teams should not spend any significant time working on restarts since overall skill development is MUCH more important. Still, it is necessary to touch upon the most basic principals of restarts.

OFFENSIVE CORNER KICKS: The player taking the kick wants to put the ball into the goalmouth, away from the goalie. When possible, a ground pass to a teammate should be used. If no teammate is open, the ball should be played in the air into the goalmouth for a teammate to try to run in and head or kick the ball into the goal. The players in the goalmouth should start 8 - 10 yards away from the goal line and run in on the kick. They should not be standing still in the goalmouth, waiting for the ball. They should not be standing behind the goalie since they will most likely not get the ball there.

DEFENSIVE CORNER KICKS: The goalie should stand just in front of the goal line, in the middle of the goal. One of the field players should stand tight against the near post, ready to kick or head away any ball that is kicked along the goal line. The player guarding the near post should be positioned on the inside part of the post so that if an opponent other than the player taking the corner kick redirects the ball towards the near goal post, the defender will be able to kick it away. The other two field players should be positioned about three yards in front of the goal, ready to get the corner kick and clear it away from the goalmouth. When possible, the two defenders should tightly mark an opponent, being sure to be "goal side" (between the opponent and the goal) of that man.

OFFENSIVE FREE KICKS: If possible, the player taking the kick should shoot to the far post. If that is not possible, he should look for a teammate to pass to. A free kick does not mean "blast the ball down-field" since this goes against the NO BOOM BALL philosophy. If a free kick is taken out on the wings, in the offensive half of the field, the free kick should be treated like a corner kick where the kicker will either play the ball into the goalmouth for a teammate to try and redirect into the goal, or play the ball on the ground to a teammate.

DEFENSIVE FREE KICKS: If the ball is near enough for the kicker to shoot, the defending team should form a wall of two or three field players between the ball and the goal, five yards from the ball. These players should try to block the kick. They should keep their hands in front of their bodies for protection and keep their heads down to avoid being hit in the face. Any player who is not in the wall must mark any opponent who might be able to receive a pass. All three field players need to come back and defend whenever the opponents get a free kick near the goal.

If the other team has a free kick near one of the sidelines, they should have one player positioned five yards in front of the kicker to block the kick. The other two field players should be back on defense, guarding the area in front of the goalmouth, as well as guarding the other two opponents.

SUMMARY OF GAME TACTICS

The above summary of game tactics for 5 v 5 youth soccer is designed to give coaches an overview of how a team should play on game day. Coaches should not spend a lot of time teaching game tactics to young players. Most of the youngsters will be too young to comprehend these tactics. Similarly, they will not have the patience to sit and listen to these tactics being taught at practice. These tactics should be touched upon at some point during the season, but not stressed for any length of time.

Too often, coaches try to stress complicated tactics to try and win games. It is important to remember that the role of the coach is NOT to win games, but to develop each player's skills and allow the players to make use of these skills in games and practices. Keep the teaching of tactics to a minimum.

BEYOND THE 6 - 8 YEAR OLD INTRAMURAL PROGRAMS

We hope that the practices and activities in this manual will be of benefit to coaches of 6 - 8 year old intramural players. This last section will describe the changes that coaches will need to make when coaching players ages 9 through 12 (intramural players or travel team players).

The philosophy of coaching older players will be similar to that for 6 - 8 year olds with some minor modifications. The following list describes the coaching methodology for older players:

- As with younger players, stress a particular theme each practice. For technical practices (e.g., on shooting, passing, dribbling, etc.), start in the Fundamental Stage (no opponent) and progress to the Match Related Stage (opposition added, not necessarily at 100 percent and not necessarily the same number of players as the attackers). Finish in the Match Condition Stage (small sided games with restrictions and/or special conditions imposed to work on a particular technique).
- Older players will need to spend less time in the Fundamental Stage and more time in the Match Related and Match Condition Stages. The Fundamental Stage for older players should always involve movement. For older players, stationary drills will not accomplish much.
- Elementary TACTICS (decision making) should be worked on at most practices. Tactics answer the questions of when, where and why to do something whereas technique only answers the question of how to do something.
- Maintain a high ball per player ratio. The Fundamental Stage should always be a 1:1 or 1:2 ratio. For older groups, small sided games may involve more players, but should still be well below 11 v 11. Optimal games in practices for older players should have a maximum of 6 v 6. Players will still greatly benefit from 3 v 3 or 4 v 4 games, as they will get a lot of touches on the ball.
- Older, more experienced players need to deal with increased pressure from an opponent. Coaches of older players will be able to use most of the activities in this manual with small modifications. The following are items that the coach can modify for older, more skillful players:
 - Lower the attacker : defender ratio. Use more defenders (or use less attackers) in activities in order to properly challenge the attackers.
 - Instruct defenders to play with more intensity, forcing the attackers to play faster.
 - Tighten (reduce) the field space (grid size) to force the attackers to play the ball quicker and with more accuracy.
 - Reduce (or eliminate) the number of neutral players or sideline players.
 - Reduce the maximum number of touches on the ball. In some activities, require the players to play two-touch or even one-touch if the players can play at that level.
- The coach must determine how much pressure the players can **successfully** handle and adjust each of the above parameters to make the activities challenging and successful. Players will not develop in the absence of pressure and will not develop when there is too much pressure.
- Players will always put out the most effort in competitive situations. This is especially true of older players. The Match Condition Stage is where players want to be. The coach should keep score in these competitive situations in order to bring out the best in the players. The coach should be sure to play small sided games that incorporate conditions and restrictions which will produce the desired type of play (i.e., concentrating on dribbling, passing, shooting, etc).
- The coach should decide what to work on in the next practice based on his observations from the previous game or practice. The coach must determine what the players most need work on.

Coaches who plan to coach older players in future years will need to always be at least one step ahead of the players. As the players gain experience, they will need to be challenged more. It is very important that coaches stay ahead of the players in terms of knowledge, especially their technical and tactical knowledge of the game.

Coaches will need to spend time in the off season learning more about higher levels of play. The more time a coach spends trying to become a better coach, the faster his players will develop. There are many avenues available to coaches who want to improve their coaching abilities:

- Attend local coaching seminars and clinics.
- Enroll in the various levels of coaching courses offered by the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) or the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA).
- Read some of the large selection of soccer coaching books on the market.
- Re-read this Coaching Manual periodically for new ideas.
- Read the LMSC Coaching Manual for 9 - 12 year old teams.

The Lower Merion Soccer Club has an extensive collection of soccer videos and soccer literature for their coaches. As a coach begins to deal with older players, they should talk to the LMSC Officers about borrowing some of the material. LMSC also pays the entire cost of any coach who successfully completes any of the USSF or NSCAA coaching schools as well as the cost of attending soccer clinics, seminars or workshops.

No matter how much a coach knows (or thinks he knows), there is always room for improvement. The game changes and coaching methodologies change so our coaches must change.

No matter how young or old the players, the coach must always remember the two ultimate objectives of coaching. These objectives apply to all of the players, all of the time:

- Ensure that each player is having FUN and develops a love of the game.
- Develop each player's skills so that he can become a better player and be capable of playing at higher levels of soccer in the future.

Please always remember the primary goal of LMSC:

“To provide each and every youngster with a fun filled experience in a soccer environment.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This coaching manual was written by Biff Sturla in an attempt to share his many years of coaching experience with other Lower Merion Soccer Club coaches. Biff has been coaching for 26 years at various levels of play:

26 years of youth coaching for Lower Merion Soccer Club in Southeastern Pennsylvania

8 years of coaching in the Delco League Select Program

4 years of coaching in the EPYSA Olympic Development Program

13 years head coach at the high school varsity level

10 years as President of Lower Merion Soccer Club, serving over 2700 youth players

During his years of coaching, Biff's teams have won many titles, including: one national finalist, three Region One USA championships, thirteen State Championships, numerous Delco League division one championships and numerous indoor and outdoor tournament championships.

The following is a list of coaching honors that he has received:

USYSA Regional Coach Of The Year, 2006

EPYSA Coach Of The Year, 2006

Main Line Life Coach Of The Year, 1999 and 2002

Main Line Times Coach Of The Year, 2002

Philadelphia Inquirer Coach Of The Year, 1999

Del-Val League Coach Of The Year, 2004

Central League High School Coach Of The Year, 1997

Several of his former players have gone on to play at the professional levels. One of his former players played for the USA in the 2006 World Cup as well as the 2000 Olympics. Many played Division One in college. Several of his players from many years ago are now coaching soccer at various levels, including college, high school and in Lower Merion Soccer Club. Another former player is working for the Marketing Department of the Los Angeles Galaxy of Major League Soccer.