

LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB

INTRAMURAL COACHES MANUAL FOR OUR 10 - 14 YEAR OLD TEAMS

(2019 Edition)



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This manual is written for coaches of Lower Merion Soccer Club's 10 - 14 year old intramural teams.

Included in this coaches manual are numerous practice activities, plus a section on game tactics for 9 vs.9 soccer (the format for our 10 and 11 year old intramural teams).






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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 dribbling the ball |
|  | movement of player without ball |
|  | movement of ball (pass or shot) |
|  | |

COACHING A YOUTH SOCCER TEAM

This manual contains a wide variety of practice activities designed for coaches of The Lower Merion Soccer Club's 10 - 14 year old divisions. Each activity will emphasize a particular skill (dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.) and assumes a maximum of 16 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, usually a white shirt and a dark shirt. This will help the coach to divide the players into teams for scrimmages. The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) requires all players to wear shin guards to games and practices.

In keeping with the guidelines of the USSF, each practice during the season should stress a specific theme (dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.) Every practice should 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 every practice with smiles on their faces.

THE THREE STAGES OF A SOCCER PRACTICE

The three stages of a soccer practice listed below are designed to enable the coach to teach a particular skill. Activities in each practice should start simple and gradually become more complex.

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 can 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. Many 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 2 v 2, 4 v 4 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 their primary objective. 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 always let them have fun.

Before each practice, the head coach should decide which skill needs the most improving. The coach should then design a practice plan that will incorporate activities emphasizing that particular skill. One of the most important jobs of a coach on game day is to observe his / her team's play and decide what needs to be worked on the most at the next practice.

Each practice should last 70 - 90 minutes. Divide the practice session equally between the Fundamental Stage, Match Related Stage and the Match Condition Stage (20 to 30 minutes per stage). Older, more advanced teams should spend less time in the Fundamental Stage, using that primarily as a warmup. Be flexible with your practice plan. Don't rush 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 equal teams 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

Economical Training 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.

Youth players 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." When talking to the players, remember the K.I.S.S. principal: "Keep It Short and Simple."

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 reason for this is that players will be more involved in the play with small sided soccer, make 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 watching the others play and not being involved in the play.

Over the years, the youth soccer community has changed youth soccer from an 11 v 11 format to smaller formats, depending on the age. While games at the 9 - 10 year old age groups are 8 v 8, practices will be much more effective when there are two simultaneous games using smaller numbers (such as 3 v 3 or 4 v 4). This will keep more players active at all times and will result in a faster rate of development for all players.

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 LeBron James (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 younger players is that players not 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 the players' opportunity to think and make decisions. This is especially true for the player who has the ball. Too often, when a player gets the ball, the coaches 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 is wiser to wait and 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 other players know what a better decision could have been.

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 a 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 all 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. Similar to practices, the pre-game warmup should have a high ball per player ratio. Each player should have as many quality 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 the pre-game warmup focus on the skill that was emphasized in the previous practice.

THE VARIOUS TYPES OF SMALL SIDED PRACTICE GAMES

This coaching manual contains a wide variety of practice games and activities. Each activity will emphasize 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 will now also 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 fields 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 fields 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 sides 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 will 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 youth players. The exact dimensions of the grid will be dependent on the age and skill level of the players. Each team will need a different size playing area for a particular activity. The coach should always start with a grid large enough to ensure initial success. If the activity appears too easy, the coach should make the playing area smaller.

| <u>Game</u> | <u>Game With Direction</u> | <u>Game Without Direction</u> |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 v 1: | 10 yards x 10 yards | 15 yards x 10 yards |
| 2 v 2: | 20 yards x 20 yards | 25 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 |
| 5 v 5: | 40 yards x 40 yards | 50 yards x 40 yards |
| 6 v 6: | 50 yards x 50 yards | 60 yards x 50 yards |

ADJUSTING SMALL SIDED GAMES FOR A TEAM'S LEVEL OF PLAY

In each of the activities listed in this book, the coach may need to adjust some parameters in order to meet the needs and skill level of his players. Coaches should observe how an activity is going and adjust different parameters as necessary. Among the parameters that a coach can vary are:

- Size of the grid: Younger, weaker teams require more space. Older, stronger teams need to play in a smaller space in order to be challenged more. If a team is not having success in an activity, the coach should make the playing area larger. Similarly, if an activity is too easy for the team, the coach should reduce the playing area.
- Number of attacking players: Many of the activities described in this book have uneven numbers, i.e., 5 v 2 or 3 v 1. If an activity is too easy for the attacking team, the coach should decrease the number of attacking players, i.e., change a game from 5 v 2 down to 4 v 2. Similarly, if the attacking team is struggling, the coach might want to add an extra attacking player.
- Number of defending players: Similar to above, the coach may add another defender to make an activity more challenging, or take away a defender to make the activity less difficult.
- Number of touches on the ball: If a team is finding an activity to be too easy, the coach might need to limit the number of touches on the ball each player may take, i.e., play two touch. To encourage players to hold the ball longer, the coach might require players to take a minimum number of touches on the ball, i.e., to encourage dribbling, require each player to make a minimum of five touches on the ball before passing.
- Number and role of neutral players: Some games use neutral players. A neutral player is a player who always plays for the team in possession of the ball. When one team loses possession of the ball, the neutral player immediately stops playing for that team and starts playing for the team that just won the ball. A neutral player usually plays in a different color shirt from the two teams involved. Neutral players might be limited to playing on the sidelines, or they may play in the middle of the field. They might be limited to two touch or one touch play. They might be allowed to score in a game, they might not be. It is up to the coach to define the role and number of neutral players, if used, in all activities at practice.

MAKING COACHING CORRECTIONS DURING PRACTICES

There are several factors for coaches to consider when making corrections during practice. First, the coach should limit the amount of instructions given to players while they are playing since this often takes the decision making process away from the players. Instead, coaches should wait until a player has finished making a play. The coach may then stop play and discuss it with the player and / or team.

Coaches should use the "P-N-P" concept (positive, negative, positive) when making coaching corrections. This means that the coach first praises something that the player did. He then makes his coaching point, briefly discussing an error and then offering a solution (this is the negative part). The coach follows the coaching point with a positive comment to keep the player's self esteem high. As an example, the coach might say "That was a great run down the wing (positive). Next time, you should turn your non-kicking foot so that it is pointing towards the goal. This will keep your cross from going out of bounds (the negative part). If you do that, you will have a great chance of assisting on a goal."

Coaches need to be able to stop the action right away in a practice activity. The coach should train the players to immediately stop if the coach yells "Stop" or "Freeze." The players should stop and stand exactly where they are so the coach can walk the players through something that just happened. Be sure to offer the players a solution to any mistake that was discussed. Play should then restart with the same players attempting to correctly execute the play that was just done incorrectly.

Coaches should also use the "Socratic Method Of Coaching." This is where the coach does not tell the players the answer to a problem. Instead, he asks them a series of questions which will hopefully enable the players to figure out the answer on their own. This is a lot more effective than simply telling the players the solution since they will actually have to come up with the answer to a problem on their own.

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 or 4 v 4 will result in MANY more touches on the ball for each child as compared to one game of 6 v 6 or 7 v 7. 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 employ the principal of "economical training." EVERY activity in practice must involve soccer balls. Do not have the players run laps, do push ups, sit-ups etc. Everything is done with a ball, maintain a high ball per player ratio at all times.
- In all activities, especially 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 (16 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)
- 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 site 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.
- 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 is 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."

"Setbacks make great opportunities for comebacks."

COACHES: YOUR JOB IS MORE THAN RULES AND STRATEGY

The following is an article about ways that coaches can be asset builders and teach lessons for life. The article was originally published in *Soccer Journal*, September / October 2002.

Learn the names of all the players on your team and call them by name.

Make a point to talk at least once with each player each time you practice or play.

Create and maintain a positive atmosphere. Two top reasons young people participate in sports are to have fun and to spend time with their friends. Winning is not one of their top reasons.

Focus on helping players get better, not be the best. It will reduce players' fear of failure and give them permission to try new things and stretch their skills.

Know that highly competitive sports can often cause a great deal of stress for young people. The intense pressure that goes along with trying to be the best can sometimes lead to unhealthy outcomes such as substance abuse and/or eating disorders. Be careful not to push young people too hard and learn about the warning signs of possible problems.

Care about your athletes' lives outside of the sport and show them that they are valuable people as well as team members.

Catch kids doing things right. Be quick to praise a player's efforts. The best feedback is immediate and positive.

Adapt your teaching style and language to the players' age level. Young children do not

always know sport terms. Use words and concepts they understand. On the other hand, older youths may be more successful when they understand the big picture they are trying to accomplish as well as the specific skills or strategies needed.

Set goals both for individuals and for the team. Include young people in setting these goals.

Use the sandwich method of correcting a player's mistake. First praise, then constructively criticize, then praise again.

Always preserve players' dignity. Sarcasm does not work well with young people. They may not always remember what you say, but they always remember how you said it.

Insist that all team members treat one another with respect. Then model, monitor and encourage respect. Have a zero-tolerance policy for teasing that hurts someone's feelings.

Be specific about a code of conduct and expectations for athletes, parents, spectators and team personnel.

Encourage athletes to do well in school and to be motivated to achieve.

Respect other activities and priorities in athletes' lives. Avoid conflicts with their other commitments and respect their need for time with their families.

Find ways each child can participate, even if he or she is not particularly skilled in the sport.

Listen to and encourage your athletes' dreams, concerns and desires, sports-related or otherwise.

Develop leadership skills in young athletes by giving them opportunities to lead practice drills and develop a team code of conduct.

Take time at the end of practice to have the group offer positive comments about each player's performance that day. Make sure no one is left out.

Split up cliques on the team by mixing up groups for drills and scrimmages.

Plan a community service project for the team. It teaches players to give something back to the community.

If you have an end-of-season gathering, take time to say a few positive things about each player. Avoid Most Valuable Player awards and other "rankings." Focus on the relationships, the improvement of the team and the unique contributions of each player.

"Rather than measuring success in terms of numbers in the win/loss columns, perhaps the ultimate standard of our success as coaches should be judged by our ability to teach children to love and enjoy the game of soccer, to feel more confident and self-assured in their abilities and knowledge of the game, to experience mutual respect from both teammates and coaches, and most importantly, to feel appreciation and pride in the opportunity they had to play a sport they love under your direction as their coach." (reprinted from the National Soccer Coaches Of Association State Diploma Coaches Manual).

ACTIVITIES FOR DRIBBLING, SHIELDING AND 1 V 1

It is very important that all players learn to feel comfortable possessing the ball in a game. Players should not be scared to hold on to the ball or attack with it. This is a philosophy that needs to be preached at the first practice of the season and maintained throughout the season. Coaches need to develop each 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 third of the field.

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 swinging 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.

COACHING POINTS FOR SHIELDING

- Stand sideways (at a right angle) to the defender with the shoulder closest to the defender leaning into the defender. Lean into the defender, do not simply stand up straight.
- 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 foot nearer to the defender when shielding the ball.
- The head must be up in order to see what the defender is doing and also to see where any teammates might be 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 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 bodies 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 within playing distance of 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.
- Step towards the ball and place the non-tackling foot next to the ball.
- Crouch down to lower the center of gravity.
- Use the inside of the 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 that the ball does not roll over your foot.
- Move the lead shoulder forward powerfully as the foot strikes the ball.

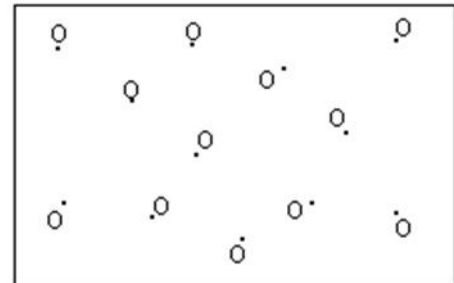
COACHING POINTS FOR THE POKE TACKLE

- Poke the ball with the front foot (the foot closest to the ball). The player's body weight should be on the back foot, ready to spring forward.
- Poke the ball at an angle (diagonal) forward and move the body weight forward to gain possession. Try to avoid poking the ball into the opponent's legs.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 - Mark out a playing area about 25 - 30 yards wide. All players should be inside the grid, with their ball. Briefly demonstrate several basic moves of dribbling (inside of the foot, outside of the foot 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 to serve as a demonstrator.

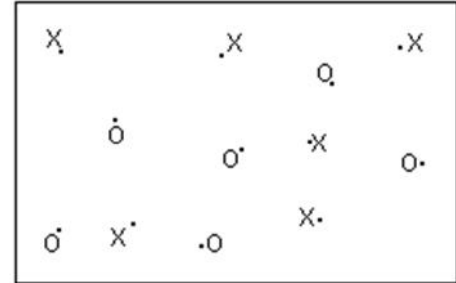
Have the players dribble freely inside the grid for awhile, using all the different surfaces of the foot. Encourage the players to keep their heads up to avoid collisions with other players and to see where they are going. Ask them to swing their hips hard when changing direction with the ball. Practice all of the different Dribbling moves both left footed and right footed.



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 stationary white shirt players, one at a time.

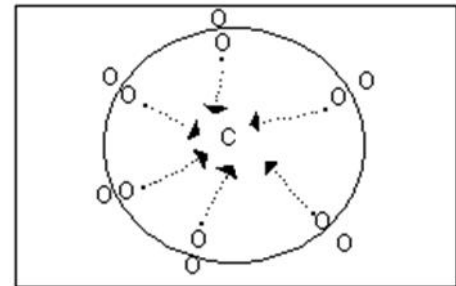
Challenge the players to dribble around as many players as possible in 45 seconds and then ask each player how many players he dribbled around. Let both teams try this several times.



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

Activity 4 - Divide players into groups of two with each pair using 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 activity. 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.

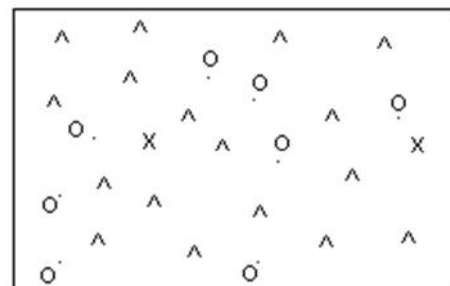


There are many variations that can be done with this activity:

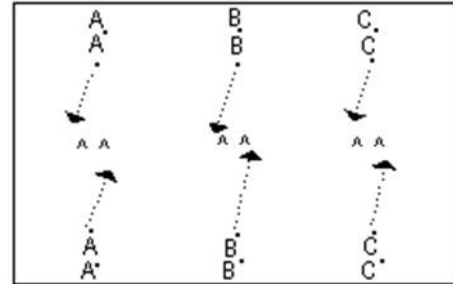
- Have the players dribble the ball left footed (clockwise) around the coach one time and right footed (counter clockwise) the second time around.
- Have the coach walk around in the circle to force players to look up and change their direction.
- Allow the players to kick the other players' soccer balls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

Activity 5 - 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.

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



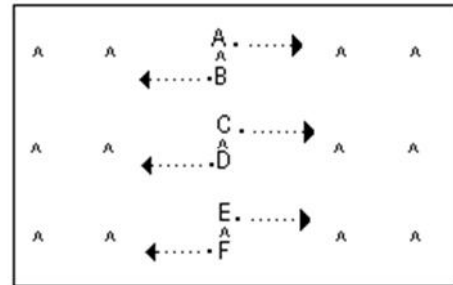
Activity 6 - Divide players into groups of about 4 players as shown below. Two players in each group are on one side of a cone or object and two others are on the opposite side. Each player should have his own soccer ball.



The first player on each side of the cone starts dribbling at the same time and does a specific dribbling move as dictated by the coach. The move should be done by each player in the exact same way and same manner so that the two players do not run into each other. Once done, the next two players go, again starting at the same time as his partner.

After about two minutes, the coach should stop the activity and specify a different move. The coach should also be sure to have the players do each dribbling move left footed and right footed.

Activity 7 - This activity can be done as a competition between two players or as a format for having players work on their dribbling skills.

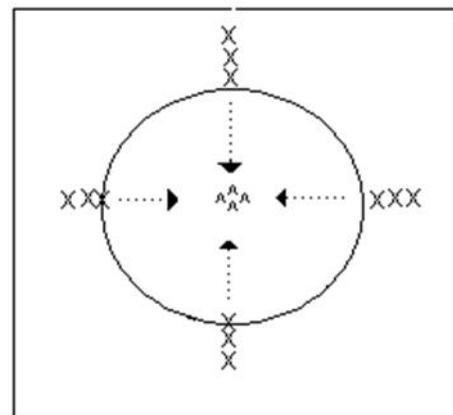


For every two players, there is a set of five cones. The two players start at the middle cone but are facing opposite directions. On command, they will dribble to the first cone, positioned about five yards away. They will perform a dribbling move specified by their coach. They will then continue to the second cone which is another five yards away. They then return back to their original cone, performing the same move on the same two cones on their way back.

The coach can also have the players continue on to the opposite two cones and perform the same dribbling move if desired.

If this is done as a competition for speed, be sure the players are still doing the designated move properly at each cone. Have the “winner” of each race move up the ladder to a different starting cone while the “loser” of each race moves down the ladder to a different starting cone.

Activity 8 - Have all players positioned at the edge of the center circle or a similar circle with a radius of about 10 yards. There are four starting spots for the players. Position a few cones together in the middle of the circle. On command, the first player from each of the four groups dribbles at the cones in the middle. When they reach the cones, they each do the same dribbling move, faking to the left and then dribbling to the right. They then dribble to the end of the line that was to the right of them. Be sure each group of four starts at the same time.



Next, the players should do the same dribbling move as before, but fake to the right and then dribble to the end of the line that was to the left of them. After the players have cycled back to their original cone, the coach should specify a different dribbling move to perform.

INDIVIDUAL KILLER

SETUP

Using cones, set up a playing area 25 yards square. All players on the team are inside the playing area and have their own ball.

RULES OF THE GAME

Each player dribbles his ball around, inside the grid. They also try to kick away other players' soccer balls while maintaining control of their ball. 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 task," such as ten ball taps or three juggles, before returning to the game. A player may not kick another player's ball away unless that player has possession of his own ball.

COACHING POINTS

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 provide players with a way 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.

Remind the players to use proper shielding technique when they are under pressure from a defender. If needed, briefly stop play and review the coaching points of shielding.

VARIATION

Add one or more players who do not have a ball to the playing area. Their job is simply to knock soccer balls away from the other players. The coaches could also walk around inside the playing area and knock away soccer balls.

TEAM KILLER

SETUP

Using cones, set up a playing area 25 yards square. Divide the players into two teams. Place all the players inside the playing area, each with their own ball.

RULES OF THE GAME

Each player dribbles his ball inside the grid. Each player also tries to kick away the soccer balls of the players on the other team while maintaining possession of their own ball. They do not try to kick away the soccer balls of the players on their team. Players may not leave their ball unattended while kicking away an opponent's ball. When a player has his ball knocked out of the grid, he must immediately get his ball and do a "fun task," such as three juggles, before returning to the game. A player may not kick another player's ball out unless that player has possession of his own ball.

When the players get tired, stop the game and see which team has the most players inside the grid in possession of a ball. Require the losing team to do some type of "fun" task.

COACHING POINTS

Encourage players to gang up on the opponent's better players. This will challenge the better players to work harder since they will have to keep their ball away from two or three opponents.

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.

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.

Remind the players to use proper shielding technique when they are under pressure from a defender. If needed, briefly stop play and review the coaching points of shielding.

TAKEAWAY GAME

SETUP

Setup a square or rectangular grid about 25 yards on each side. Place all players inside the grid. Approximately half of the players in the grid have a soccer ball, the other players do not have a soccer ball.

RULES OF THE GAME

The players without a soccer ball try to steal a soccer ball from one of the players who does have a ball. When a player has his soccer ball taken away, he immediately tries to steal a ball from a different player in possession of a ball. A player who has just had his soccer ball taken away may not go after the player who took that ball away.

If a player is forced to dribble out of the grid, the defending player takes over possession of that ball and the player who just lost the ball must go find a different player to try to and take a ball from.

After a set amount of time, the coach stops play and tells the players to quickly pick up a ball. Those players who do not have a ball to pick up must do some type of "fun task," i.e., do three juggles with their ball. Give the players a moment to catch their breath, then start the game up again.

COACHING POINTS

Encourage the players that have soccer balls to try to not just possess the ball, but try to use creative dribbling skills to get behind any defender that is pressuring him.

Players without the ball must be encouraged to work hard and get a ball back as soon as possible. Do not let them play at less than 100% effort.

Defenders should be encouraged to double team players with a ball. If a defender sees a player shielding a ball from another defender, that defender should immediately go in and double team that ball.

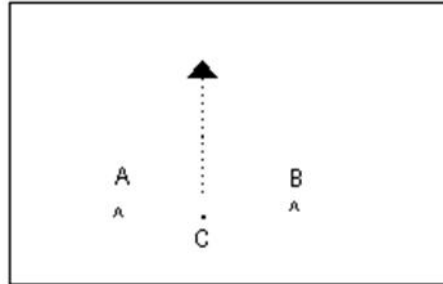
VARIATIONS

- Have the players without a ball each hold a shirt or pinnie. When a player steals a ball, he throws the shirt on the ground. The player who lost the ball must first pick up the shirt, then go after any player with a ball (including the player who just stole the ball from him).
- Divide the players into two teams. Have each team try to possess as many soccer balls as possible. Players who do not have a ball try to take a ball from a player on the opposite team. After a set amount of time, the coach stops the game and tells the players to quickly pick up a ball. The team in possession of the most soccer balls at that time wins. Be sure to use an odd number of soccer balls in this game so that there will be a "winning" team.

1 V 1 FETCH THE BALL

SETUP

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.



RULES OF THE GAME

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, then turn and dribble the ball back between the two cones.

The player not in possession of the ball 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.

COACHING POINTS

Before starting this activity, the coach should show a few moves that players can use to beat an opponent with a defender marking from behind.

The two players should angle their initial run to the ball so that they can get their body in front of their opponent. They should each try to get the shoulder nearest the opponent inside of the opponent to establish position.

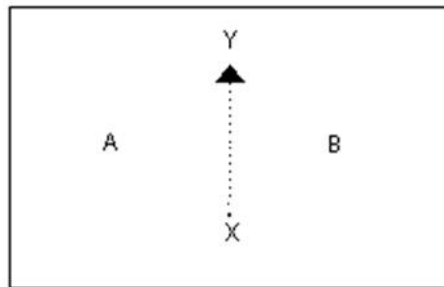
The player who does not get to the ball first should try to prevent the player with the ball from turning and facing the goal. Stay tight on him so that he cannot turn and attack the goal.

The player with the ball must try to turn and get past his opponent. He must find a way to be able to turn towards the goal while maintaining possession of the ball. He must be sure to keep the ball shielded from his opponent at all times.

1 V 1 TO HUMAN GOALS

SETUP

Divide the players into groups of four. Two of the players (A and B below) stand about 10 yards apart, facing each other with their legs spread apart quite wide. Their legs will serve as the goals for the other two players. These two players are stationary throughout the activity. The other two players (X and Y below) will be competing against each other in the activity. They start about five yards apart, equal distant from the two players who are serving as goals.



RULES OF THE GAME

The two players who are playing (X and Y) start by one touch passing the ball back and forth. When the coach says go, these two players start playing 1 v 1 against each other, each trying to dribble (not pass or shoot) the ball between either of the two other player's legs (A and B above). To score a goal, a player may dribble through the front or back of either goal. Players may attack either goal.

The ball is in play continuously for one minute, at which time the coach stops the game. After a player scores a goal, he must immediately try to get the ball and score another goal through either the same goal or the other goal. Play does not stop when a goal is scored.

After the game has ended, the players who served as the goals (A and B) play each other while the two players who just played (X and Y) now serve as the goals.

Continue to have the players alternate between being goals and players. Have the players switch with players from other groups so that each player plays a different opponent each time. Ask the players to keep track of their wins and losses. This will make them work a lot harder. After about 10 games, have the two players with the best records play against each other for the championship.

COACHING POINTS

Be sure that players serving as goals do not move their legs in or out to make the goals smaller or larger. Players serving as goals will sometimes try to make the goals larger for their friends and smaller for players they don't like as much. If one of the players serving as a goal should get knocked down, be sure he gets up right away.

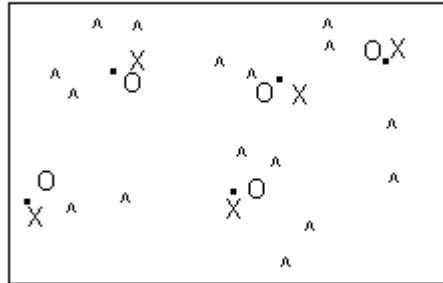
This game is excellent for getting players to learn to cut the ball hard and go in a different direction. If the defender has one of the goals closed off, the player with the ball should quickly change direction and attack the other goal.

Do not let each game go for more than a minute since this game is very physically demanding.

1 V 1 THROUGH CONES

SETUP

The coach lays down about a dozen pairs of cones on the field, each pair placed about four feet apart. The players are placed in groups of two, with each pair having one ball. Each pair of players may start anywhere in the playing area.



RULES OF THE GAME

Each pair of players start out by one touch passing the ball back and forth. When the coach tells the players to start play, the player with the ball keeps it and begins to play 1 v 1 against his partner. The player with the ball tries to dribble the ball under possession through as many different pairs of cones as possible. The player without the ball tries to steal the ball from his opponent and dribble through as many pairs of cones as possible.

Play is continuous for one minute. At that point, the coach yells stop. The player in each pair who scored the fewest goals in the game must do a fun punishment. The players then switch partners and play again.

COACHING POINTS

In this game, players will learn to work on their one vs. one dribbling skills. Players will learn to cut the ball, accelerate, decelerate, shield, etc. The defenders will have to work on winning the ball one vs. one from an opposing player.

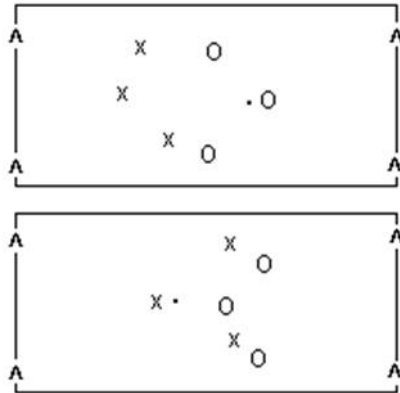
VARIATION

To maximize the effort of the players, make this activity a tournament. Have each player keep track of how many wins and losses they have as they play a series of one minute games against various opponents. Players generally will work harder if scores and / or records are kept in any activity.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - 1 V 1 TO ENDLINES

SETUP

Set up two fields about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide. Play two games of 3 v 3 with no goalies.



RULES OF THE GAME

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.

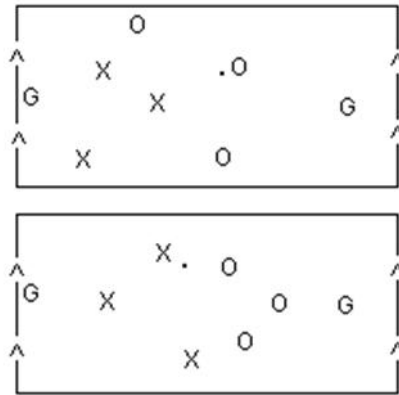
VARIATIONS

- Using cones, set up a 13 yard long goal on each end line. These goals are much wider than regular soccer goals. Require the players to dribble through the cones to score.
- 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 the ball, only dribble it. Demand that the players use their dribbling skills to beat their opponents. Do not let them merely get rid of the ball. This rule may be relaxed a bit by allowing a player to pass the ball in his offensive half of the field if he is double teamed by his opponents.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - 1 V 1 TO REGULAR GOALS

SETUP

Set up two small grids, side by side. Using bicycle flags or cones, set up a standard size goal on each end line of each grid. Play a regular 3 v 3 or 4 v 4 game. Each team has a goalie.



RULES OF THE GAME

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 earlier 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 whenever a ball goes out of play.

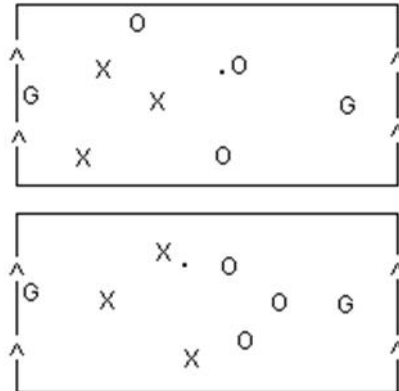
VARIATION

Only award one point for a player dribbling past an opponent if this was done in the offensive half of the field. Now, players are taught to play safer in the defensive half of the field and take risks in the offensive half of the field.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - 1 V 1 TO GOALS, NO PASSING

SETUP

Using bicycle flags or cones, set up a standard size goal on each end line. Play a regular 3 v 3 or 4 v 4 game. Each team has a goalie.



RULES OF THE GAME

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.

Goalkeepers may pass the ball if they are in their defensive half of the field. Goalies may dribble the ball down the field as well, but this is not a requirement. If a goalie dribbles the ball across the midfield line, he may no longer pass the ball and must go to goal. When that happens, the teammate closest to the goal must immediately run back to the goal and become the goalie for that team.

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.

VARIATIONS

- Only set the no passing rule in the offensive half of the field. Allow players to pass the ball in their defensive half of the field (less risk taking) but require them to dribble the ball and take risks in their offensive half of the field.
- Allow the field players to pass the ball backwards or square (sideways), but not forward. The ball may only be advanced up the field by players dribbling the ball.
- Allow a player to pass the ball if he is double teamed.

ACTIVITIES FOR PASSING AND RECEIVING

Activities emphasizing passing and receiving should use a high ball per player ratio so that the players will have a maximum number of touches on the ball. The previous section, which focused on dribbling, used a 1:1 ball per player ratio in many of the Fundamental Stage activities. For passing and receiving activities in the Fundamental Stage, a 1:2 ball per player ratio will be ideal.

COACHING POINTS FOR THE INSTEP (LACE) PASS

- This technique is very similar to the technique 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 leg is directly over the ball.
- The body should be leaning slightly over the ball.
- The ball is struck either on the equator or slightly above the equator. The ball should only be struck below the equator when trying to put the ball up in the air.
- Contact is made with the laces (top of the foot).
- 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.
- 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).

COACHING POINTS FOR THE 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. This will help to keep the ball on the ground, making it easier for the receiving player to control the ball.
- The kicking foot follows through the ball after the kick.

COACHING POINTS FOR THE OUTSIDE OF THE FOOT PASS

- This is a VERY advanced technique and should only be worked on by older players.
- Turn the toes of the kicking foot 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.

COACHING POINTS FOR RECEIVING PASSES ON THE GROUND

- 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. Be sure to withdraw the foot as the ball strikes it.
- When receiving the ball with the inside of the foot, keep the toe up to lock the ankle. When receiving the ball with the outside of the foot, keep the toe down to lock the ankle.
- Receive passes so that the ball is played slightly in the direction that the player wants to go. This is known as having a "positive first touch." This is best accomplished by angling the foot receiving the ball so that it will deflect in the desired direction.
- 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.
- If not under pressure, the player should receive the ball with the foot furthest from the player making the pass. The ball should be received "across the body" with an open stance. The ball should deflect off the player's foot in the direction that the player wants to attack. This is known as a "positive first touch."
- If the player receiving the ball is under pressure, the player should receive the ball with the foot furthest from the defender, in a closed stance. The ball should deflect off the player's foot backwards, away from the defender in such a way that the receiving player's body is positioned between the ball and the defender. This is known as a "negative first touch."
- The receiving player may also disguise the direction he wants to go with various body gestures. The player might position himself to appear as if he is going to take the ball in one direction, but at the last minute receive the ball so that it is played in a different direction.

COACHING POINTS FOR RECEIVING PASSES IN THE AIR

- Keep your eye on the ball.
- Get behind the ball as it arrives.
- Decide which surface to use (chest, top of the thigh, top of the foot, etc.)
- As the ball approaches, quickly look around to determine where you want to next play the ball.
- Withdraw the body part receiving the ball to cushion it. Do not present a stiff surface for the ball to be played with. Otherwise, the ball will bounce off the body, far away from the player.
- Move the ball from the landing area as soon as possible. Try to have it come down in the direction you want to play the ball if not under pressure. Otherwise, play the ball to a space where you can shield the ball from any opponent who is near.

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.

No matter how sound players are in the technical aspects of passing and receiving, they will not be able to successfully pass the ball under pressure of an opponent unless the receiving players are able to move into a space where they can receive a pass. Coaches need to coach not only the technical aspects of passing and receiving, but the tactical aspects of where players should be moving to so that they are able to receive passes.

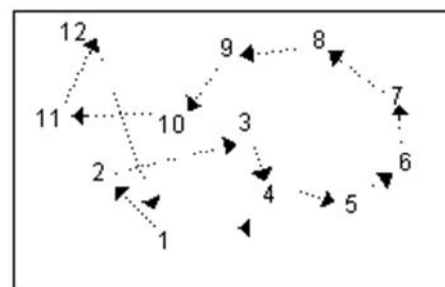
FUNDAMENTAL STAGE ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 - Divide 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 should be brought in to demonstrate during the practice. The outside of the foot pass should only be done if the coach feels that the players are able to successfully perform this technique.

Activity 2 - Set up several grids 15 yards square. Place three players in each grid. The players should be set up in a triangle. 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 often prove to be too difficult for most younger players.

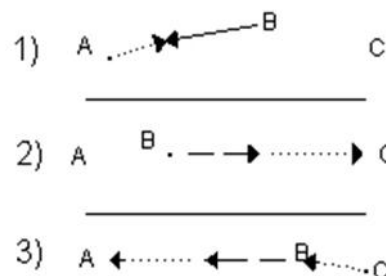
Activity 3 - Set up a grid 40 yards square. Give each player a number from 1 - 12. The players should jog around inside the grid. Player 1 passes to player 2 who passes to player 3 on up. The highest numbered player passes to player 1. Start the exercise with two balls (at the feet of players 1 and 6), 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.

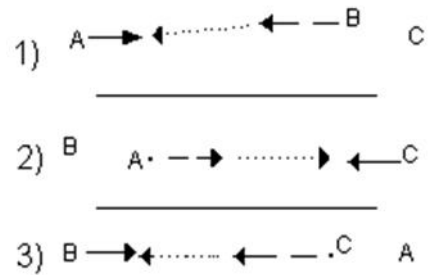
Advanced Variation: Instead of a player simply receiving a pass from the player before him, have the players combine for three passes. Thus, player 1 would pass to player 2. Player 2 would pass back to player 1 who would again pass the ball to player 2. After those three passes are completed, player 2 would look to play the ball to player 3. Similar to before, the two players would combine for three passes. If the players are advanced enough, they should make the second and third passes both be one touch passes when possible.

Activity 4 - 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.



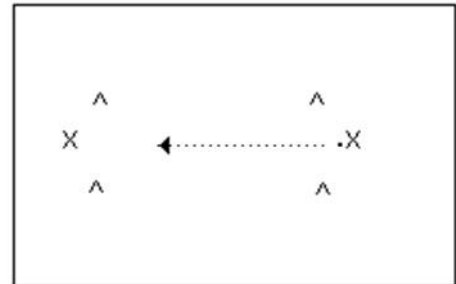
More advanced players should try to receive the ball facing sideways to the player passing the ball so that they can easily see what is in front of them, not just what is behind them. Receiving a ball in this manner is referred to as being “sideways on.” Encourage players to make a positive first touch (played in the direction they want to go).

Activity 5 - 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, passes the ball to player B and switches places with him. Players continue the rotation.



Activity 6 - "Short-Short-Long." Start with the same setup as the previous activity, 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.

Activity 7 - Set up a pair of cones, four yards apart. About 10 yards away, set up another pair of cones, also about four yards apart. Have one player standing just behind each of the pairs of cones. The two players take turns passing a ball back and forth. They must be able to pass the ball through the other player's cones. Have a contest to see which player can make the most successful passes in 10 tries. Be sure the players do this left footed and right footed.



Advanced players can try this activity by limiting the players to receiving the other player's pass with one touch and playing it back with one touch. They may not take a third touch on the ball each time it is played to them. More advanced players could play this one touch. The players should then see how many consecutive one touch passes they can make with the ball going through the cones.

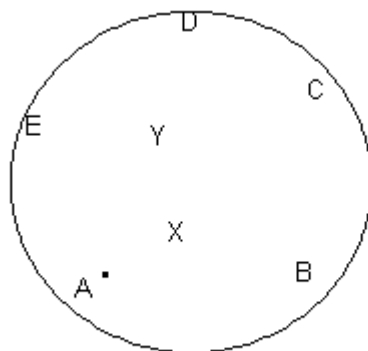
Variation: Add a third player to this activity. This player starts behind the player with the ball. Do this activity using the same setup as before, except now the player who passes the ball must run behind the player who he passed to. Have each player pass, then move to the opposite end of the grid. See how fast the three players can move the ball and get into position to receive the next pass.

5 V 2 GAME WITH VARIATIONS

One of the most common warmup activities is the game of "5 v 2." Many different components of the game of soccer can be taught in this game. Coaches can direct their coaching points towards a different topic each time the game is played. If desired, the coach can impose various conditions and / or restrictions in the 5 v 2 game to emphasize a particular component of the game of soccer.

SETUP

Five attacking players (A - E) form a circle 15-20 yards in radius. Two defenders (X and Y) start in the middle of the circle. This game could also be played in a square or rectangle.



RULES OF THE GAME

The attacking team passes the ball around, trying to keep the two defenders from gaining possession. Play continues until a defender gains possession of the ball, or the ball is played outside of the circle. Once play stops, one of the defenders switches with one of the attackers. In most cases, the attacker that caused play to stop goes in the circle while the defender that won the ball becomes an attacker. Some coaches prefer to have the defender who has been in the circle the longest become an attacker.

The attacking team should always look to see if they can "split the defenders" with a pass. This is similar to a through ball in the real game of soccer which beats two or more defenders.

The coach can make this into a competition if desired. See which group of five players can record the most points before the ball goes out of the playing area or is controlled by a defender. Teams get one point for every pass made, but award three points for a pass that goes between the two defenders. Change the players around each time possession is lost and see which group can record the highest number of points.

VARIATIONS

- More advanced teams can play the game 4 v 2.
- If the attacking team is advanced enough, limit them to a maximum of two touches on each possession. If an attacking player takes more than two touches, that player goes into the circle and takes the place of one of the defenders.
- Play the game with the requirement that the players must play either one or two touch. If a player takes more than two touches on the ball, the next attacker may only play the ball with one touch. This will require the attacking players to think at least one pass ahead.
- Another variation is to start each round of play with a throw in. This will require players to learn to either receive and control an air ball or one touch an air ball to a teammate.

- To add the element of counter-defending, require the attacking player who has his pass intercepted to immediately enter the circle and try to win the ball back from the two defenders. That player has 10 seconds to get the ball back from the two defenders and play it back to a teammate. If the attacker is able to win the ball back, he remains an attacking player. Otherwise, he switches with the defender who initially stole the ball.
- Modify the setup to have one attacking player inside the circle with the two defenders. The attacking players on the perimeter try to play the ball to their teammate inside the circle. The attacker inside the circle must try to get open for a pass. When he is able to receive a pass, he tries to turn and play the ball to a different teammate on the perimeter. He should only play the ball back to the teammate he received the ball from if he is unable to turn. Players on the outside only pass to their teammate inside the circle when he is open. Otherwise, they continue passing to the other perimeter players.

COACHING POINTS

The coach can teach many different components of the game of soccer in the 5 v 2 game, both offensively and defensively.

For the attacking team, the coach can make the following coaching points:

- Challenge the players to see the entire field. The player with the ball should first look to see if he can “split the defenders” with a through ball. If that pass is not on, the player with the ball must be able to see all other options, both to his left and to his right.
- If the receiving player is not under heavy pressure, he should receive the ball with his far foot and open his hips up to see the entire field. If the receiving player is under heavy pressure, he must close his stance and receive the ball with the near foot, using his body and other leg to shield the ball from the oncoming defender.
- Passes should be played on the ground as much as possible. Similarly, the player receiving the ball should be able to receive the ball without it popping up in the air. The receiving player should also try to receive the ball by touching the ball in the direction he wants to play the ball. This is called a “positive first touch.”
- The attacking players without the ball should constantly be moving along the perimeter of the circle so that they are in a good position to receive a pass. They should never be standing flat-footed. The player furthest from the ball should move to a position to receive a pass that splits the two defenders. The two players nearest the player with the ball must be sure to offer a viable option to the left and to the right of the player with the ball.

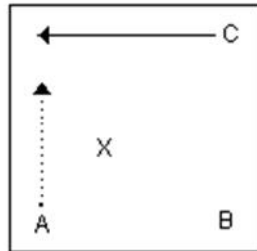
For the defending team, the coach can make the following coaching points:

- Immediate pressure must be applied by the first defender (the defender nearest the ball). The defense must always put pressure on the player with the ball so that the player with the ball has limited time and space to play the ball. The first defender should also approach the player with the ball at an angle to force the player with the ball to play it in a predictable direction (usually in the direction of the other defender). This will help the second defender to immediately put pressure on the player receiving the next pass.
- The second defender should always be in a position to support the first defender, similar to “the real game of soccer.” The second defender should be diagonally behind the first defender. When a pass is made, the second defender immediately assumes the role of the first defender, putting pressure on the ball and trying to channel the ball in the direction of the other defender. Similarly, the first defender must immediately assume the role of the second defender once a pass is made by quickly retreating to the middle of the circle, behind the other defender who is now applying pressure to the attacking player who just received the ball.
- The defenders should never be “flat” (side by side) since the player with the ball would be able to easily pass the ball forward, between the two defenders, to a teammate.

3 V 1 KEEPAWAY

SETUP

Set up a grid about 20 yards square. Place three attacking players inside the grid with one ball. Place one defensive player inside the grid.



RULES OF THE GAME

The three offensive players (A, B and C) try to make as many passes as possible inside the grid. Play continues until the defensive player (X) is able to get control of the ball, or until the ball goes out of play.

The coach can make the game more competitive by keeping score. See how many passes a team can make before the ball goes out of bounds or is controlled by the defender. Alternate teams, see which team of three can record the highest score.

COACHING POINTS

The two attacking players without the ball must move around so that they are never standing behind the defender. The player with the ball should always have an option to his left and to his right. Demand that the attacking players who don't have the ball get as wide as possible and position themselves so they are facing in towards the middle of the field when receiving the ball.

In the diagram above, player C must move to the left (into a passing lane) in order to support player A, who has the ball. If player C receives a pass from player A, then player B will have to immediately move to where player C originally was so that he is not standing behind the defender.

Be sure to not let the attacking players who don't have the ball stand behind the defender. Demand that they immediately move to the side of the grid so that the player with the ball has a passing option to both his left and to his right.

VARIATION

Higher level players can be limited to two touch play.

If the activity is not very difficult, require players to make all passes with their weak foot only.

2 V 2 V 2 KEEPAWAY

SETUP

Setup a rectangular or square grid about 30 yards on each side. Divide the players into three different teams of two players each.

RULES OF THE GAME

While there are three different teams (each with their own jersey color), the coach designates two teams to join up and play 4 v 2 against the other team.

After a set amount of time, the coach switches the teams so that a different color team is playing numbers down.

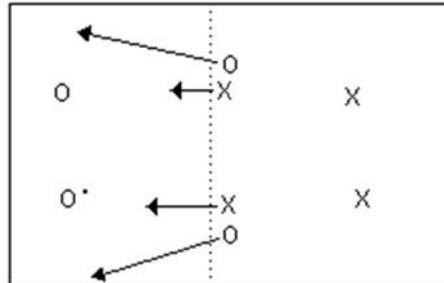
VARIATIONS

- This game can be played 3 v 3 v 3 or 4 v 4 v 4.
- When the team of four loses possession of the ball, a different color immediately becomes the team playing by themselves. This would be the color that caused possession of the ball to be lost. As an example, if the red and yellow teams are combining against the blue team and a player on the red team either loses possession to a blue team player or plays the ball out of bounds, the yellow and blue team immediately join forces and play 4 v 2 against the red team. The coach should carefully watch the game to settle arguments about which team lost possession of the ball and has to go on defense.
- Similar to above, but require the defending team to successfully make a pass before a different color has to become the defenders.
- Depending on the skill level of the teams, the team of four could be required to play two touch or even one touch. The team of two would still have unlimited touches.

2 V 2 + 2 KEEPAWAY

SETUP

Setup a rectangular field approximately 35 yards long and 20 yards wide with a midfield line. Each team has two players that must stay in their offensive half of the field and two players that may go on either side of the midfield line. Thus, when a team has possession of the ball in their half of the field, they have a 4 v 2 advantage.



RULES OF THE GAME

Each team tries to play keep away from the other team in their half of the field. Count how many passes each team can make in a set amount of time or play until one of the teams has accumulated a certain number of passes.

VARIATIONS

- For advanced players, limit each team to two touch in their offensive half of the field. Teams have unlimited touch in their defensive half of the field.
- Play until one of the teams can make 10 passes in a row.
- To make the game more difficult, have each team play with only one player who stays in the offensive half of the field. This will make the game 3 v 2 in each half of the field. The game could also be played 4 v 4 with one player per team not allowed over the midfield line (4 v 3).
- Make the grid slightly larger and have each team also have one player who must stay in the defensive half of the field at all times. Now it will be more difficult for teams to win the ball in their defensive half of the field and play it to one of their teammates in the offensive half of the field since that player might be marked. This will make the game 4 v 3 in each half of the field.

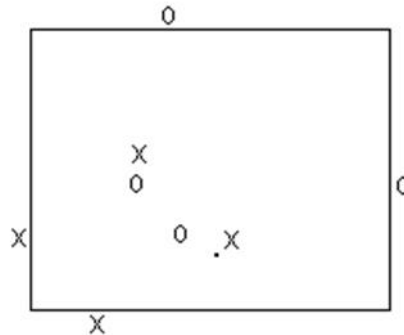
COACHING POINTS

The coach needs to determine an appropriate size grid as well as an appropriate number of players on each team and how many players may cross the midfield line.

2 V 2 WITH 4 PERIMETER PLAYERS

SETUP

Set up a rectangular playing area with each side about 20 yards long (the grid does not have to be a square). This activity needs eight players. Two players on each team are inside of the playing area. Each team also has two perimeter players that play on adjacent (not opposite) sides.



RULES OF THE GAME

Each team tries to maintain possession of the ball. Players may pass the ball to any of their three teammates. The perimeter players may pass the ball to each other. See which team can be the first team to make a certain number of passes in a row.

After a few minutes, rotate the inside players with the perimeter players.

COACHING POINTS

As you can see from the diagram, the team in possession of the ball will have a 4 v 2 advantage in one half of the field (if the field is divided diagonally) so each team will want to try and keep the ball in their half of the field as much as possible.

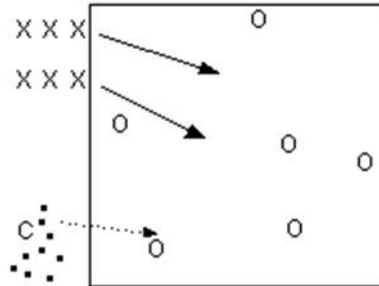
VARIATIONS

- More advanced teams should limit the perimeter players to one touch play so that they learn to "think one pass ahead" and know what their options are before they get the ball.
- An even more advanced version of this game is to require perimeter players to not only play one touch, but require them to pass the ball to a teammate other than the one who played them the ball.
- This game can also be played with 10 players. Each team would have two perimeter players and three players on the inside.

TIMED KEEPAWAY

SETUP

Divide the team up into approximately two equal size teams. Create a square grid that is an appropriate size for this activity.



RULES OF THE GAME

One team starts with all of their players inside the grid. The coach stands at the edge of the grid with a large supply of soccer balls. The coach also has a watch to time the activity. The other teams starts on the outside of the grid. In the diagram above, the offensive team has all six players inside the grid while the six defensive players stand in two lines at one corner of the grid.

On command, the coach plays a ball to one of the offensive players in the grid. The defensive team sends the first pair of players into the grid. They try to knock the ball out of the grid as quickly as possible. When this happens, the two defenders immediately leave the playing area and the coach plays a new ball to one of the offensive players. The second pair of defenders run in and try to knock the ball out of the grid. Again, when that happens, the two defenders immediately leave the grid, the coach plays a new ball to the offensive team and the third pair of defenders runs into the grid.

When a pair of defenders leaves the playing area, they go to the end of the defender lines. Play continues until all of the balls have been put in play and knocked out of the grid. When the last ball leaves the playing area, the coach stops his watch and calls out how much time the defending team took. The teams then switch roles with the new defensive team trying to knock the balls out of play in less time than the first group.

VARIATIONS

- The game could be played for a set amount of time. The object of the game is now for the defense to knock as many balls out of play as possible during that time frame. The offensive team tries to have as few new balls put into play during that time.
- Vary the number of attacking players and the number of defending players in the grid. Be sure to make the grid an appropriate size for the age and skill level of the players.

POSSESSION GAME, CHANGE TEAMS

SETUP

Set up a rectangular or square grid approximately 25 yards on each side. Place a team of four players in the grid. Two other players, each holding a shirt or pinnie in their hand are also in the grid.

RULES OF THE GAME

Players on the team of four try to maintain possession of the ball inside the grid. The two players holding shirts each try to get possession of the ball. If one of these players gets possession of the ball, he immediately drops the shirt he is holding and joins the team of four. The player who lost possession of the ball must immediately pick up the shirt from the ground and rejoin the game as a defender. The game does not stop when a defender gets possession of the ball.

If one of the offensive players knocks the ball out of bounds, the closest defender gives his shirt to the player who knocked the ball out of bounds and joins the offensive team.

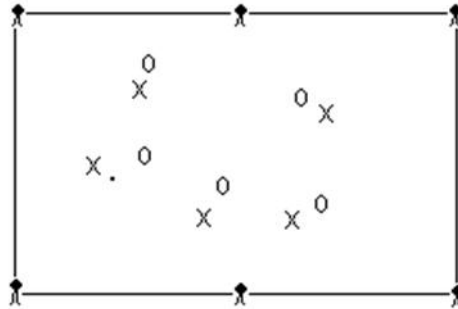
VARIATIONS

- More experienced players can play 3 v 2 or 4 v 3.
- Limit the number of touches for the attacking team to two touch.

KNOCK THE BALL OFF THE CONE

SETUP

Divide the team into two equal teams of about five players. Setup a playing area about 30 yards square. At each corner of the field, place a small cone with a soccer ball balanced on top of it. Place a similar ball on a cone at the middle of one or more of the playing area boundary lines.



RULES OF THE GAME

Each team tries to make five passes in a row. When they do, they then try to shoot the game ball at one of the balls placed on top of a cone. To score a point, a team must make at least five passes in a row, then knock a ball off of a cone. If they are unable to knock a ball off of a cone before they lose possession or the ball go out of bounds, they do not get a point.

COACHING POINTS

Have the players look to score as soon as they make the minimum number of passes. They can continue to pass, but need to immediately try to score as soon as they are able to make the required number of passes.

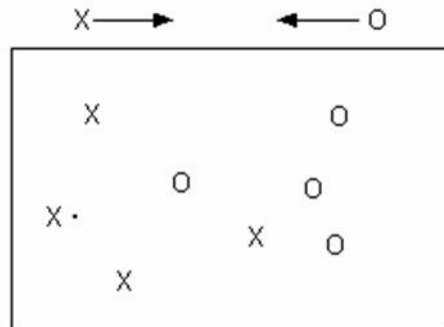
VARIATION

This variation will be a bit more difficult than the original game described above. Here, we require the team in possession to make EXACTLY the set number of passes and no more. Now the player receiving the fifth pass must try to score on his own. He may not pass to a teammate. It will be important now for the player receiving that last pass to be in a good position to score since he will not be able to use his teammates to help him. The player making the last pass should only pass to a player who is in a good position to score.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - 4 V 4 OVER AN ENDLINE

SETUP

Create two teams of four and place them in a rectangular grid approximately 40 yards long and 30 yards wide. Each team defends one end line and attacks the other end line.

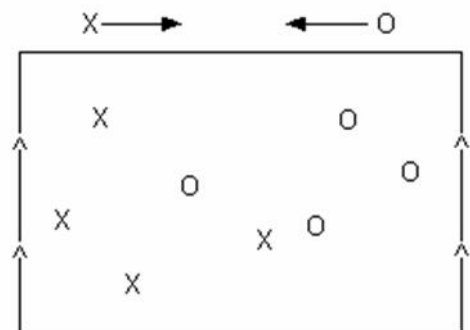


RULES OF THE GAME

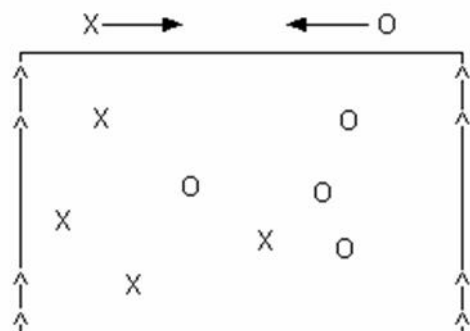
Each team tries to pass the ball up field. They may not dribble the ball forward (sideways dribbling or backwards dribbling may be allowed if the coach wants). To score, the team must pass the ball over the end line to a teammate who has run over to the other side of the end line. Merely kicking the ball over the end line, or failing to control the ball on the other side of the end line does not count. Play the game for a set length of time. The team with the most points at the end of time wins.

VARIATIONS

- On each end line, mark off a smaller area with cones. To score a point, a team must pass the ball through the cones from one player to another and maintain possession on the other side of the cones.



- To encourage teams to switch the point of attack, setup two small goals on each end line, one near each of the corners of the playing area. Now, if one goal is heavily defended, the attacking team should try to attack the other goal on that end line.



- Mark a midfield line and only allow players to dribble if they are in their defensive half of the field. Once they get into their offensive half of the field, they may only advance the ball by passing.
- Similar to above, but only allow the players to dribble if they are in their offensive half of the field. They may only pass the ball when they are in their defensive half of the field.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - PASS OR SHOOT

SETUP

Setup a rectangular playing field about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide. Place a standard size goal on each end line. Each team has three or more field players and one goalie.

RULES OF THE GAME

Play a regular soccer game, except the scoring is kept as five points for a goal and one point for every successful pass.

COACHING POINTS

Encourage the goalies to get into the offensive action, trying to make passes and receive passes as well. The team in possession of the ball should continue trying to get points by passing until they have a clear scoring opportunity. At that time, they should look to shoot the ball into the net.

VARIATION

Change the scoring to three points for a goal and one point for a team making three consecutive passes.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - PASSES BEFORE SHOOTING

SETUP

Setup a playing area with standard size goals on each end line. This game can be played 3 v 3 or higher. Each team should have one player designated as a goalie.

RULES OF THE GAME

Require teams to complete three consecutive passes before they are allowed to take a shot. In this game, the goalie on the team in possession must get up into the action during the passing.

COACHING POINT

Remind the goalie that even if the other team steals the ball, they cannot shoot it right away. The goalies should not simply stay back on their goal line.

VARIATION

The first time that a team tries to score, only require them to make one pass before trying to score. Once a team has scored a goal, require that team to make two consecutive passes before they are allowed to shoot again. After that team scores a second time, require them to make three consecutive passes before they are allowed to shoot. Each time a goal is scored, increment the number of passes that need to be made.

ACTIVITIES FOR SHOOTING AND GOALKEEPING

The one thing that soccer players of all ages like to do the most is score goals. The following activities will emphasize scoring goals (shooting) and preventing goals (goalkeeping).

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 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 knee of the kicking foot, as well as the hips, 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.

PHILOSOPHY OF PLAYING IN THE ATTACKING THIRD

Part of coaching shooting is to instill a mentality in the players to shoot whenever they have a chance of scoring. Too often, young players will opt to not shoot the ball when they have the opportunity. Some players will simply hold the ball while others will look to pass the ball when a shooting opportunity presents itself. It is important that players develop the confidence to shoot and not get upset when they do not score a goal. Players must realize that most shots do not result in a goal.

Coaches need to demand that players be able to release the ball quickly. In most cases, the player with the ball will be guarded by one, sometimes two players. Fundamental Stage activities will teach the players to learn how to properly shoot the ball. The Match Related Stage activities must be set up so that players will learn to quickly release the ball. This is where the players learn to develop speed of technique. Players must be able to quickly collect a pass and shoot it, before a defender has a chance to block the shot.

Coaches must not only emphasize proper shooting technique, but quick technique. Players must be given many opportunities to shoot using correct technique, under pressure of an opponent.

COACHING POINTS FOR GOALTENDING

When an opponent is about to shoot:

- The goalie's feet should be on the ground, shoulder distance apart. The goalie should be on the front part of his feet, not the heels.
- The knees should be slightly bent, ready to move.
- The goalie's body should be relaxed, not tense.
- The head is still, eyes focused on the ball.
- Arms should be positioned so that the elbows are slightly bent in front of the chest.
- Wrists should be in a slightly hyper-extended position with the fingers pointed diagonally upward.

There are three ways the a goalie should catch the ball, depending on where the shot is going.

BASKET CATCH (for low shots when the goalie can get behind the ball)

- Move the body to get behind the ball.
- Fingers are pointed down, palms facing the ball, pinky fingers almost touching each other.
- Bend the knees so that the bottom half of the ball is caught with the hands.
- Bring the ball up to the chest area with the arms pinning the ball to the chest.

CONTOUR CATCH (for shots at the middle of the body when the goalie can get behind the ball)

- Move the body to get behind the ball.
- Fingers are pointed down, palms facing the ball, pinky fingers almost touching each other.
- Catch the ball with the forearms, then the chest.
- Bring the ball into the chest area with the arms pinning the ball to the chest.

HIGH CATCH (for crossed balls and high balls that must be caught above the chest)

- Move the body to get behind the ball.
- Fingers are pointed up with the palms facing the ball. The thumbs should be almost touching each other. The index fingers should also almost be touching each other so the hands are behind the ball. The thumbs and index fingers form a diamond.
- Catch the top half of the ball.
- Bring the ball down to the chest area with the arms pinning the ball to the chest.

When an opponent is about to shoot, the goalie should learn to be well off the goal line, cutting down the angle that the shooter has. The goalie should always be positioned on a line between the ball and the exact middle of the goal. He should advance off the goal line as the opponent prepares to shoot, but not so far off the line that he the opponent can easily chip the ball over the goalkeeper's head.

When possible, the goalie should come out of his goal and smother the shot, just as the shooter is about to release the ball. This is especially the case on a breakaway. The goalie should run out and meet the opponent. If the opponent's dribble is too far in front of him, the goalie should run out and either grab the ball or cut down the angle so much that the shooter can only shoot the ball into the goalie's body.

Coaches need to emphasize that goalkeepers need to do a lot more than just stand between the goal posts and block shots. Goalkeepers should be taught to move around in the goal area. They should move to pickup any ball in the penalty area that they can get to, especially if an opponent is in the area. This part of goalkeeping is known as "shot prevention." Encourage goalies to quickly run out and pick up any ball that they can get to.

Goalies should also be ready to move outside of the penalty area and play the ball with their feet. This will most often occur when the ball is in the opponent's end of the field and one of the opponents booms the ball over everyone's heads. Rather than wait for the ball, the goalie should run out of the penalty area and play the ball with his feet to a teammate. When the ball is at the far end of the field, the goalie should be standing beyond the penalty area, ready to come off his line. By standing beyond the penalty area, the goalie has less distance to travel to get to a long ball.

Goalies should also be encouraged to call for a drop pass whenever a teammate has the ball under pressure and is facing his own goal. Rather than the defender trying to turn and beat his opponent (who he cannot see), the goalie should call for a drop pass, receive the pass with his feet and play it to another member of his team. (Note: after the defender plays the ball back, that defender should immediately run to the nearest sideline and offer the goalie the option of a return pass). The goalie should try to pass the ball to a teammate. He should only slam the ball downfield if he is under a lot of pressure.

When making saves, goalies should always try to move their body to get their body behind the ball. Saves should always be made with their hands. They should be discouraged from making kick saves. Encourage the goalies to move their entire body to the ball, not just move their arms and hands.

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 punt or 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. He should not attempt to dribble around an opponent since there are no teammates backing him up.

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 when there are opponents in that area of the field.

Diving For The Ball - Proper goalkeeping technique is very important when making a diving save, not only to give the goalie a better chance to make the save, but also to minimize the chance of injury. When making a diving save, the goalie should learn to land on his side, not on his stomach.

- For low shots, the goalie needs to get his near hand on the ball since it is the closest hand to the ball. The lower arm must be fully extended on tipped saves. If the goalie is going to catch the ball, he must get his lower hand behind the ball and get his upper hand on top of the ball to pin the ball to the ground after the save is made.
- For high shots to his side, the goalie will need to get up in the air and use the hand on the opposite side of the ball since this will be the closest hand to the ball when he is up in the air. The arm must be fully extended to get to the ball. If the goalie is going to try to deflect the ball, he should try to get his palm to the ball, not just a fingers. He must try to forcefully re-direct the ball to the corner of the field. If the goalie is going to try to catch the ball, he should get the lower hand behind the ball and his upper hand on top of the ball. The ball should reach the ground first when the goalie is landing, to lessen the impact of the landing.

Learning goalkeeper technique is very important, not only to keep the ball out of the net, but also for safety reasons. Goalkeepers need to be taught the proper techniques to minimize injury. LMSC Travel Team goalies should be encouraged to attend the Travel Team goalie clinics offered during the fall and spring seasons. All goalkeepers, who are serious about becoming better goalkeepers, should look to attend at least one goalie camp a year. Teaching goalkeepers proper technique requires more than having them stop shots during practice. Coaches need to work 1 on 1 with goalies, serving them balls that are savable with proper technique. The coach needs to have them practice the various techniques over and over again. Do not allow them to use bad technique as this can result in injury and also create bad habits that will be hard to break later on.

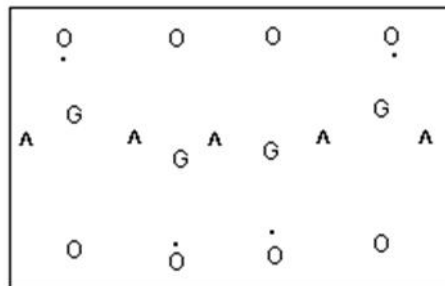
FUNDAMENTAL STAGE ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 - Set up a row of six road cones or bicycle flags, each spaced 21 feet apart (the length of a standard 8 v 8 goal). This will create five goals for the players to practice shooting. Divide the team into groups of three, each working at one of the 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.



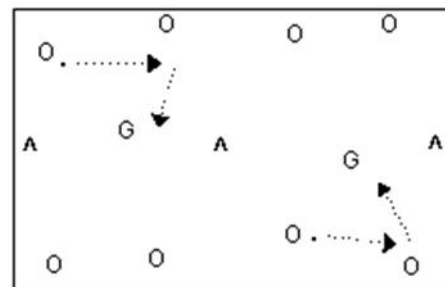
Progression: Instead of having the players shooting stationary balls, have them take several dribbles so that they are shooting a moving ball. Again, it is important that the players practice their shooting both **left footed and right footed**. Have them dribble directly at the goal and shoot from about 12 - 15 yards out.

Next, 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.

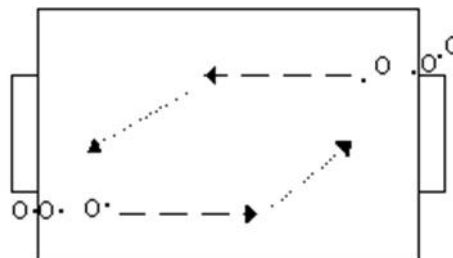
The coach could also have each player place a cone about 15 yards out from each goal. The shooter now pretends that the cone is a defender. He must now first use a dribbling move to beat the defender before taking a shot.

Progression - Now have the players shooting balls passed by a teammate. Two players now stand 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 a very important part of shooting.



Activity 2 - Set up two fields, each about 25 yards long. Using bicycle flags or cones, place a standard size 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.

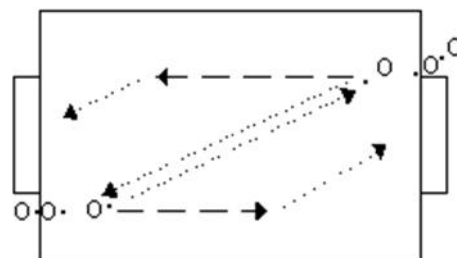


Encourage the players to shoot to the far post. They need to turn their non-kicking foot so that it is pointing towards the far goal post when shooting. The players need to get around the ball and swing their hips when shooting so they can get the ball across to the far post. Be sure the players are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

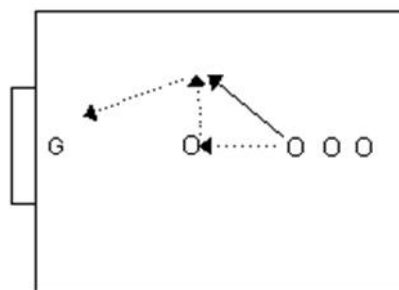
After awhile, switch the lines to the left post. Repeat the activity, except that the players dribble left footed and shoot left footed.

Be sure that the players always 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 3 - Same activity as above, except the first player in each line start off by chipping or driving the ball to the player at the front of the opposite line. These two players must then quickly receive the ball (with the first touch being played in the proper direction), take a few dribbles and shoot the ball. After shooting, the players go to the end of the opposite line and the next two players serve their balls to the opposite line.



Activity 4 - 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 each 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 the ball on the run.



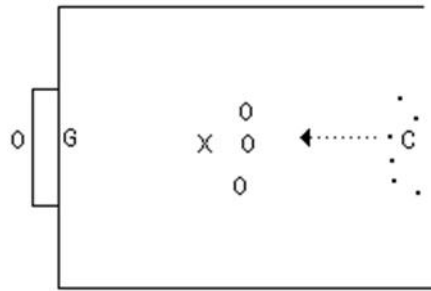
As a variation for advanced players, require that the player first-time the shot (shoot without first controlling the ball). If the pass is not accurate, the player may take an extra touch to control the ball.

Note: Be sure to have two or three groups working on this activity 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.

1 V 1 TURN TO GOAL

SETUP

The coach stands 30 yards from a goal with a large supply of balls. Three attacking players stand 15 yards in front of the coach. The goal is defended by a goalie and one field player. A sixth player stands behind the goal, retrieving balls.



RULES OF THE GAME

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. Play continues until either the goalie or defender gains possession of the ball or the ball goes out of bounds. At that time, the coach immediately serves another ball to one of the other attackers who is open. The coach continuously serves balls to one of the attacking players 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 game is strictly a 1 v 1 game. The two attackers without the ball do not take part in that part of the game.

The player standing behind the goal should try to return as many balls as possible to the coach while play is going on. Be sure that player does not return the balls in a way that would interfere with the play taking place on the field.

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.

COACHING POINTS

Encourage the attacking player to quickly turn and shoot. He must try to release the ball as fast as possible, before the defender can block his shot.

Players should know where the goal is before they shoot. That way, when they get the ball, they do not have to look up to see where to shoot. They should focus their eyes on the ball so that they strike it properly. Be sure the players are looking at the ball, not the goal, when they strike the ball.

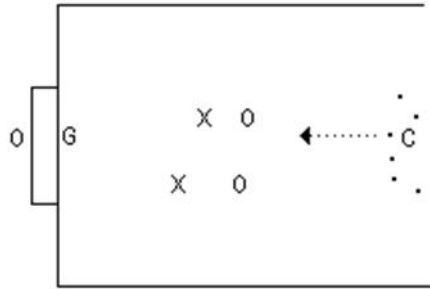
VARIATION

Place three or four players in the goal mouth. One player starts as the defender. Now, when a player takes a shot on goal, he becomes the defender for the next ball that is put into play.

2 V 2 TO ONE GOAL

SETUP

Setup several 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.



RULES OF THE GAME

Each team tries to score on the same goal while preventing the other team from scoring on the 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 goalie makes a save, he should return the ball to the coach and a new ball is put into play.

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.

VARIATION

Play 3 v 3 or more, depending on the number of players at practice. If there are a lot of players, be sure to set up two fields for this activity.

COACHING POINTS

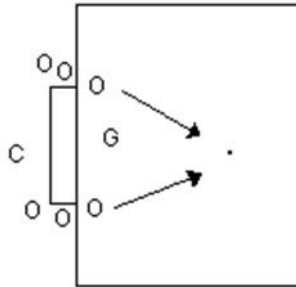
Encourage the attacking player to quickly turn and shoot. Players must try to release the ball as fast as possible, before the defender can block the shot.

Players should know where the goal is before they shoot. That way, when they get the ball, they do not have to look up to see where to shoot. They can focus their eyes on the ball so that they strike it properly. Be sure the players are looking at the ball, not the goal when they strike the ball.

1 V 1 FROM THE GOALPOSTS

SETUP

Have two or three players stand in a 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.



RULES OF THE GAME

When the coach throws out a ball, the first player in each line runs onto the field, tries to control the ball, turn and shoot while preventing his opponent from doing the same. After a goal is scored, or the ball has gone out of play, the coach serves another ball to the next two players. Make the player who did NOT take the shot retrieve the ball.

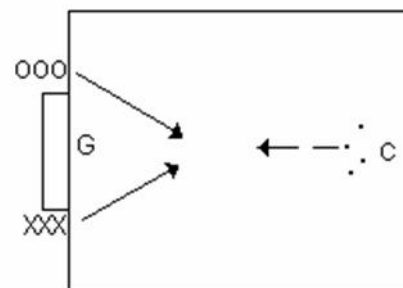
COACHING POINTS

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 activity 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.

VARIATIONS

- The coach calls out a number before throwing out the ball. That number of players will come out from each goal 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 and 3 v 3 games. After the play is over, players go back to the end of their line.
- 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.

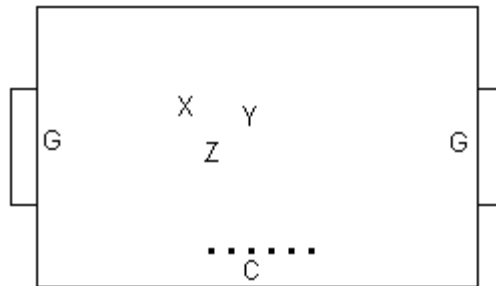
- Instead of serving the ball from the goal, have the coach stand about 30 yards up the field. Now the players must receive a ball that is coming towards them. It is important that the players move to the ball at top speed and try to get their body positioned in a way that will prevent their opponent from getting the ball.



RAPID FIRE SHOOTING

SETUP

Setup two goals, about 25 yards apart, each with a goalie defending each goal. Three players are on the field. The coach is off to the side of the field with a large supply of soccer balls.



RULES OF THE GAME

The coach serves a ball onto the field. The three players compete for the ball and try to score on either goal. The players without the ball each try to take the ball away and score themselves.

Play stops as soon as the ball goes out of play or one of the goalies gets possession of the ball. If the goalie gets possession of the ball, he returns it to the coach. As soon as play stops, the players quickly return to the middle of the field and the coach serves another ball into the middle.

The first player to score ten goals wins.

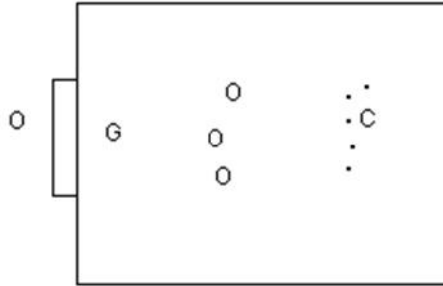
VARIATIONS

- In order to get the players to learn to quickly release the ball, award three points for a one touch goal (received directly from the coach), two points for a two touch goal and one point for a goal that requires three or more touches on the ball.
- This game can be modified to have three pairs of players on the field (one pair of red shirts, one pair of blue shirts and one pair of yellow shirts). Now the game is played 2 v 2 v 2.
- To make the game more difficult, have four players inside the area playing 1 v 1 v 1 v 1.

1 V 1 V 1 TURN AND SHOOT

SETUP

This shooting game involves one goal. Place a goalie in the goal. Three field players stand about 12 yards from the goal. The coach is about 25 yards away from the goal with a large supply of balls.



RULES OF THE GAME

The coach serves a ball into the playing area. The three field players compete for the ball. The player who gets to the ball first tries to turn and shoot. The other two players try to steal the ball from him and take a shot of their own.

The player with the ball will always be playing 1 v 2 in this game. When the ball goes out of bounds or the goalie gets possession, the play is over and the players return to the 12 yard line and wait for the next serve. The first player to score 8 goals is the winner.

VARIATION

Instead of playing this game 1 v 1 v 1, this game could be played with two teams of two (2 v 2).

COACHING POINTS

The most important thing to coach here is for the players to have a mentality to go to goal. They must be aggressive in getting to the ball before the other players and taking it to goal. They should not be afraid to take a shot and they should especially not be afraid to miss a shot.

Stress to the defending players to not let the player with the ball turn and face the goal.

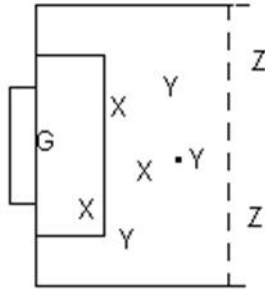
Challenge the attacking players to quickly make a move that will enable them to turn with the ball, face the goal and get a shot on goal.

Encourage the players to look for rebounds and score before either opponent can get to the ball.

HALF COURT GAME - VERSION 1

SETUP

This game is played with three teams of three players in front of one goal. Setup a line about 25 yards away from the goal. Two of the teams play 3 v 3 inside this area. The third group will have one of their players serve as the goalie. The other two players will stand just outside of the playing area.



RULES OF THE GAME

One team starts on the attack, the other team starts out on defense. The attacking team tries to score on the goal. The defensive team tries to win the ball and play it to one of the two players standing outside the playing area. When that happens, the two teams inside the playing area immediately exchange roles. The defending team becomes the attacking team and the attacking team becomes the defending team.

The player outside the playing area who receives the ball immediately passes the ball back into the area to the team now on the attack. That team tries to score while the other team tries to win the ball back and play it to one of the two players outside of the playing area.

If the goalie gets possession of the ball, he plays it to one of the defenders. The defending team tries to play the ball to one of the two players outside of the playing area.

If a shot goes out of bounds, the defending team takes possession of the ball and gets a free play back to the edge of the playing area.

After a set amount of time, the two perimeter players and the goalie switch places with one of the teams that was playing on the field.

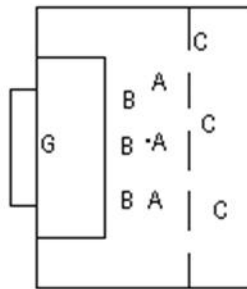
VARIATIONS

- If the coach wants to work on specific positions for each players, he can vary the game by having the defending team play on defense at all times and the attacking team play on offense at all times. Now, when the defending team wins the ball, they play it back to one of the perimeter players. The perimeter players play the ball back to the attacking team.
- To teach the players to switch the point of attack, require the perimeter player who receives the ball to quickly pass the ball to the other perimeter player. The second perimeter player then plays the ball to a member of the team that is about to go on the attack. Place the two perimeter players at least 20 yards apart.

HALF COURT GAME - VERSION 2

SETUP

This game is played with three teams of three players in front of one goal. Using cones, setup a line about 25 yards away from the goal. Two of the teams play 3 v 3 inside of the area between the goal line and the line of cones. The third line is positioned beyond the line of cones.



RULES OF THE GAME

Play starts with one of the teams (team A) inside the area attacking the goal. The other team inside the playing area (team B) defends the goal. If the defending team wins the ball, they try to play the ball to one of the players on the team outside of the playing area (team C). When that happens, the defending teams (team B) runs off the field, beyond the line of cones. The team that was outside of the line of cones (team C) then brings the ball into the playing area and tries to score. The team that had been on offense (team A) is now the defending team.

If a team scores a goal, they get to stay on the field and another ball is put in play for them.

If the goalie gets possession of the ball, he plays the ball to a member of the defending team (B) who try to play the ball up the field to the team outside of the playing area (team C). The team that was on attack must try to prevent them from playing the ball up the field.

COACHING POINT

The defending team may not simply kick the ball over the line of cones. They must play the ball to a specific player on the team waiting to receive the ball. Do not allow them to leave the playing area unless they make a successful pass to the third team.

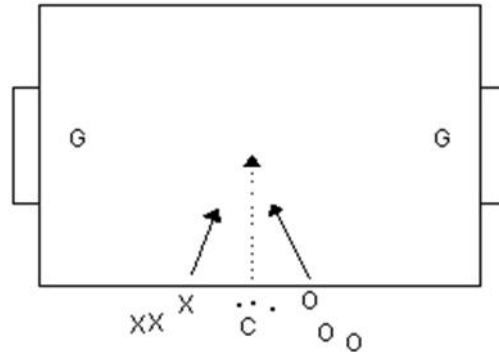
VARIATION

To incorporate wing play, have one or two of the players on the team outside of the playing area be stationed out on the wings. Now, when the defensive team plays the ball to one of the players outside of the playing area, the receiving player must strike a long ball to a teammate on one of the flanks. The team now on offense will now be starting their attack from a wing position.

1 V 1 FROM SIDELINES

SETUP

Set up one or more fields about 20 yards long with standard size goals on each end line. Each goal is defended by a goalie. 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.



RULES OF THE GAME

When the coach rolls out a ball, the first player in each line runs onto the field and tries to get the ball. The two players play 1 v 1, trying to score on the opposite goal from where they started.

If the player scores, he gets one point. 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. Alternatively, the coach may yell "same players on" and serve another ball to the players that are currently on the field.

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

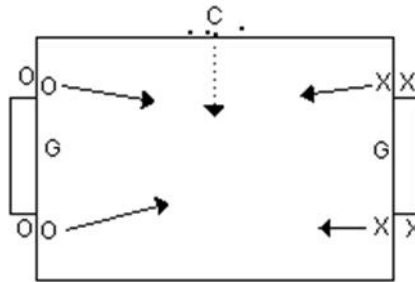
VARIATIONS

- The game can be played 2 v 2, with the first two players in each line coming out to play.
- Each round, the coach can call a number out. That number of players comes out from each line to play. Sometimes the coach will call out 1 for a 1 v 1 game, sometimes the coach will call out 2 for a 2 v 2 game. The coach could also call out 3 or 4 players on a team.
- Each round, the coach can call out two numbers. The first number indicates how many players from the first line come out. The second line indicates how many players from the second line comes out. Thus, if the coach calls "1, 2," one player will come out from the line to the coach's left and two players will come out from the line to the coach's right.

2 V 2 FROM ENDLINES

SETUP

Set up a field 20 yards long with a standard size goal on each end line. 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.



RULES OF THE GAME

The coach throws a ball onto the field. The first player at each post comes running onto the field to play 2 v 2. Services may be on the ground, bouncing or up in the air.

If the goalie makes a save, he distributes the ball to a player on his team and play continues. 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. Alternatively, if the ball goes out of play, the coach may yell "same players on" and serve another ball to the players currently on the field.

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.

COACHING POINTS

While this is a shooting game, coaches can teach the concepts of the first defender and the second defender. The defender closest to the player with the ball (called the "first defender") should put pressure on the ball and slow down the attack. The defender away from the ball (called the "second defender") should position himself diagonally behind the first defender. The second defender should be able to guard the second attacker (the teammate of the player with the ball) and also be able to pick up the player with the ball if he gets by the first defender.

It is up to the coach as to whether to allow the goalies to get up into the attack when their team has possession of the ball.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - SHORT FIELD GAME

SETUP

Setup a field only about 20 - 25 yards long with plenty of width (at least 40 yards) and regular size goals on each end line. Each team also has a goalie and three field players. Add one or two neutral players. Be sure there is a large supply of balls. Place all extra balls inside of each goal so that the goalies can retrieve another ball whenever a shot goes over the end line.

RULES OF THE GAME

Play a regular game, but encourage players to shoot at every opportunity. Be sure the players do not waste time chasing balls that go over the end line. Instead, have the goalie put a new ball in play right away in order to maximize playing time.

Using at least one neutral player and having a very short field will ensure that there are a lot of shots taken throughout the game. Having at least one neutral player gives the players plenty of chances to take shots.

VARIATIONS

- Instead of having one neutral player in the middle, have a neutral player play out on each flank. When one of the neutral players receives the ball, he either serves it to a member of the team that passed him the ball or serves it into the goal mouth that they are attacking.
- Coaches can be creative in their scoring. One way of keeping score would be to award five points for a goal, three points for a shot on goal that the goalie cannot catch and one point for all other shots. In addition, the coach could award double points for all weak footed shots.

COACHING POINTS

It is vital that players always look to shoot first. Be sure that the players recognize all shooting opportunities and take shots whenever they have a chance to score.

Be sure that the defenders work hard at all times so that the attacking players face realistic game pressure. It is important that attacking players face real game-like pressure when working on their shooting skills. Otherwise, they will not be able to handle this type of pressure in a real game.

Encourage players to go 1 v 1 in order to get a shot. In regular games, teams often have to play numbers down in the attacking third of the field so encourage them to get shots off even when under pressure of one or more opponents.

ACTIVITIES FOR HEADING AND RECEIVING AIR BALLS

In the game of 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 the 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. Players should NOT spend much time heading a ball, just enough time to learn how to do it properly.

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.

There are two basic ways to head a ball, defensive and offensive:

Defensive Heading (in front of a team's own goal)

- Clear the ball high, wide and far away from the goal.
- Head the bottom half of the ball so that the ball goes up in the air.
- Jump off of one foot, time your jump to get the ball at the highest possible point.

Offensive Heading (on scoring opportunities)

- Head the top half of the ball so that the ball goes down and not over the goal.
- Many head balls at goal are directed down to the ground, forcing the goalies to dive low.
- It is preferred to run into the penalty area to head the ball in, as opposed to standing in the penalty area, waiting for the ball. Time the run into the penalty area to get the ball while at full speed. This will provide maximum power and make it more difficult for an opponent to defend.

The following is a review of receiving air balls. This material was covered in the section on passing and receiving.

- Keep your eyes on the ball.
- Get behind the ball as it arrives.
- Decide which surface to use (chest, top of the thigh, top of the foot, etc.)
- As the ball approaches, quickly look around to determine where you want to next play the ball.
- Withdraw the body part receiving the ball in order to cushion it.

Move the ball away from the landing area as soon as possible. Try to have it come down in the direction you want to play the ball if not under pressure. Otherwise, play the ball to a space where you can shield the ball from any opponent who is near.

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE ACTIVITIES

HEADING ACTIVITIES

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 the ball. 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 controls the ball, picks it up and repeats the activity, heading the ball back to the first player. Encourage players to jump up and use their neck, legs and lower back muscles to propel the ball. Be sure to move the head forward, not up and down.

This activity should be done for both offensive heading (head the ball down to goal) and defensive heading (cleared high, wide and far).

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 controls the ball, then picks it up and throws it underhanded to the first player who heads it to the second player. Repeat.

Note: In all the activities 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 players into groups of three. Have one player stand right behind another player. The third player stands five yards away, facing the two other players. He throws the ball underhanded, just over the near player. The third player, standing just behind him, jumps up, over the passive defender in front of him, and heads the ball back to the server. Repeat several times, then switch roles. This activity will help players learn to head the ball when they are near an opponent.

ACTIVITIES FOR RECEIVING BALLS IN THE AIR

Activity 5 - 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.

Note: 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 as the ball arrives to cushion the ball.

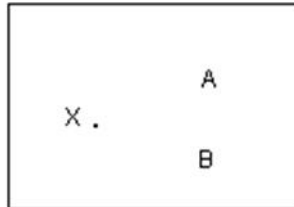
Repeat this activity, but have the receiving player control the ball with the instep (laces of the shoe). The receiving player should lift his foot high in the air to meet the ball and then retract the foot as the ball arrives to lessen the chance of the ball flying away.

on their juggling skills at home, away from practices.

1 V 1 AIR BALLS

SETUP

Players are divided into groups of three players, each group with one ball. Two players stand about five yards apart, facing the third player, who is holding the ball in his hands.



RULES OF THE GAME

The player with the ball throws it up in the air, 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.

Vary the types of services. Not all balls have to be served directly between the players. Some can be played over their heads, some to one side, etc. The objective is to create a friendly competition for the kids to receive air balls under pressure of an opponent.

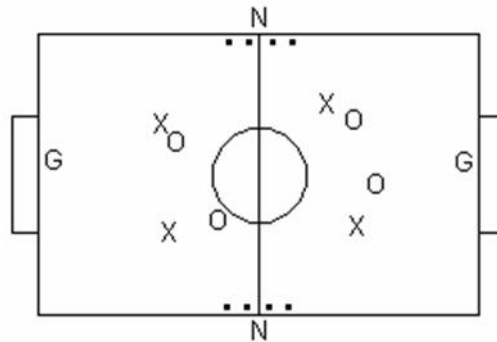
VARIATION

Using a similar setup as above, allow the player who is able to fully control the ball to pick the ball up and become the server for the next round of play. Each time, the player getting full control of the ball gets to serve the ball to the other two players.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - AIR BALL GAME

SETUP

Setup a rectangular field for a small sided game. Place one neutral player on each sideline, each with a large supply of soccer balls.



RULES OF THE GAME

Regular rules except that whenever the ball goes out of play, the neutral player on the opposite side of the field immediately serves a different ball into the field of play. Since the ball will be served from the opposite sideline, players will get a lot of practice serving long balls and controlling long air balls. The neutral players are not to play the ball to any specific player on the field.

ACTIVITIES FOR 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 played from the wings into the goals. This chapter will introduce the players to the concepts of wing play and crosses.

COACHING POINTS FOR WING PLAY AND CROSSES

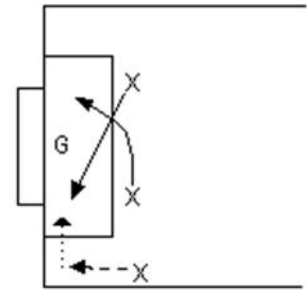
- On crosses from the right wing, the dribble and cross should both be made with the right foot. On crosses from the left wing, the dribble and cross should both be made with the left foot. Players should dribble with the foot closest to the side line so that they can use their other leg to shield the ball if a defender approaches. The serve should be with the furthest foot from the goal so that the player can use his hips and body to swing around the ball and get maximum power.
- Crosses should be played across the goalmouth, just out of reach of 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. This will help the player to swing his body in such a way that the ball will stay in the field of play and not go over the end line.
- 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 have his last touch before serving the ball be 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 so that the goalie will not have enough time to get to the ball and so that the player receiving the crossed ball will not have to supply any power when he redirects the ball towards the goal. The serve should be made just like a shot, only wide of the goal. Sometimes a cross can be played over the goalies head (half chipped, half driven) for a teammate on the far side to run onto.
- Crosses can be made from along the goal line (base line crosses) or further up the field, closer to the midfield line (early crosses), or anywhere in between.
- Base line crosses should be played backwards, away from the goalkeeper. They should be played along the ground to a teammate running into the goalmouth, about 6 - 8 yards from the goal line.
- Early crosses should be curved away from the goalkeeper, usually low on the ground for a teammate to run in on and control at speed for a breakaway. Early crosses are made from well beyond the penalty area and should arrive at an area where a teammate can get to the ball before the goalie.
- All activities should be practiced from both sides of the field. Always serve the ball with 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 so that they arrive in the goalmouth at the same time as the ball. If a player runs in too early, he should immediately run out of the goal mouth and then circle back in.

More advanced players should be taught to make their runs into the box at an angle or bending.

The player furthest from the ball should run in diagonally, across the goal mouth, in the direction of the near post.

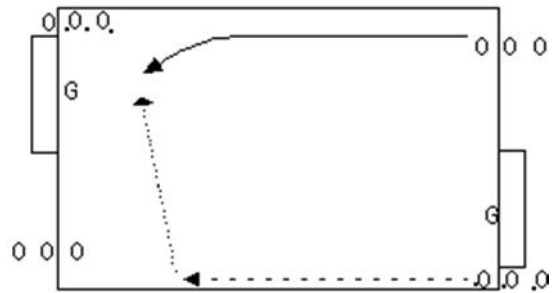
The player nearest the ball might want to bend away to the far post. This will force the defender marking him to turn away from the ball. The defender will have difficulty seeing both the ball and the man he is marking.

Runs that are made in a manner other than straight up and down the field are much more difficult to defend. The players on the defensive team will get confused and be pulled out of position, leaving space for other attackers to run into.



FUNDAMENTAL STAGE ACTIVITIES

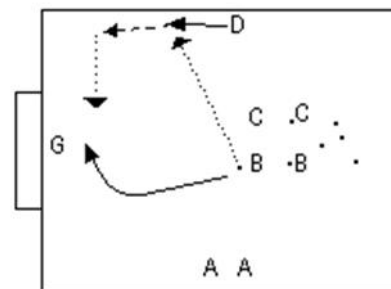
Activity 1 - Set up two goals 25 yards apart. Position the goals slightly off center, as shown in the diagram. At each goal, have a line of players at one goal post and a second line of players just inside the sideline. The first player in the line nearest the sideline dribbles a ball down the wing and 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).

Activity 2 - Create four lines of players, all standing about 25 yards away from a goal. Player B plays a long left footed pass to player D who receives the ball and speed dribbles down the wing. Player D then serves the ball right footed into the box to player B who has run into the box. Player B tries to one time the ball on goal.



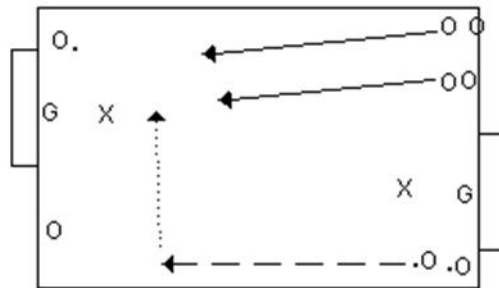
While this is taking place, the next players in the B and C lines are one touching a ball back and forth. As soon as the previous pair finish, player C plays a long right footed pass to player A who receives the ball and speed dribbles down the wing. Player A then serves the ball left footed into the box to player C who has run into the box. Repeat this activity with the players changing lines after each run down field.

Be sure to not have too many players waiting in line to play. Keep the players active at all times. This activity can be made competitive by having both player B and player C go into the box to get the crossed balls and having one defender play inside the area, trying to clear the ball away.

2 V 1 FROM CROSSED BALLS

SETUP

Set up two goals 25 yards apart. Position the goals slightly off center, as shown in the diagram. At each goal, have a line of players at one goal post and two lines of players on the opposite side, just inside the sideline. Each goal is defended by a goalie and one field player.



RULES OF THE GAME

The first player in the line nearest the sideline dribbles a ball down the wing and crosses it. The first player in the other two lines each run into the goal mouth for the crossed ball and try to score on the goalie and defender. If the defender or goalie win the ball, the play is over.

VARIATION

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 control in on the other side of the midfield line.

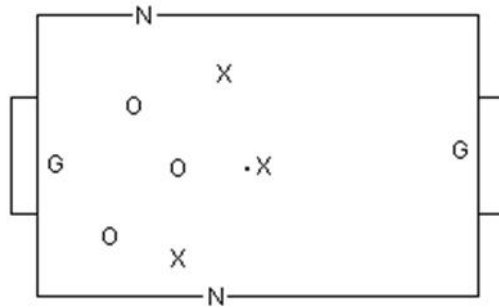
COACHING POINTS

Have the two players running in for the crossed balls vary their runs. The player furthest from the ball should run in fast, across the goal mouth, in front of the goalie, looking to play a ball at the near post. The player nearest the ball should bend his run out to the back post, looking for a ball played long, to the far post. Do not let the players run into the box and stand still waiting for the ball to arrive. They should always be moving in the box so that the defender has a difficult time marking them. If a player arrives in the penalty area before the ball is served, he should run out of the area and then come back in again.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE - TWO NEUTRAL WINGERS

SETUP

Play on a field about 30 yards long with a standard size goal on each end line. Each team has one goalie and three or four field players. Place one additional player on each sideline. These sideline players will play for whichever team has possession of the ball.



RULES OF THE GAME

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 the ball down his sideline and crosses the ball into the goal mouth. The defending team may not steal the ball from the sideline player. Once the cross is made, the ball is live.

VARIATIONS

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

SMALL SIDED PRACTICE GAMES

This section of the Lower Merion Soccer Club's *Coaches Manual For Our 9 - 13 Year Old Teams* contains a wide range of small sided games that can be used by coaches in practices. Each of these small sided games emphasize a particular aspect of soccer. The games are designed to be fun for the players and develop both their technical skills and their tactical skills.

Players will work harder in small sided activities when score is kept. It is important however that coaches not over-emphasize the scores and be aware that players with low scores might become upset. Player sometime get upset if he gets paired with a player or players who he considers to be of weaker talent. Coaches should work hard to ensure that players get a chance to play with and against all of the other players on a team in practice. Coaches should consider changing the teams on occasion, especially during water breaks.

Coaches should also remember to keep as many players active at all times as possible. There should not be a lot of players off the field, waiting to get into an activity. Instead, coaches should consider having two or more games going on at the same time, when appropriate.

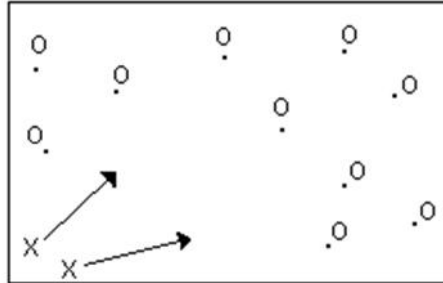
Coaches should also remember to keep games scaled down in order to maximize participation. Two simultaneous games of 3 v 3 will provide much better player development that one game of 6 v 6 since more players will be around a ball at all times and fewer players will be inactive on the field.



TEAM KNOCKOUT

SETUP

This is a fun game that is often used as a warmup activity at the beginning of practice. Setup a square or rectangular grid of roughly 25 yards by 25 yards. The size of the grid will vary, depending on the number of players involved in the game. Designate two or three players to be defenders (the two X players below). The defenders stand in one corner of the grid without soccer balls. The remaining players (the O players) all start inside the grid, each with a soccer ball.



RULES OF THE GAME

On command, the defenders go into the grid and try to knock all the soccer balls out of the grid. Once a soccer ball is knocked out, it stays out. When a player has his soccer ball knocked out, he remains inside the grid and offers support to his teammates.

The attacking players dribble or pass the remaining soccer balls inside the grid, trying to prevent the defenders from kicking the remaining balls out of the grid. Once all the soccer balls have been kicked out, play stops.

To make the game more exciting, the coach should time how long it takes each set of defenders to knock all the balls out of the grid. Challenge each successive set of defenders to knock the balls out in less time than the fastest time recorded.

COACHING POINTS

Emphasize to the players that this game starts out as a dribbling game, but evolves into a passing game. Be sure that when a player has his ball knocked out, he stays inside the grid and offers passing options to the players with soccer balls.

VARIATIONS

Older, more skilled teams will need more defenders inside the playing area. Also, the playing area should be made much smaller to force players on the offensive team to work harder.

CLEAR THE HOUSE

SETUP

Setup a square or rectangular grid about 25 yards on each side. Place approximately 60% of the players inside the grid, each with a soccer ball. The remaining players wear pinnies and do not have a soccer ball. They start at one corner of the grid.

RULES OF THE GAME

On command from the coach, the players in pinnies run into the grid and try to kick out as many soccer balls as possible. Players with a soccer ball try to prevent the defending players from knocking their ball out of the grid. If their ball is knocked out of the grid, they must quickly get the ball, return to the grid and resume dribbling. The defending players try to keep as many balls out of the grid as possible. After a fixed amount of time, the coach stops play and counts how many players are currently in the grid with a soccer ball. The next group of defenders tries to better that mark.

VARIATION

When a player has his ball knocked out of the grid, the player must do some type of “fun punishment” before being allowed back into the grid. This might be five ball touches or three juggles, depending on the age and skill level of the players.

KEEPAWAY WITH A KEEPER

This is a fun warmup game that gets field players involved as well as your goalie(s).

SETUP

Setup a square or rectangular grid. Divide the players into two equal teams. Place one or more goalies in the grid as neutral players.

RULES OF THE GAME

The two teams try to play keep away against each other. Either team may also pass the ball to the goalie. The goalie tries to control the ball (preferably with his hands) and distribute the ball to a member of the team that just passed the ball to him.

COACHING POINTS

The field players should try to play the ball on the ground to each other whenever possible. Passes to the goalie however should be varied to get the goalie used to different types of shots that he would see in a game. Players can chip the ball to the goalie, drive the ball high or low, etc.

Be sure that the goalies use proper goalkeeper techniques when playing. The goalies should be sure to have their feet firmly planted on the ground when a field player is about to play the ball to him. Goalies should not be moving their feet when a field player is about to play a ball to him. The keeper should be standing with both feet on the ground, body weight slightly forward.

VARIATIONS

- Teams with two goalies have a choice in how to set up the activity. Both goalies can be asked to play as neutral players, similar to above. Alternatively, one goalie could play specifically for one team and the other goalie specifically for the other team. Both goalies should be moving around, trying to get into a position to receive a pass.
- Require the goalie(s) to distribute the ball in the air to the player on the team in possession who is furthest away from him. This will help the field players to practice receiving air balls.

MAN UP / MAN DOWN

SETUP

Setup a regular small sided game with one team having one more player than the other (i.e., 4 v 3). Have one team playing in colored pinnies, the other team playing in white shirts. Have a set of goals on each end line.

RULES OF THE GAME

When a goal is scored, the player who scored the goal immediately switches over to the other team. If he is on the shirt wearing pinnies, he takes the pinnie off and plays for the white team. If the player scoring is on the white team, he immediately runs off the field to get a pinnie and play for that team.

Throughout the game, when a team allows a goal, they will gain an extra player. But, when a team scores a goal, they will lose a player.

For a game that starts off 4 v 3, if the team of 4 scores, the game will switch to 3 v 4. If that team scores again, the game will change to 2 v 5. Most likely, that will quickly switch back to 3 v 4. The game is constantly changing numbers and each team will constantly be changing their tactics and approach to the game as the situation changes.

VARIATIONS

- If there is an even number of players, start the game with one player sitting out so that there will be an odd number of players in the game. When a goal is scored, the player who scored the goal comes off the field. The player who was not on the field comes onto the field and plays for the team that allowed the goal.
- Set up a game with even numbers (i.e., 4 v 4). Each time a player scores, he leaves the game and does not return. See which team can have all of their players leave the game first. Be sure that players not on the field of play are active. They can work on juggling, passing or some other skill. Coaches should not have the players sitting idle for any length of time.

PROTECT THE LEAD

SETUP

Setup a regular field for a small sided game. Each team has four or five field players plus a goalie.

RULES OF THE GAME

Begin the game as a regular small sided game with no special rules. When a team scores a goal, the opposite team is given a set amount of time to get a goal of their own. The team that scored the goal may not score another goal during that time. Their job is strictly to prevent the other team from getting the equalizer. Since the team that scored cannot score again, the goalie for the opposite team has no need to defend his goal. The goalie should move up and join the attack.

The team protecting the lead should try to get the ball away from their goal and maintain possession for as much time as possible.

The coach should periodically call out the amount of time remaining for the team to get the equalizer. If the team is unable to score in the specified amount of time, they have to do a fun punishment. If the team trying to score does get a goal within the specific time frame, both teams resume normal play until another goal is scored.

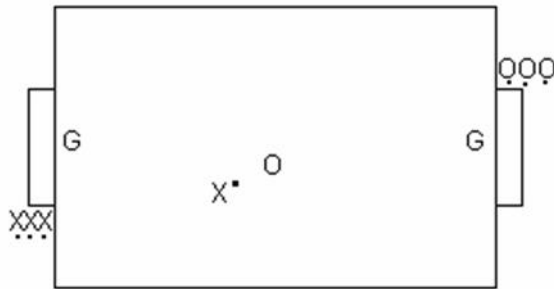
VARIATION

With each goal, increment the amount of time that the team protecting the lead must defend. The first time they score, give the opposing team just four minutes to get an equalizer. If they are able to defend successfully for four minutes, they must protect their lead for six minutes the next time they score. Keep building up the amount of time that they must defend, based on how many times they have been able to protect their lead.

1 V 1 TRANSITION

SETUP

Setup a pair of goals about 20 - 25 yards apart. Place half of the players on the right goal post of one goal, place the other half of the players on the right post of the other goal. Each player has a ball. The goals are each guarded by a goalie.



RULES OF THE GAME

Play starts with the first person in each line playing 1 v 1 to the goals. When a goal is scored, or the ball goes over the end line, the player at the front of the line on the goal line where the ball went out immediately dribbles his ball into play. The player who was defending that goal steps off the field and goes to the end of that line. The player just coming onto the field with the ball plays 1 v 1 against the player who just shot the ball over the end line.

In the above diagram, if X scores a goal, or shoots the ball his opponent's goal line, the next O player immediately dribbles another ball into play and goes 1 v 1 against the X player who just shot the ball. The player who just shot the ball must immediately recover and defend against the new player.

The next player in line should not wait until the shooter has a chance to recover. Instead, he plays his ball as soon as the previous ball has gone out of play. Players will quickly learn that even after they play the ball, they still have responsibilities on the field.

If the goalie makes a save, he immediately plays the ball to the player on his team and the game continues.

VARIATIONS

- The game can be played 2 v 2. Players not in the game form two lines on their goal line, one at each of the goal posts. The coach could require a team coming onto the field to make a minimum of one passes if desired.
- A neutral player can be added who stays on the field at all times.

COACHING POINTS

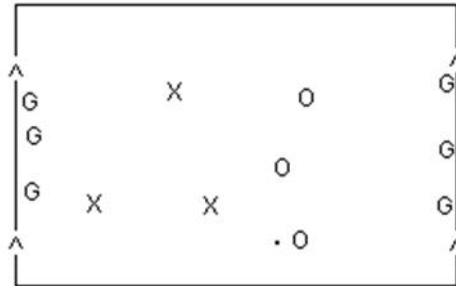
The trick to scoring is: How quickly can we get off a shot? Too many players take an extra touch before shooting or they feel that they must be completely around the defender. All that is needed is enough space to get the shot off. The player with the ball does NOT have to get past the defender to shoot.

Be sure that the player who just shot the ball over the end line immediately plays defense. He will need to close down the new attacker immediately.

BIG GOALS GAME

SETUP

Using corner flags or bicycle flags, set up a goal on each end line. Each goal should be about 12 yards long, much longer than a regulation size goal (8 yards long). Each team has six players. Three of the players on each team are field players, the other three players are goalies. All three goalies defend the very big goal on their end line. The goalies may only travel three yards off of their goal line, they may not travel beyond that area.



RULES OF THE GAME

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.

VARIATION

This game can also be played with two field players and two goalies on each team.

ONE AND DONE

SETUP

Divide the players into three equal teams. Each team wears 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.

RULES OF THE GAME

When a team allows a goal, they immediately come off the field and are replaced by the team that was off the field. Each time a team allows a goal, they come off the field and the team not on the field comes on to replace them. Continue replacing the team that allows a goal with the team that is currently off the field.

Instruct any team coming off the field to immediately retrieve all soccer balls that are not inside of the goals and place the balls in the goals.

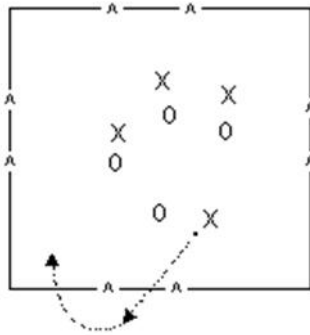
VARIATIONS

- 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.
- 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.

BARCELONA 4 V 4 TO FOUR GOALS GAME

SETUP

Create a field about 30 yards on each side. Two teams of four are inside the grid. Place a pair of cones on each of the four sidelines with the cones about five yards apart.



RULES OF THE GAME

Each team tries to possess the ball and dribble the ball through any of the four sets of cones to get a point. When a player is able to dribble through a set of cones, he immediately brings the ball back onto the field and starts to attack one of the other three sets of cones.

Defenders may not follow the player over the end line when a goal is scored.

Play continues as the player with the ball dribbles back into the field of play and tries to score on another goal. Teams may not score on the same goal two consecutive times, unless they have lost possession of the ball.

GAME TACTICS FOR 8 V 8 SOCCER

This section will address simple game tactics for 8 versus 8 soccer. These tactics should be touched upon, but not given too much time, during the season. The coaching focus 9 and 10 year old teams should be on skill development and simple tactics (1 v 1, 2 v 2, etc.) In this section, the players in the diagrams that are labeled as 'X' are the players on our team, the players labeled 'O' are the opponents.

SYSTEMS OF PLAY

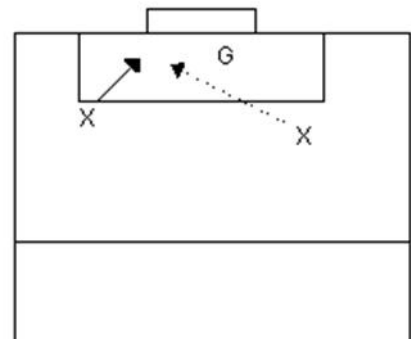
In regular 11 versus 11 soccer, there are many different systems of play and many different ways to play within each system. The most common alignments are the 4-3-3 (four defenders, three midfielders and three attackers) and the 4-4-2. Different teams will use different alignments, based upon the strengths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

For 8 versus 8 soccer, one of the most effective, yet simple setups, is a 2-3-2 formation (two defenders, three midfielders and two forwards). The following discussion on game tactics will assume that a team is using a simple 2-3-2 formation.

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. Players 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 when the defender is able to take the ball away.

When shooting, players should usually aim for the far post instead of the near post. When shooting to the far post, a shot that goes wide will sometimes stay in play for a teammate to redirect into the net. A shot wide of the far post often becomes an effective cross. 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 of 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 middle of the goalmouth.

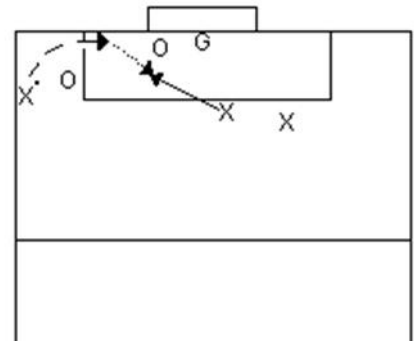


If a player has the ball well off to the side of the field and cannot get the ball into a position to shoot, the player should try to cross the ball. Crosses can be made on the ground or in the air.

The main point to stress for crosses is that the ball be played across the goalmouth, AWAY from the goalie. Players crossing the ball should serve the ball with the foot furthest away from the goal so that they can swing their body through the ball, in the direction of the goalmouth, with maximum power. 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.

Most crosses should be driven with maximum power so that the goalie does not have time to move off of his goal line and intercept the ball. Also, crosses driven with power make it easier for the receiving player to knock into the net since he only has to redirect it, not power it into the goal. Crosses taken from near the end line can be floated over the goalies head, to the far post, for a teammate to run onto and head into the goal. The player serving the ball should serve it far enough behind the goalie so that the goalie cannot turn around and catch it.

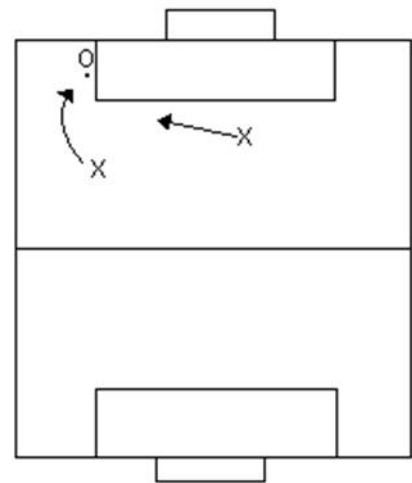
Another tactic to consider is the “end line cross.” An end line cross is made when the winger is able to take the ball all the way down the wing to the end line, then dribble the ball along the end line toward the goal until a defender comes out of the goalmouth to guard him. At that time, the player with the ball passes the ball diagonally backward, on the ground, to a teammate running into the goalmouth. It is important that the ball be played on the ground so that the teammate can easily one touch the ball into the net.



The winger must be sure that the ball does not go to the goalie. It should be played 6 - 8 yards out from the goal line. One benefit to an end line cross is that the player receiving the ball will always be onside since he was behind the ball when it was served.

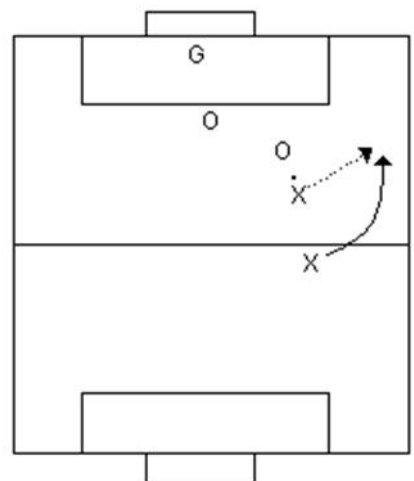
The two forwards should not be limited to playing either the left side of the field or the right side of the field. They should both be encouraged to constantly go from one side of the field to the other side, with the flow of play. The two forwards should rarely be on the same side of the field at any one time.

When the other team has the ball deep in their own end of the field, the two forwards should place a maximum amount of pressure on the opponent with the ball. The job of the forwards is to try and force the other team to kick the ball out of bounds or kick it to the wrong team. The forwards must also prevent the opposing team from playing the ball forward.



The forwards should angle their runs so that an opponent with the ball cannot get to the sidelines (see diagram on the right). The forward should over play the opponent with the ball, allowing him to only dribble towards the middle of the field. The forward should then chase the opponent and try to either steal the ball or force that player to dribble into one of the forward's teammates. The forwards should be sure to never let the other team's defenders dribble the ball out towards the sideline.

The midfielders need to be able to get up into the action on offense. Often times, the midfielders need to run beyond the two forwards. If one of the forwards has the ball and is unable to go forward, the outside midfielder on that side of the field should “**overlap**” the player with the ball. Overlapping is when the midfielder runs well wide of the player with the ball, calls for a pass and then takes the ball down the flank.



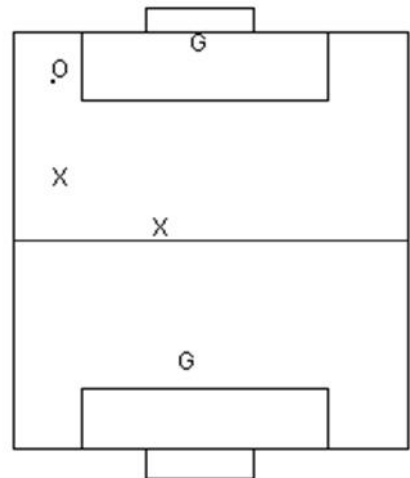
Since the midfielder's run starts behind the player with the ball, the midfielder must call for the ball with a loud, demanding voice. The player with the ball must be able to hear the midfielder, since he will be unable to see the midfielder moving down the flank. The midfielder's run must be well wide of the player with the ball so that the defender guarding the player with the ball cannot also defend the overlapping player.

The center midfielder should have the freedom to go wherever the ball goes. His main job is to get the ball from the defensive end of the field up to the offensive end. When his team is on the attack, the center midfielder should be looking to either make a pass upfield to the one of the forwards so that they can shoot, or shoot the ball himself. When these options are not available, the center midfielder should play the ball out wide to the outside midfielders so that they can attack on the flanks.

When the ball is deep in the opponent's end of the field, the defender on the side of the field where the ball is should be well beyond the midfield line. He should NOT be standing on the midfield line, but rather be well into the offensive half of the field. The other defender should be positioned diagonally behind that defender, near the midfield line (see diagram to the right).

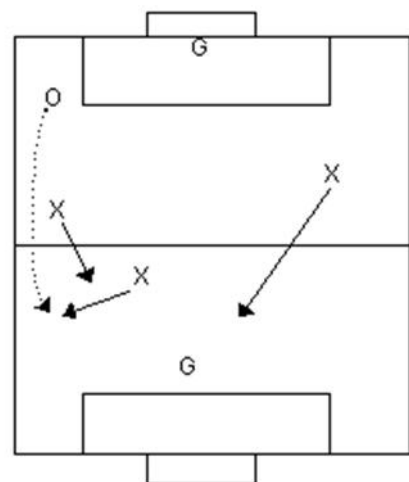
There are two reasons for the ball side defender to be up so far. First, he can help support his teammates on offense by calling for a drop pass when needed. The defender should then look to play the ball to a teammate on the opposite side of the field.

The second reason for having the nearest defender move well beyond the midfield line is that if the other team steals the ball, the defender can put pressure on the opponent with the ball and prevent the other team from starting their attack. Without pressure, the opponent would be able to easily play the ball upfield. Hopefully, the near side defender can apply immediate pressure and prevent the opponent from playing the ball forward. The ball side defender can also try to steal any pass made in that area.



If the opponents play the ball long, over the ball side defender's head, the far side defender should be able to run over and get the ball. If this happens, the near side defender should quickly run back and get diagonally behind his defensive partner (see diagram to the right). The two defenders must learn to quickly change positions when a ball is played over the head of the near side defender.

Also, when our team is deep in the opponent's end of the field, the goalie should be standing beyond the penalty area. He should NOT be standing on the goal line. The reason for this is that if the other team blasts the ball down the field, past both defenders, the goalie will be able to get to the ball before anyone on the other team. The goalie can then control the ball and pass it to one of his teammates. If he is under a lot of pressure, he should try to play the ball long to one of the corner flags at the opposite end of the field. It is important that the goalie not slam the ball into an onrushing opponent. His clearing pass must be played safely, to a place where the opponents cannot get the ball.

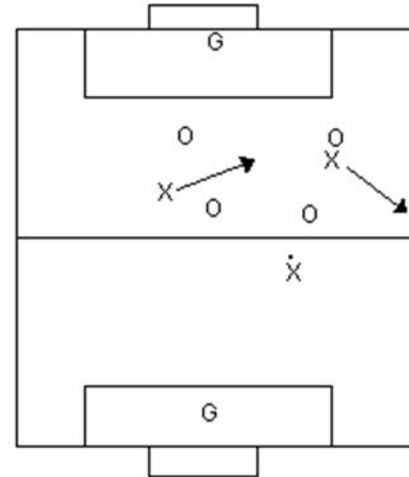


TACTICS IN THE MIDDLE THIRD OF THE FIELD

Play in the middle third of the field should be somewhat less "risk oriented" than play in the attacking third of the field. 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 aimlessly kick the ball downfield without a purpose.

Offensively, when our midfielders have the ball, the two attackers should try to run into space where they can receive passes from the midfielders. The forwards will sometimes try to make forward runs to receive thru balls (passes going directly towards the opponent's end line for a teammate to run onto), sometimes move to a position to receive a ball played diagonally by the midfielder and sometimes check back straight to the ball to receive it at their feet. The key for the forwards is to move to a place where they can receive the ball and continue the attack (see diagram to the right).

The two forwards should be free to move around on either side of the field. They should not be constrained to playing on just the left side or the right side of the field. Making crisscrossing runs will often times confuse the other team's defenders.



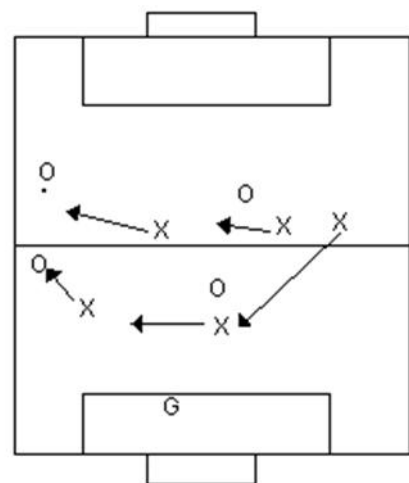
Defensively, the two forwards should look to come back and double team any opposing midfielder who has possession of the ball. This must be done at full speed, surprising the opponent.

Our midfielders must always put pressure on the ball and prevent the opponents from playing the ball forward. At all times, the opponent with the ball must be tightly marked so that he cannot play the ball up the field to his forwards. The two outside midfielders must be able to sprint back on defense and support the two defenders. They must be able to find a man to guard, and prevent that opponent from helping with his team's attack.

When our team is on defense, players should quickly get "goal side" of their opponent. This means that they are positioned between the opponent and the middle of the goal.

In the diagram to the right, the midfielder nearest the ball applies immediate pressure to the player with the ball. The center midfielder moves towards the ball to mark the opponent nearest the player with the ball. The defender nearest the ball immediately closes down his man, preventing him from receiving a pass.

Our midfielder furthest from the ball comes all the way back on defense so that he is aligned with the weak side defender. Note that his run is made back towards the goal and in towards the middle of the field. The ability of our weak side midfielder to quickly get back on defense and serve as a third back is crucial to the success of a team's defense. The weak side midfielder needs to get all the way back on defense whenever the opposing team gets possession of the ball. Once the weak side midfielder is back with the defenders, the defender furthest away from the ball can move over towards the defender who is nearest the player with the ball. He should position himself so that he is diagonally behind the defender who is marking the player with the ball.

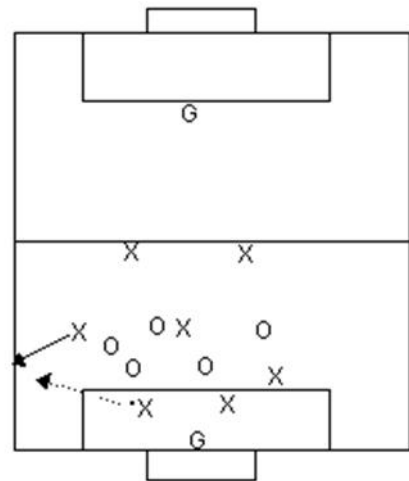


Offensively, our midfielders want to be able to play the ball forward whenever possible. They should look to play the ball up to the forwards whenever they can. If that option is not available, they should look to run the ball up the field themselves, or make passing combinations with the other midfielders to get the ball up the field. Depending on the level of play of the opposing team, our midfielders should be a bit conservative in their approach to attacking in the middle third of the field. While we want to use a skill oriented approach to attacking, the midfielders need to realize that a loss of possession in our defensive half of the field could lead to the other team quickly getting a good scoring opportunity.

When our team has the ball in the middle of the field, our defender closest to the ball should be up in support offensively, and pushed up to deny the other team the ball. Our defender away from the ball should be further back, ready to get any ball played past his defensive partner.

TACTICS IN THE DEFENSIVE THIRD OF THE FIELD

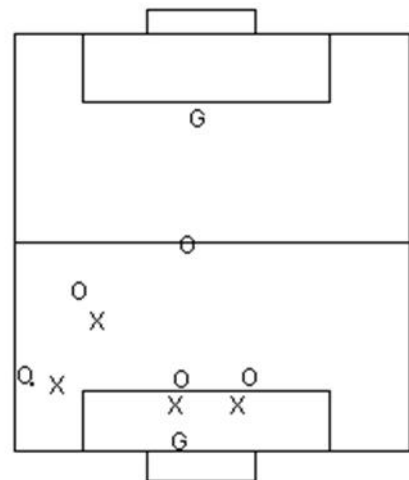
Players in the defensive third should take a "safety first" approach. Players should never dribble the ball inside of their penalty area unless they are trying to get the ball out to the sidelines, before taking it upfield. When possible, players should try to pass the ball out of the defensive third rather than dribble the ball. Either way, it is important to get the ball out of the goalmouth as quickly as possible, towards the sidelines and then up the field. This does NOT mean that players should 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 need to be careful when passing the ball back to their goalie since the rules prohibit the goalie from receiving a pass with his hands when played from the foot of a teammate. Goalkeepers may use their hands to receive a pass from a teammate if the ball was played to him with a body part other than the feet or if the ball was accidentally played to him from the foot of a teammate.

When one or more opponents are positioned in the goalmouth, waiting for a pass or cross, the defenders must mark (guard) them closely. Defenders near the goal should position their body so that they are right next to an opponent, 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 able to see 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 when teaching this concept.

When the ball is out near the sideline, at least one defender must be positioned directly in front of the goal to guard against a ball being played into that part of the field. This is the most dangerous area of the field, and the area that must be most heavily guarded when the other team has the ball. The defenders must mark the most dangerous attackers that come into the goalmouth.



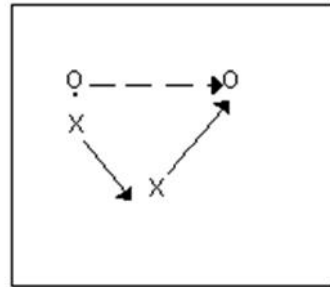
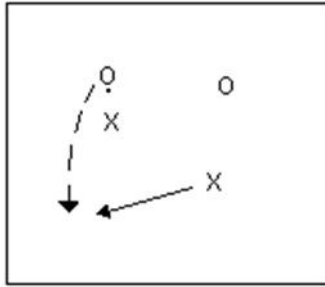
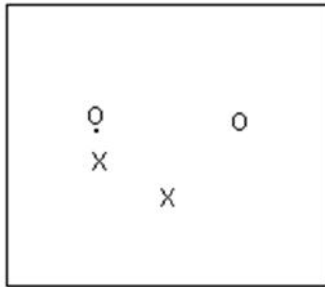
When the other team has the ball, it is very important that our team immediately put pressure on the ball. No matter which opponent has the ball, the defending team must have a player marking him, trying to get the ball from him. Defenders should be taught to fight hard for the ball and never let the opponents have the ball without any pressure. By applying pressure, the opposing player will have a limited amount of time to determine what to do with the ball. The opponent 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 other team to have enough time to make a good play with the ball. Never let this happen.

In the defensive third of the field, defenders should never “dive in” when tackling. They should be patient, stay between the opponent and the goal and not try to steal the ball unless they are confident of winning it. If they go in for a tackle and miss, the opponent will get around him and possibly score. Defenders need to be patient and wait for the right moment to win the ball. Also, by not diving in, the defender will be able to delay the opponent, allowing the other defenders to get into position to back him up (defensive “cover”). This will also give the other defenders time to mark the other opposing players.

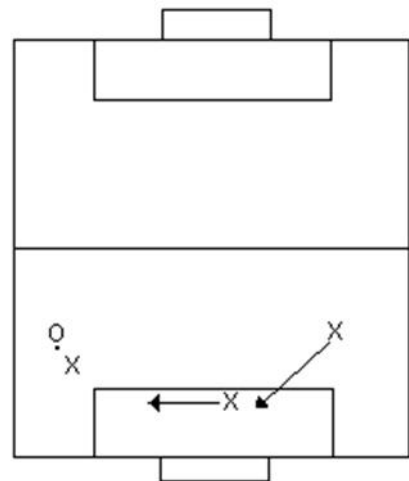
Players should understand the concept of backing up a teammate on defense. The defender guarding the player with the ball (known as the “first defender”) should always have a teammate behind him (known as the “second defender”), ready to pickup the man with the ball if the first defender gets beat. This concept is illustrated in the first diagram below.

If the player with the ball is able to get around the defender guarding him, the other defender will quickly slide over and pick up the player with the ball. The defender who got beat will quickly run back into the middle and become the supporting defender. This is illustrated in the second diagram below.

If instead, the player with the ball passes the ball square to a teammate, the second defender must immediately step up and pressure the ball, assuming the role of the first defender. The player who was pressuring the ball runs back and over, becoming the second defender. This is illustrated in the third diagram below.



The outside midfielder on the side of the field away from the ball needs to come all the way back on defense and act as a third defender (see diagram to the right). This “weak side” midfielder should be back in the middle of the goalmouth, either guarding an opponent, or guarding the area in front of the goal. Once the weak side midfielder is able to get back, the defender furthest from the ball can slide over, towards the ball.



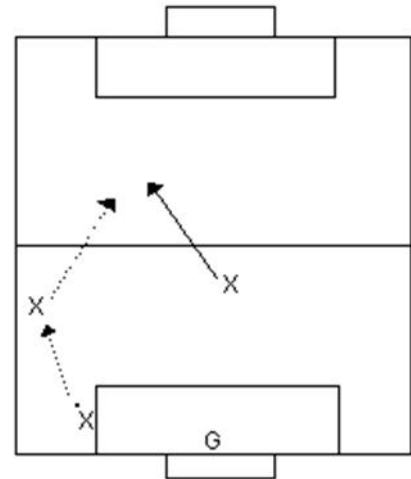
THE TRANSITION GAME

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 in a defensive shape. Teams are most likely to be scored on when they are not ready to defend. Ideally, the team that wins the ball will want to string several forward passes together and send a team member in on a breakaway before the other team can get set up in their defensive formation.

When a team counter-attacks, they should immediately try to play the ball forward as quickly as possible and score. As soon as the team wins the ball, the forwards should run into open space so that they can receive a forward pass. This forward pass should be played past as many opponents as possible. The midfielders must look to play the ball upfield to the forwards, then get up into the action themselves. The forward who receives the ball should either dribble the ball down field at speed, or play another forward pass to a teammate further up the field.

As the counter-attack develops, the rest of the team needs to quickly get up the field in support. This includes the defenders, who must immediately get up the field to close down the opponent's space if the opponents should win the ball back. The defenders should not be allowed to casually walk up the field after the play.



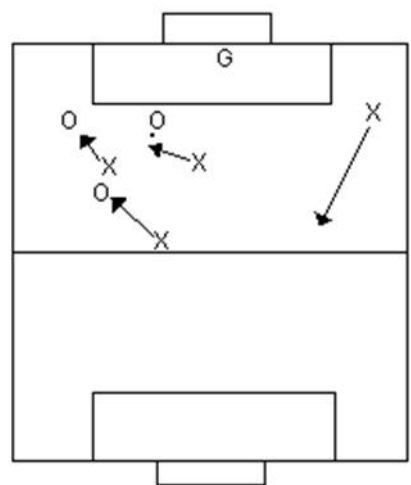
Counter-Defending: The moment that a team loses the ball is the time that they are most vulnerable to being scored on. When a team loses the ball, it is critical that they prevent the other team from going forward right away.

The first thing that the team needs to do is put pressure on the opponent that just won the ball. If possible, they should try to win the ball back right away. If this is not possible, they must prevent the opposing player from playing the ball forward. This will give the rest of the team time to get back on defense. The longer that our team can prevent the opposing team from going forward, the more time we will have to get our players back on defense and set up in an organized manner.

When our team loses the ball, we must not only put immediate pressure on the opponent with the ball, we must also quickly mark the opponent who is closest to the player with the ball. This will prevent the player with the ball from passing to a teammate who can play the ball up the field. This will help give the other members of our team enough time to get back on defense. It is better for our team to defend with all players involved in the defensive process, then just a few players. All players must be aware of their defensive responsibilities on the field and be prepared to play defense the instant that our team loses the ball.

The three most important principals in counter-defending are:

- apply immediate pressure to the player with the ball.
- eliminate the easiest passing option.
- delay the opponent's attack so that the rest of our team can get setup defensively.



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 drive the ball into the goalmouth with plenty of power, 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 into the goal. Players in the goalmouth should start about 14 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 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 redirects the corner kick towards the near goal post, the defender will be able to clear it away. Another defensive player should be positioned on the inside of the far post, ready to clear away any shot on goal that comes into that area.

The other field players should be positioned 4 - 8 yards in front of the goal, ready to get the corner kick and clear it away from the goalmouth. When possible, the defenders should tightly mark an opponent, being sure to be "goal side" (between the opponent and the goal) of that man. It is important that the defenders get to the ball before the opposing team players. The team defending on the corner kick will usually want to have one forward up the field, about 25 yards away from the goal. His job is to win any ball that is cleared away. That player must follow the ball wherever it goes. He must be ready to run from one sideline to the other in an attempt to get possession of the ball when it is cleared away. He must not let the other team's defenders win the ball and play it back into the goal area.

OFFENSIVE FREE KICKS: If possible, the player taking the free kick should shoot to the far post or drive the ball just wide of the far post for a teammate to redirect on goal. If this is not possible, he should look for a teammate to pass to. A free kick does not mean that the player taking the kick simply "blasts the ball downfield" since this goes against the Lower Merion Soccer Club's NO BOOM BALL philosophy. If a free kick is awarded out on the wings, in the offensive half of the field, the kick should be treated like a corner kick. The player taking the kick can 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 opponent to shoot, the defending team should form a wall of three to five field players, all standing between the ball and the goal, eight yards from the ball. These players must be ready to block a shot with their bodies. They should keep their hands in front of their bodies for protection and keep their heads down to avoid being hit in the face. Players who are not in the wall must mark the opponents who are in position to receive a pass. All 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 the sideline in their offensive end of the field, the defensive team should have one player positioned eight yards in front of the kicker to block the kick. The other field players should be back on defense, guarding the area in front of the goalmouth, as well as guarding the other opponents. The defenders should be pushed up, away from the goalie so that the goalie has more room to move. If all of the defenders are pushed up, away from the goal, the opposing players will not be able to stand near the goalie since they will be in an offside position. If the opponents chip the ball over the defensive wall, the defenders not in the wall will need to run to the ball and head it out. They must also follow the opponent whom they are marking if he runs into the goalmouth.

The most important things that the players on the defending team must do are: a) quickly organize their defensive shape, b) concentrate so that they can read the play as it develops and c) get to the ball before the other team and clear it away from danger.

GOALKEEPER TACTICS

Goalkeeper tactics have already been covered in this manual. Goalies should be encouraged to move all around the penalty area to pick up any ball with their hands that they can get to. Goalies must learn to "own" the entire penalty area. They should be encouraged to leave the penalty area 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 must be able to offer their teammates a drop pass whenever the teammate with the ball is facing towards his own goal and is under pressure from an opponent. The goalie must be confident that his foot skills will enable him to control the ball and distribute it to a teammate on the other side of the field.

Goalies should also be taught to distribute (punt or throw) the ball upfield to the nearest sideline. To be safe, the goalie 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 the opponent dribbles the ball too far in front of him, the goalie should immediately sprint out and pick the ball up before the attacker can regain possession. 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. On breakaways, goalies should dash out at the player dribbling the ball and dive at the ball (with his body perpendicular to the run of the opponent) so that his body will block the ball. This will force the opponent to rush his shot or shoot it directly at the goalie. Opposing players will be intimidated by a fast charging goalie. While diving like this, the goalie should have his arms stretched out to get the ball, and positioned in front of him to protect his face.

SUMMARY OF GAME TACTICS

The above summary of game tactics for 8 v 8 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. These tactics need to be touched upon during the season, but not stressed for any great length of time.

Coaches often feel the need 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 technical and tactical skills and allow the players to make use of these skills in games and practices. Keep the teaching of game tactics to a minimum.

Coaches must always remember that their ultimate objective is for the children to have fun. If coaches spend too much time on game tactics, the players will get bored and lose interest.



BEYOND THE 10 - 14 INTRAMURAL AGE GROUPS

Much of the previous section of this coaching manual was geared for coaches of 9 - 13 year olds intramural players. The emphasis on coaching children of these ages must always be: FUN first and skill development second. Players will hopefully develop a love for the game and develop the necessary skills to be successful in the game of soccer.

As players get older, the philosophy of coaching will change a bit, but the emphasis must still be on FUN and skill development. Some players will play in the Travel Team Program while others will remain in the Intramural Program. Some players will go on to play at the high school level, and even play at the college level. Over the years, a few LMSC players have even made it to the professional level. One former LMSC player played for the USA in the 2006 World Cup. To get to these higher levels, coaches must continue to instill a love of the game if they are to succeed.

The following list describes the coaching methodology for older players:

- Skill development must be done in realistic settings, against opponents. At first, new skills can be worked on in the Fundamental Stage (no opposition). Soon after that however, players need to practice their skills against opposition (Match Related Stage and Match Condition Stage).
- Small sided games that emphasize a particular aspect of the game should continue to be a regular part of all practices. Players need to learn how to compete against other players and be able to make quick, intelligent decisions.
- Older players need to have a proper warmup before playing. A good warmup should include some type of movement (such as the Fundamental Stage activities in this book), followed by stretching. As players get older, and their bodies change, they need to take better care of themselves and avoid injuries that will keep them out of action. Stretching should never be done until the players have had a warmup that elevates their heart rate and warms up their muscles. Players should NEVER bounce when stretching. All stretching should be "static" (no movement). Many older teams will also stretch at the end of practices and after games. Modern research has shown this to be the best time to take care of players' muscles.
- Older players need to have a better understanding of simple tactics. They must not only know HOW to perform a skill (technique), but know when, where and why to perform a particular skill (tactics). Coaches should strive to develop not just technical skills, but also develop the players' ability to see the game as it goes on and make quick, intelligent decisions. This can best be accomplished by playing a lot of small sided games in practices.
- 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 must modify for older players and for more skilled 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 receive the ball and 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. Match Condition Stage activities are what the players like the most. The coach should keep score in these competitive situations in order to get the maximum effort from each player. The coach should be sure to play small sided games which incorporate conditions and restrictions which will emphasize a particular skill or tactic (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 soccer 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 that 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 coaching courses sponsored 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.
- Reread this Coaching Manual periodically for new ideas.

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 reimburses the registration fee to any LMSC 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 / she knows), there is always room for improvement. The game changes and coaching methodology changes 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 players, all 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 over 37 years at various levels of play, including:

- 37 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
- 24 years head coach at the high school varsity level
- 20 years as President of Lower Merion Soccer Club, serving over 2800 youth players

During his years of coaching, Biff's teams have won many titles, including: one national finalist, three Region One USA championships, 13 outdoor State Championships (with eight different teams), 14 indoor State Champions and 18 Delco League division one championships.

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

- EPYSA Service To Youth Award, 2017
- 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, 2012, 2018

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. Two former LMSC players have had 10 year careers in the MLS (Major League Soccer). Two other former players are now playing in MLS. Many played Division One in college. Several of his players from many years ago are now coaching soccer at various levels, including MLS, college, high school and in Lower Merion Soccer Club.

