

LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB



COACHES MANUAL FOR OUR 6 YEAR OLD INTRAMURAL TEAMS

(2019 Edition)

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This Coaches Manual Is Written For The Following Age Divisions:

Bantams Division	6 year old boys
Microns Division	6 & 7 year old girls

Included in this coaches manual are a season's worth of practice sessions, geared for children in these age groups, as well as a brief section on game tactics for 4 vs. 4 soccer.

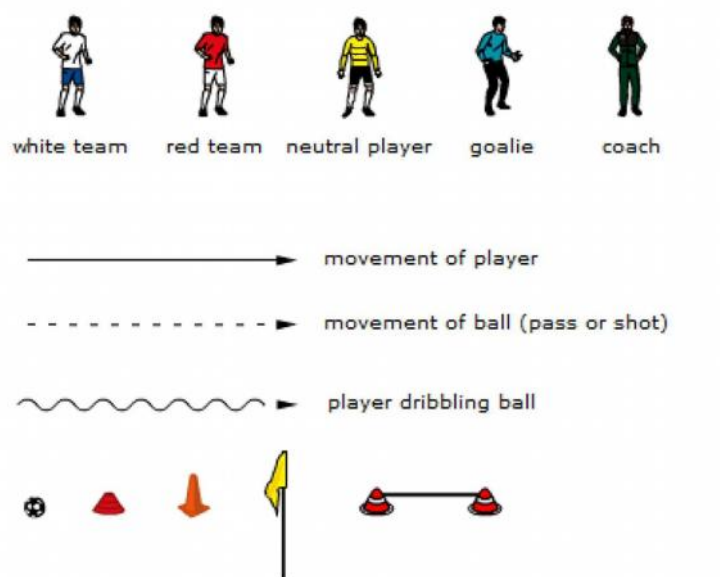
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LEGEND FOR THE DIAGRAMS IN THIS COACHES MANUAL



COACHING A YOUTH SOCCER TEAM

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

It is important that **EVERY player brings a ball to EVERY practice** so that there is a 1:1 ball per player ratio. This is extremely important for a successful practice. The coach should also bring a few extra soccer balls in case one or more players do not bring a ball to practice. Players should bring two different colored shirts to practice: their LMSC game jersey and a white tee shirt. This will help the coach to create teams for various activities at practices, including scrimmages. United States Soccer Federation (USSF) regulations require players to wear shin guards to all games and all practices.

Each practice in this manual will focus on a specific skill. USSF coaching guidelines suggest that all practices progress, in order, through three stages as described below.

THE THREE STAGES OF A SOCCER PRACTICE

FUNDAMENTAL STAGE

Players practice the specific skill being addressed without pressure from an opponent. The coach should ensure that there is a 1:1 or 1:2 ball per player ratio during the Fundamental Stage. The key element to this stage of a practice is **repetition with correct form**. Players should make as many touches on the ball as possible, but all touches should be done using **proper technique**. Since there are no opponents, players will have enough time to perform each skill with proper technique.

To best develop the players' technical skills, the first 25-30 minutes of each practice should be devoted to having each player work with his or her own soccer ball. The coach should strive to maximize the number of touches on the ball that each player makes in this stage of the practice. The more soccer balls in use at once, the more touches on the ball each player will make. This is why we want a 1:1 ball per player ratio.

Repetition with correct form is the key to technical development. The more touches on the ball that a player makes (with correct technique), the faster the player's technical development will be.

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). Most activities in the Match Related Stage will have more attacking players than defenders in order to ensure that the players can successfully execute the skill being worked on. In each practice activity, there will be many parameters that the coach can adjust to ensure that the players experience success and are being challenged. These parameters include: the size of the playing area, the number of attacking players vs. the number of defending players, the amount of pressure a defender may apply, etc.

MATCH CONDITION STAGE

In the final stage of a practice, the players compete against each other in a game-like activity. The Match Condition State can be one versus one (1 v 1), 2 v 2 or higher. The coach will put the players in competitive, game like activities where the players can try the skills that they worked on earlier in that practice. Kids by nature enjoy competing so the players will enjoy this stage of practice the most and will go home with smiles on their faces. It is important to keep the numbers small in this stage of practice. Two simultaneous games of 3 v 3 are MUCH more productive than one game of 6 v 6 since the players will be much more involved in the action and make many more touches on the ball.

PRACTICE PHILOSOPHY

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

It is recommended that the practices run in the order that they appear in this manual. Similarly, activities within each practice should progress in the order listed.

For players this age, teams should have one practice a week with each practice about 75 - 90 minutes long. The coach should divide the practice session equally between the Fundamental Stage, Match Related Stage and the Match Condition stage (20 to 30 minutes per stage). Most importantly, the coach should be sure that each practice ends with a small sided game so that the kids go home happy.

Try to have either an assistant coach, another adult or an older sibling of one of your players also attend each practice. During each practice activity, have that person supervise half the team while you supervise the other half. This will give each player more individualized attention. Before each practice, share your practice plan with your assistant coach / practice helper so that your helper knows what skills will be taught and what activities will be used at the next practice.

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

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

THE CONCEPT OF ECONOMICAL TRAINING

This is a well known coaching principal which states that all activities at practice should incorporate as many of the four basic components of soccer as possible. The four components of soccer are:

- Technical work (skill development)
- Tactical work (decision making)
- Physical (speed, strength, stamina, agility, etc.)
- Psychological (must be challenging, fun, and lead to success)

Each activity in a practice session should involve as many players working with a soccer ball as possible. Players need to make a lot of touches on the ball and should be given the opportunity to make many decisions during each practice session.

Players at this age should NOT be running laps, doing calisthenics, doing conditioning work, etc. If practices are run properly, the players will get plenty of physical exercise while working with their soccer ball. In addition, they will develop skill, make quick decisions and learn to understand the game.

Youngsters have very short attention spans. They should not be given long lectures, their minds will quickly drift away. Players should be given BRIEF instruction, then sent out on the field to work on their skills as much as possible. **Young players learn by “doing things,” not by “listening to adults.”**

THE CONCEPT OF SMALL SIDED GAMES

Many years ago, the United States Soccer Federation recommended that youth soccer move away from playing full sided (11 vs. 11) soccer and towards small sided soccer. The reasoning for this is that players will be more involved in the play with small sided soccer, have many 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, not involved in the play.

Based on the recommendations of the USSF, the Lower Merion Soccer Club switched the format of games for our six year old divisions to playing two simultaneous games of 4 v 4 with no goalies. As a result, all players are now more involved in the play, make many more touches on the ball and make many more decisions on the field. The players are always involved in the action. As a result, our players are developing at a much faster rate than in previous years.

PLAYERS NEEDS AND COACHES NEEDS

Below, in the left column, is a list of what players need during practices and games. The right column, is what a coach needs to bring to each practice in order to be successful.

What Players Need	What Coaches Need To Bring
FUN!!!	ENTHUSIASM!!!
Movement	Leadership
FUN!!!	ENTHUSIASM!!!
Touches On The Ball	Observation
FUN!!!	ENTHUSIASM!!!
Success	Correction Methodology

CREATING TWO FOOTED SOCCER PLAYERS

One flaw of most inexperienced youth coaches is that they do not demand that players to learn to perform various skills both left footed and right footed. Players need to learn to perform all skills with both feet. Players who do not learn to be two footed players at a young age will have a lot of trouble undoing bad habits in later years. Be sure players learn to be two footed at the youngest age possible.

In games and in scrimmages, players running down the left side of the field with the ball should be dribbling the ball with their left foot (the foot closest to the sideline). This will make it more difficult for defenders to steal the ball. When shooting a ball, the player should use the foot furthest from the goal so that the player can swing his hips when kicking. This will provide a LOT more power to a shot. As coaches, we must demand that players do things correctly, otherwise we are just reinforcing bad habits.

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.
- To develop the skills necessary to become a better player and be able to play at higher levels of soccer in the future.

COACHING METHODOLOGY

Some of the key elements that a coach must deal with in a training session are:

- Practice session organization - equipment (balls, cones, goals, etc.), field space, activities
- Coaching position (be in the best position to view all of the action)
- Quality stops in action (water breaks, rest, fun time ...)

We do not "coach the kids" as much as we "organize activities" for them to discover things and solve problems. Often times, the activities that coaches present at practice will be the best teacher. Players at these ages will only learn so much from listening to the coach, they have too short of attention spans. Effective practice activities will be the best teacher for the players.

Coaches need to try and develop players, not try and organize them to win games.

Observation During A Training Session - Take some time to analyze the organization of the kids. Sometimes it is best to just let the kids play at the start of a practice so they can get rid of their excess energy. They DO NOT want to be part of some organized session and listen to the coach talk. That is **NOT** why they came to practice. Sometimes it is best to simply let them start practice with a scrimmage or other fun, competitive game. This will encourage players to show up to practice on time or early.

Be sure to observe and analyze your practice session. If it is not working, figure out how to adjust it. Coaches can control each activity by adjusting the field space, the number of players (offensive and defensive), the amount of pressure a defender may apply, etc. If all else fails in a practice session, just choose up teams and play a small sided game. The players will have fun, get plenty of technical work, make plenty of decisions (problems to solve), get plenty of exercise and they will look forward to the next practice session.

Two Important Questions That Coaches Should Always Ask Themselves:

- Will this practice session help the players become better?
- Do I need to adjust the practice in any way so that the players can experience success?

Correction Methodology (how to make corrections at practice)

- Don' just criticize. Suggest how the players could do something better.
- Determine who can perform a skill well. Let that player demonstrate the skill. This will be much more convincing than if an adult demonstrates.
- Challenge them to "do this."
- It is not necessary to say someone did something "wrong," just suggest a way that works better. Perhaps the coach could ask a player "have you ever thought about doing it this way?"
- Do not over-emphasize things done incorrectly at practice. When talking about something done incorrectly, preface your statement with a positive remark and finish it with a positive remark. This is the PNP (Positive - Negative - Positive) way of making coaching corrections. Always sandwich a negative comment between two positive comments.

Setting Up A Practice Session

- Be sure to have the correct equipment (balls, cones, goals, etc.)
- ALL players need to have their own soccer ball (a 1:1 ball per player ratio is important).
- A significant part of each practice should be spent with each player working with his / her own soccer ball.
- Players should get 500-600 touches per practice. The majority of these touches will be in the first 25-30 minutes of practice, during the Fundamental Stage of the practice.
- Challenge players with numbers, i.e., "how many can you do?" or "how many seconds can you do this in?" Have the players compete against themselves, not against the other players.

As coaches, we spend way too much time organizing. Players learn by doing things, not by listening. The best thing that coaches can do is put the players into activities that will enable the players to learn.

An Effective, Alternative Way To Run A Practice Session:

- Immediately Start The Action (little or no explanation)
- Observe What The Players Do
- Make Corrections
- Continue

Making Coaching Corrections: Coaches need to occasionally pull a child out of an activity and offer INDIVIDUAL corrections while the rest of the group is still busy. This is why it is helpful to have one or more assistants (parents) at practice. They can keep an eye on the rest of the team while the coach talks with a player one on one.

Coaching During A Game: One of the most important things a coach can do during a game is observe the players. See what each players' strengths and weaknesses are. Use these observations to determine what needs to be worked on at the next practice. Coaches need to remember that game day is for the kids. Let them have fun, let them play. Observe what they do and use those observations to plan what needs to be worked on at the next practice.

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 with no purpose. 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 players to blindly kick the ball down the field; this does NOT develop skill. Encourage 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 v 1.

Consider soccer to be like basketball. When LeBron James gets the ball from a defensive rebound, he NEVER just throws the ball down the court 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 six year old players is that players NEVER be discouraged from being "ball hogs." It is MUCH better for players at these ages to hold the ball too long then 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 PLAYERS TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS

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 (what should the player do to help defend against the other team?)

Too often, well meaning coaches constantly shout out instructions to the players, taking away their opportunity to think and make decisions. This is especially true of the player who has the ball. Too often, when a player gets the ball, the coach and the parents on the sideline, 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 skills.

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

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

PRE-GAME WARMUPS

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

THE VARIOUS TYPES OF SMALL SIDED PRACTICE GAMES

This coaching manual contains a wide variety of practice games and activities. Each activity emphasizes a particular theme. Most of the small sided games that can be played in practices can be divided into three distinct categories:

- **POSSESSION GAMES** - The objective of possession games is for one team (or one individual) to keep **possession** of the ball and prevent the opposing team from getting possession. There are no goals, 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 types of games, each team defends one end line of the playing area and attacks the other end line. The objective is to dribble the ball over the opponent's end line while still in possession of the ball. In addition to the element of **possession**, these games incorporate the element of **direction**. Teams must now play in a particular direction and try to get past 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 playing areas will encourage more wing play and encourage players to switch the ball from one side of the field to another. Narrower playing areas 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 while keeping the ball out of their own net. Similar to end line games, the size and shape of the grid is important. When emphasizing shooting, the field should not be long. A shorter field will allow for more shooting opportunities. When emphasizing wing play, a wider field should be used so that teams will be able to take the ball down the side of the field and cross the ball.

SIZE AND SHAPE OF PRACTICE GRIDS

As mentioned before, the size of the grid in each activity must be determined by the coach. When in doubt, the coach should make the playing area a little bit too big so that the players have plenty of space to execute their skills in game-like situations. If the playing area appears too big, the coach should 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 teams of six year olds. The exact dimensions and shape of each practice grid will be dependent on both the age and skill level of the players. Each team and each activity will require a different size playing area. The coach should always start with a grid large enough to ensure initial success. If the activity appears too easy, the coach can always make the playing area smaller.

<u>Game</u>	<u>Game Without Direction</u>	<u>Game With Direction</u>
1 v 1:	10 yards x 10 yards	15 yards x 10 yards
2 v 2:	15 yards x 15 yards	20 yards x 15 yards
3 v 3:	25 yards x 25 yards	30 yards x 25 yards
4 v 4:	30 yards x 30 yards	35 yards x 30 yards

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).
- A soccer ball pump.
- First Aid kit.

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 (using **correct** technique) 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 quickly 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 six year old players can easily understand.
- Do not have the players stand in long 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 when working on technical skills.
- Players must practice each skill both left footed and right footed.
- Encourage players to be creative in both practices and games. In games, encourage players to attempt the skills they worked on in practices. Realize that it often takes many failed attempts at a skill before a player will finally succeed at a skill in a game.
- Finish off all practices with small sided games. Remember that two simultaneous games of 3 v 3 will result in **MANY** more touches on the ball for each child as compared to one game of 6 v 6. **NEVER** have a full field scrimmage with another team at practice. Be sure to have as many players active at all times as possible.
- Remember to use the principal of "economical training." **EVERY** activity in practice must involve soccer balls. Do not have the players run laps, do push ups, situps etc. Everything is done with a ball. Maintain a high ball per player ratio in all activities.
- In all activities (including small sided games), place all extra balls just off the field of play, preferably just inside the goals. When one ball goes out of play, quickly put a different ball into play. Play should not be stopped for any length of time while players 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.

SOME THOUGHTS ON COACHING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRACTICE SESSION # 1

DRIBBLING AND INDIVIDUAL FOOTWORK

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

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

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

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

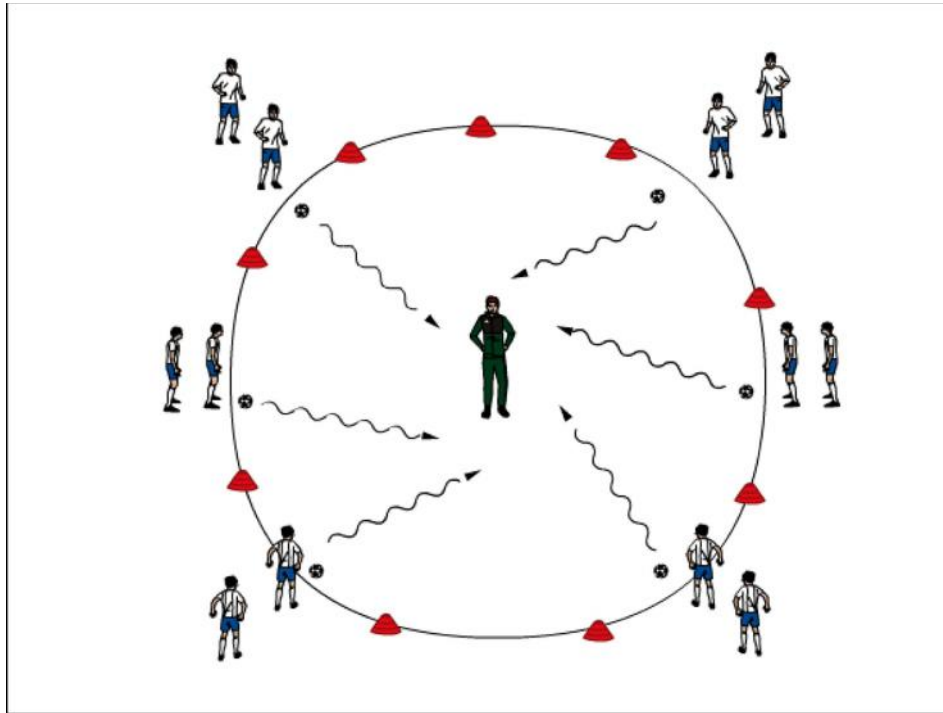
KEY COACHING POINTS FOR DRIBBLING

- Keep the ball close at all times, especially when an opponent is near.
- Practice using all the different foot surfaces including the inside of the foot, the outside of the foot, the sole (cleats) and the instep (laces).
- 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 throughout the season.
- Players must keep their heads up when dribbling so they can see the field, the boundary lines and the other players on the field. Players should only glance down at the ball briefly before looking back up.
- Change direction sharply by quickly turning the hips, bending the knees and getting the foot around to the opposite side of the ball.
- Change speed quickly. When attempting to beat an opponent, players should dribble under control at the defender, make a move and then quickly accelerate past the defender. When talking to players about beating a defender with dribbling, use the expression "change of direction, followed by change of speed."
- Encourage players to try their new dribbling moves in games. Do not worry if they do not succeed right away. Players need to have many opportunities to fail at a move before they will successfully perform the move.
- After playing the ball past the defender, explode behind the defender. Once around the defender, the player with the ball should position his body between the ball and the defender so that the defender cannot steal the ball. The ball should always be on the foot **furthest** from the defender.

ACTIVITY 1

Use cones to make a circle about 15 yards in diameter. Divide the players into pairs with each pair sharing a ball. The coach or another adult stands in the middle of the circle. Each pair of players stands on the perimeter of the circle.

The first player in each group dribbles a ball into the circle and around the coach. The player then dribbles around his partner, around the coach again and then back to his partner. The player's partner then performs the same activity. The players in each pair continue alternating between dribbling and resting.



After the players get the hang of the activity, stop play and change it up a bit. The first time each player does this, have them dribble the ball right footed, counter clockwise, around the coach and his partner. The second time through, have them dribble the ball left footed, clockwise, around the coach and his partner. Emphasize to the players that they should always use the foot that is **furthest** from the coach, similar to playing in a game when players try to keep the ball away from an opponent.

After awhile, the coach should walk around inside the circle. Now the players need to look up to find where the coach is so they can dribble around him. Make it fun by having the coach quickly walk away from players, they will enjoy trying to catch up to the coach.

ACTIVITY 2

Use the same setup, but now make this a game. Have the players continue the same sequence of dribbling around the coach, their partner, the coach again and then back to their partner. This time however, allow the players to kick away any other player's soccer ball as long as they are in possession of their own ball. The coach, who is still moving around in the middle of the circle, may also kick away any soccer ball that comes near him. The coach must be sure to not kick any ball too hard so that nobody gets hurt.

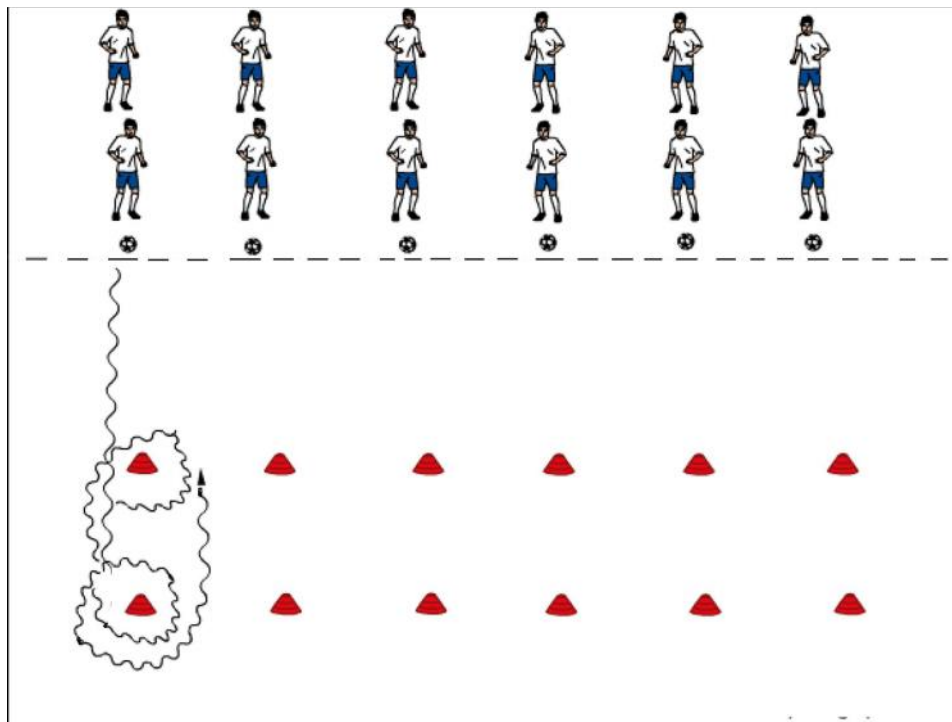
ACTIVITY 3

Children always love relay races. This activity will give the players a chance to compete against other players in a fun, competitive activity. Place the players in pairs, but with a different partner than before. Each pair has a soccer ball. Have each pair standing together at a starting line with each pair of players about five yards from the other pairs of players.

Place a cone about four yards away from each pair of players. Place a second cone about four yards further away from the first cone.

When the coach says go, the first player in each pair speed dribbles to the first cone, dribbles a full circle around it, then continues to the second cone where he again dribbles a full circle around that cone. The player then heads back to the first cone, dribbles another full circle around that cone, then passes the ball to his partner who repeats the same activity. Have each player do this activity twice. See which pair of players is able to complete this activity the fastest.

Repeat this activity a couple more times, but now set conditions on the activity. The first time through, require the players to use their left foot only and dribble around the cones clockwise. The second time through the players must use their right foot and dribble around the cones counter clockwise. The third time through they do this left footed, the fourth time through they do this right footed. Again, see which pair is able to finish first.



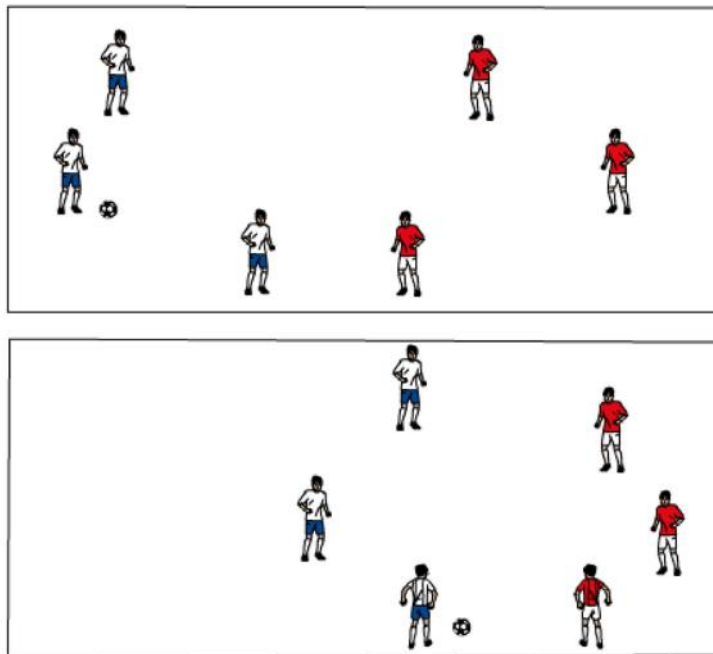
In this activity, it is important that players are placed in groups of two and no more. If there are three or four players in each group, there will be too many players standing around idle. In order to maximize skill development, players need to make as many touches on the ball as possible. It is therefore optimal to place them in groups of exactly two so they can work, rest, work, rest, etc.

FINAL ACTIVITY

The final activity in every practice should be where players try their skills in a game-like situation. This is the part of the practice that should be the most fun so that every child leaves practice smiling. Be sure to leave at least 20 minutes at the end of each practice for a game since it is not only fun, but allows the players to learn how to apply the skills they just worked on in a game situation.

Create two small fields for the players to play on. If you have 12 players, make two fields that are 30 yards long and 25 yards wide. Play 3 vs. 3 on each field. If you have fewer players, make two fields that are about 20 yards long and 15 yards wide. Play 2 vs. 2 on each field. The important thing is to have two games going on so that the players are more involved in the action and get many more touches on the ball.

On each field, have one team wear white shirts and the other team dark shirts.



Goals are scored by dribbling (not shooting) the ball under control over the opponent's end line. Require the player to dribble the ball under control over the opponent's end line, then step on the ball for a goal. After about six minutes, rotate the teams around so that each team gets a chance to play all three of the other teams.

Coaches should set restrictions or conditions in the game that will encourage the players to try the new skills they just learned in practice. The most important restriction that the coach must establish is the "No Boom Ball" restriction. Demand that the players dribble the ball and try the dribbling moves they just worked on at the beginning of practice.

COACHING POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Be sure that players work on each skill equally with their left foot and their right foot. It is very difficult for coaches of older teams to correct bad habits and make players play two footed. This needs to be done at the youngest ages possible. Otherwise, the players will condition themselves to only be one footed players. This is a bad habit that must be prevented at a young age.
- Encourage the players to dribble the ball, maintain possession and try to beat their opponents by dribbling past them. Do not let the players be afraid of possessing the ball.
- Be sure to strictly enforce the "NO BOOM BALL" rule. Encourage players to possess the ball. They should never simply kick the ball down the field, without a purpose.
- Encourage each player to develop an attitude of trying to attack when he has the ball.
- BE SURE THAT ALL PLAYERS LEAVE WITH SMILES ON THEIR FACES.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE FIRST PRACTICE OF THE SEASON

- Learn EVERY player's first and last name by the end of the practice.
- Be sure that all players know to bring to bring shinguards, a size 3 soccer ball and two different colored shirts to all practices.
- Be sure that the players know when their next practice or game is.
- Give each player a schedule for the season. This should include dates, times and fields for games, along with a practice schedule for the upcoming weeks.
- Create an e-mail address list so that the coach can e-mail players about upcoming practices and other information. Be sure to ask each family for ALL of the e-mail addresses where they wish to receive soccer e-mails.
- Collect ALL phone numbers for each player and their family, including cell phone numbers for both parents. Be sure to bring this list to all practices and games in case an emergency situation arises and a player's parents are not at the field.
- Give out a roster with all players' names and phone numbers so that the players can arrange car pools. Be sure that all coaches' names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses are also on the roster so the players have a way to contact the coaches during the season.
- Have a team meeting at the end of the first practice with the parents. If the team does not already have an assistant coach, ask for a volunteer to help out with practices. Also, consider asking for a volunteer to serve as Team Manager, someone who will help with phone calls, assign half time and post game refreshments, etc.
- Be sure players leave practice knowing when and where the next practice is.
- Be sure ALL players have had a good time.

PRACTICE SESSION # 2

DRIBBLING MOVES

The second practice session will be a continuation of the first session where the players worked on their dribbling skills. The reason that the first two sessions focus on dribbling and individual footwork is that we want to instill confidence in each player when possessing the ball. Players should be comfortable possessing the ball and be willing to try and dribble the ball up the field in games.

In later practice sessions, we will focus on players trying to beat opponents one vs. one. Coaches must remember that it will take quite awhile for players to be able to beat opponents with dribbling skills. Players must be allowed to try this over and over in both games and practices. Eventually players will be able to use their dribbling skills to get past their opponents. If the coaches do not encourage this at a young age, the players will never develop into high level players.

As with the previous practice, the coach should remember several important items:

- Each player should have his own ball to work with.
- Player development occurs the fastest when each player is working with his own ball.
- Minimize the amount of time that players are standing idle during practice. Players should never be standing in long lines, waiting for their turn to try something.
- All activities should be performed equally with the left foot and the right foot.
- All practice activities should involve as many soccer balls as possible. Do not waste time with activities such as jumping jacks, running laps, etc. Every activity at every soccer practice must be done with both **skill development and fun** in mind.
- Never let players simply blast the ball down the field. All touches made on the ball should have a purpose.
- Do not discourage players from being ball hogs. At this young age, players will not yet understand teamwork and will not be eager to pass the ball. For now, encourage them to control and possess the ball so that they can develop their individual skills.
- In order to develop good dribbling skills, players must be encouraged to try their dribbling skills in both practices and games. They often will not succeed at first. Players need many opportunities to fail before they can be successful in dribbling past opponents. If we allow the players to try their dribbling moves in games, they will eventually be successful in 1v1 situations and be able to beat opponents with their dribbling.
- Success in dribbling skills and 1v1 skills will not happen right away. It takes a lot of time to be successful. Coaches and parents need to be patient with this and continue to let them try their dribbling skills, knowing that they will often fail in the beginning.
- Be sure that all players are having **FUN** at all times.

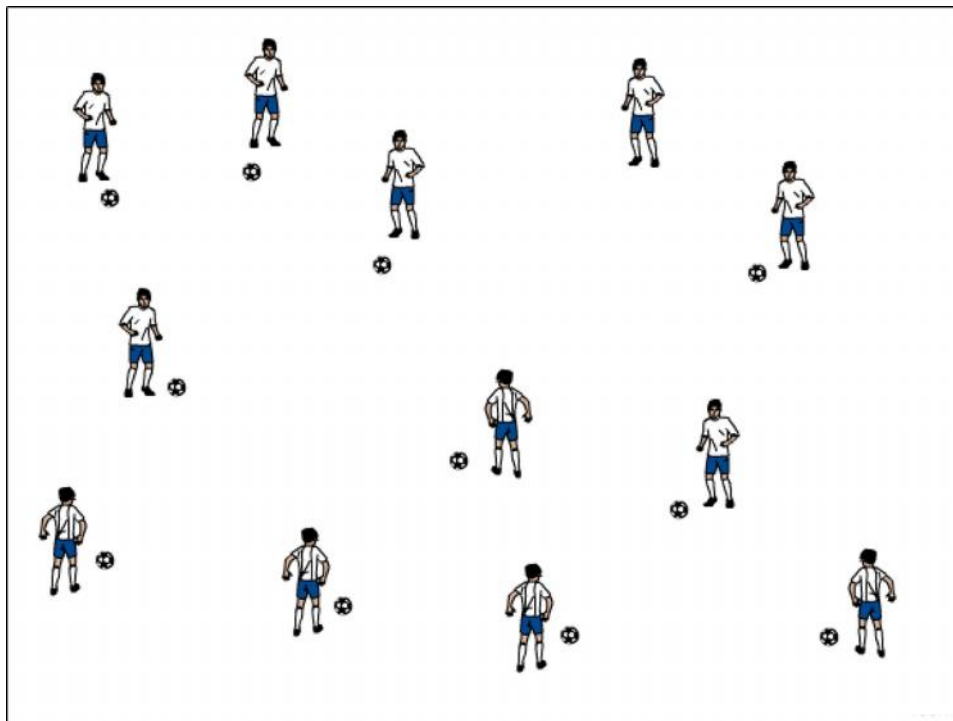
ACTIVITY 1

Using cones, mark out an area about 25 yards square. All players should be inside this "grid" with their own ball. Have each player dribble his ball around inside the grid, trying to avoid running into other players. Encourage the players to change direction regularly while dribbling in and out of the other players. It is important that the players know that they need to keep their heads up in order to avoid collisions.

Next, ask each player to identify two players in front of him and quickly dribble their ball in between those two players. Again, the players will need to dribble with their heads up.

After about a minute, have the players step on their ball, stop and rest. Repeat this activity several times. Encourage the players to dribble in and out of the other players who are also moving. Constantly emphasize to the players that they need to keep their heads up. Constantly encourage them to change direction while dribbling. Discourage them from simply dribbling in a straight line.

The coach will then ask the players to try a series of fun dribbling activities, one at a time. The players are going to be asked to dribble a ball as if they were different types of animals. Each of the animals listed below would dribble a ball differently than the other animals. Go through the list of animals below, one at a time, encouraging the players do dribble their ball as that animal would.



Penguin: The coach first asks the players how a penguin would dribble the ball. Help the players to come up with the idea that penguins would point their toes outward a bit and then alternate tapping the ball with inside of their right foot, then the inside of their left foot as they slowly dribble around in the grid. They should do this slowly, but they should touch the ball with EVERY step they make. Give the players a minute to try dribbling like a penguin. Be sure they alternate feet as they dribble the ball around in the grid. Be sure they tap the ball with EVERY step they make. After awhile, tell the players that penguins would still be able to change direction as they dribble in and out of the other players. They should be able to constantly change direction while avoiding running into the other players.

Cheetah: After the players have had a chance to dribble like a penguin, ask the players how a cheetah would dribble. As before, help the players to come up with the idea that a cheetah would dribble around the grid very fast while keeping the ball under control so it does not go out of the grid. Remind them that the cheetah is the fastest land animal in the world, but when they run, they are always in control and they would still be able to control their ball when dribbling. Give the players a minute to try dribbling like a cheetah. Again, encourage players to use BOTH feet when they dribble. Another important coaching point is to have them keep their heads up so that they do not run into each other. One of the reasons that we have the players dribble in and out of each other in a fairly tight grid is so that they learn to keep their head up and see what is in front of them.

Turtle: After the players have had a chance to dribble like a cheetah, ask the players how a turtle would dribble. The players will likely say that a turtle would dribble slowly. Tell the players that a turtle would place the sole of the foot (the bottom of the foot, their cleats) on the ball and either push the ball forward while walking forward (a “forward turtle”) or pull the ball backwards while slowly walking backwards (a “backwards turtle.”) After awhile, tell the players that a turtle would use the sole of his foot to push the ball to the left or right to change direction (a “sideways turtle.”) The coach might need to demonstrate these points or have one of the more athletic players demonstrate. Give the players a minute to try to dribble around the grid, slowly, like a turtle.

Statue: After the players have had a chance to dribble like a turtle, show them how to be a statue. A statue would put his foot on the ball, strike a funny pose and remain motionless with the foot on top of the ball to prevent it from moving. As a fun variation, tell them that the Statue Of Liberty would step on the ball and raise one arm up high (with an imaginary torch in that hand).

Snake: Ask the players how a snake would dribble a ball. Give a few players a chance to tell you how a snake would dribble (during which time all players are getting a chance to rest), then tell them that a snake would constantly be weaving to the left and then weaving to the right. They would never be going in a straight line. Briefly show them that a snake would take a couple of dribbles to the left, then quickly change direction and dribble to the right, then back to the left, etc. Encourage them to use the insides of their feet to “hook” around the ball and change directions. If the coach is uncomfortable in demonstrating this type of snake like motion, ask one or players to demonstrate this. Be sure the players are constantly going left, then right, then left, etc. When dribbling like a snake, they will learn to change the direction of the ball. Again, a snake would have his head up so that he does not run into any of the other snakes. Give the players a few minutes to try dribbling like a snake.

Chimpanzee: Ask the players how a chimpanzee would dribble a ball. Again, give a few players a chance to answer this while they are resting. Explain to them that a chimpanzee would constantly be changing directions. They would constantly take one dribble then quickly change directions, take another dribble in a different direction, etc. Make it more fun for the players by talking about a “confused chimpanzee” who didn’t know where to go. The players should use both the inside of their foot and the sole of the foot to sharply change the direction they are going. Again, encourage the players to change directions with each touch of the ball. They should appear to be very “confused” about the direction that they want to go.

A Scared Mouse: Again, ask the players how this animal would dribble a soccer ball. They will probably have some funny ideas. Let players express their views on this while the players are resting. After awhile, explain to them that a scared mouse would dribble slowly at first with his head up, looking for some open space to run into. Once the mouse sees an area of the grid where no other players are, the mouse quickly speeds up and dribbles to that area of the grid. Once the mouse gets to that area, he dribbles slowly again, dribbling around with his head up, looking for a new area where no other players are dribbling. The players are now learning the very important concept of “changing speeds.” They should be encouraged to accelerate as quickly as possible into an unoccupied section of the grid, then slow back down again. Changing speeds (quick acceleration) is a very important part of dribbling.

Eagle: An eagle has a long wing span. For this move, the players start by putting the sole of their foot on top of the ball, but with the ball way out to one side of their body. The leg will have to be reaching out to the side to reach the ball. The players will then drag the ball across their body to the opposite foot. Again, the ball should be as far out to the side of the body as possible. After the player “catches” the ball with his opposite foot, he drags it back across his body again to the original foot. Have the players repeat this process for a few minutes.

Fun Game: Once the players have the idea of how each of these different animals would dribble a ball, play a fun game where the coach shouts out the names of the various animals, one at a time, asking the players to dribble like a penguin, a cheetah, turtle, snake, scared mouse or (confused) chimpanzee. The coach should call out a different animal about every 10 seconds. When the coach senses that the players are getting tired, he should call “statue” (or “Statue Of Liberty”). See which players can quickly step on the ball, make a funny pose and remain motionless. Have the players repeat this several times, until they get tired and need a water break.

While the players are dribbling, observe each player’s technique. If the coach sees one or more players dribbling the ball with bad technique, the coach should call “statue.” While the players are resting, the coach can make any needed technique corrections. The coach can either demonstrate one of the dribbling moves again or have one of the players demonstrate a particular technique. After the players have seen the correction (and had time to rest), have them continue working on that particular move, then resume calling out different animals. While the players may look at this as dribbling like animals, they are actually learning the very basics of real dribbling moves that are used in real games.

To add some more fun to the activity, the coach could call out the name of a different animal (one that was not worked on earlier) and ask the players to dribble their ball like that type of animal would. Fun examples of this would be a chicken (see if they use their arms to pretend they are flapping their wings), an angry lion (fast and aggressive), a charging rhino or a squirrel trying to avoid an oncoming car. A few fun things to call out would be to ask them to dribble like Frankenstein or Sponge Bob Square Pants.

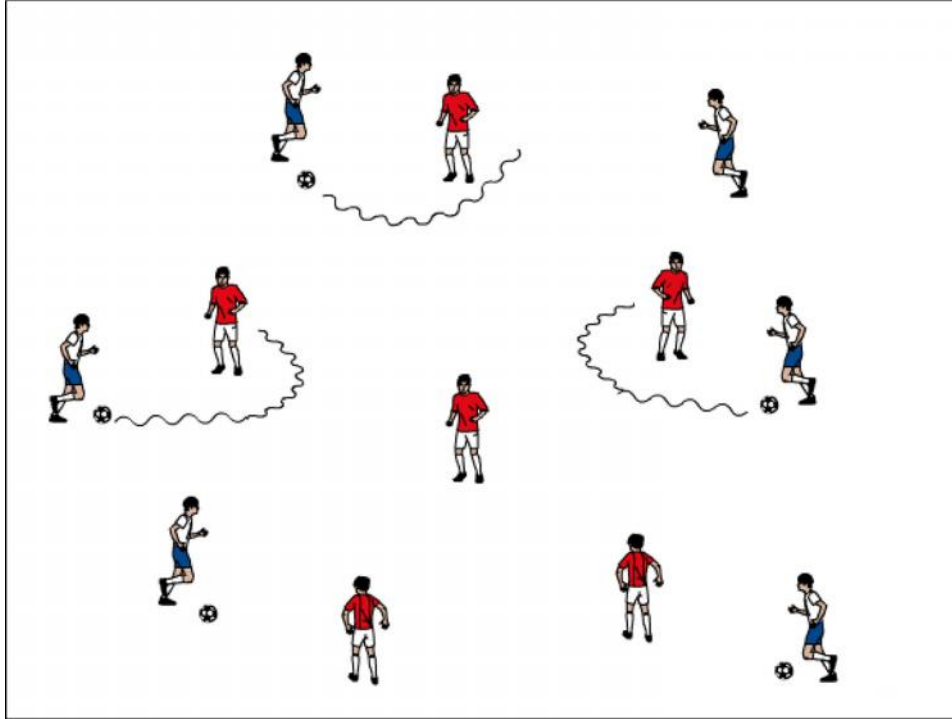
ACTIVITY 2

After awhile, players get bored doing “drills” like the previous activity. Players like to be challenged and compete at something. When the coach senses that the players are getting tired of working on these moves, have them play the following game:

Divide the players into two teams. Have half of the players wear white shirts while the other half of the players wear their team jersey or a dark shirt. Have one team spread out throughout the playing area with each player on that team holding his soccer ball in his hands. Members of the other team stand with their ball at their feet, ready to dribble.

On command, the players with their ball at their feet quickly dribble towards any one of the stationary players and dribble a full 360 degree circle around that player. The dribblers then quickly speed dribble to a different stationary player and dribble another full circle around that player. Have the dribblers continue doing this for a full minute, then command them to stop. Ask each dribbler to yell out how many players they dribbled a full circle around. Remember that players at this age will have a bit of trouble counting. Other players will have wild imaginations and will give you an exaggerated number.

Have the teams switch roles so that the other group of players perform this activity for one minute. Continue this activity with each team alternating between being the dribbling team and the resting team.



The coach can make this activity more challenging by adding a condition to each round. For example, the coach could require each player to only use his weak foot (left foot for most players) one round or require the players to only use the outside of their feet when dribbling around a stationary player.

ACTIVITY 3

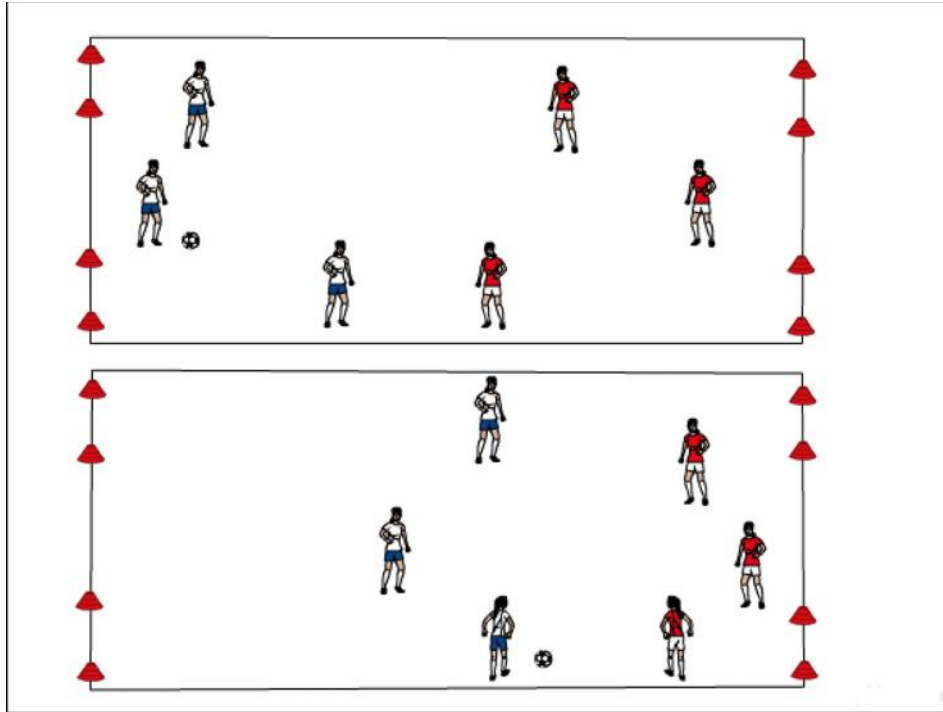
Modify Activity 2 above so that the resting players now stand with their legs spread far apart. Ask the dribbling players to try and dribble their soccer ball through as many of these “gates” as possible in one minute. As before, stop play after a minute and let each player quickly tell everyone how many gates they were able to dribble through. Players may dribble through a gate in either direction (front or back). Be sure that the player keep their legs far apart and do not “close the gates” right before a player tries to dribble between his legs.

In subsequent rounds, the coach can save time by having all of the players shout out how many gates they dribbled through, simultaneously. While this will be loud, the team won't spend so much time waiting for each individual player to shout out his individual number.

FINAL ACTIVITY

The final activity will be a dribbling game similar to the one in the first practice. The coach uses cones to create two goals (each about five yards wide) on each end line. Now, players may only score if they are able to dribble the ball, under possession, through either of the two goals on the opponent's end line.

Similar to the previous practice, the final activity should have two games being played with each game played as either a 2 vs. 2 game or a 3 vs. 3 game. Players will make a lot more touches on the ball and be more active if there are two small games being played, instead of one large game.



Coaches must encourage the players to try and beat opponents by dribbling. Do not let players simply kick the ball down the field without a purpose. Encourage players to go to the opponent's "other" goal if one goal is blocked off by defenders. The coach should only award a goal to a player if the player is able to successfully dribble through the ball, under control and then step on the ball after the ball goes through the goal. If the player does not have control of his dribble as it goes through the goal, the coach should not count that goal.

Of course, the most important thing that the coach must be sure takes place is that all players have **FUN** and leave practice with smiles on their faces.

PRACTICE SESSION # 3

KICKING TECHNIQUE, SHOOTING & RECEIVING

The third practice session will focus on players learning how to properly kick a ball with their instep (laces). This is how most shots are taken and how long distance passes are made. As with all dribbling activities, players need to practice kicking technique both **left footed and right footed**. Coaches should be sure that players take 50% of their shots in practice are left footed so that they learn to be two footed soccer players. It is much tougher to teach an older player to be a two footed soccer player. Have them learn this at the youngest of ages.

Older players will be taught how to use the inside of their foot and the outside of their foot to pass. For six year olds however, we will only teach them on the instep kick. In this session, we will teach players how to use the inside of their foot and the outside of their foot to receive a ball that is coming towards them.

COACHING POINTS FOR INSTEP (LACE) SHOOTING

- Approach the ball with a series of short steps, followed by one final longer step.
- The non-kicking foot is placed next to the ball, pointed at the intended target, with the knee bent.
- The body is compact, leaning forward, over the ball. The chest is facing over the ball. The knee of the kicking foot is directly over the ball.
- The ball is struck on the **equator**, with the laces.
- At the moment of contact, the kicking foot is **perpendicular** to the ground (toes pointing straight down) to lock the ankle. The toes should be pointed directly into the ground.
- The hips, as well as the knee of the kicking foot, are pointed in the direction of the shot.
- The eyes must be looking down at the ball, focused on the ball. Do NOT look at the goal when shooting. Instead, be sure to be looking down at the ball.
- 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.
- 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. This however is way too advanced for six year olds.

RECEIVING THE BALL WITH THE INSIDE OF THE FOOT

- 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**.
- Relax the foot so the ball hits the middle of the foot or the ankle bone and gently drops down. The player needs to gently “give with the ball” by slightly withdrawing the foot upon contact.
- Contact is made with the ball at the **equator** or slightly higher, so that the ball does not pop up.
- For balls played in the air, lift the leg up off the ground so contact is made at the equator.

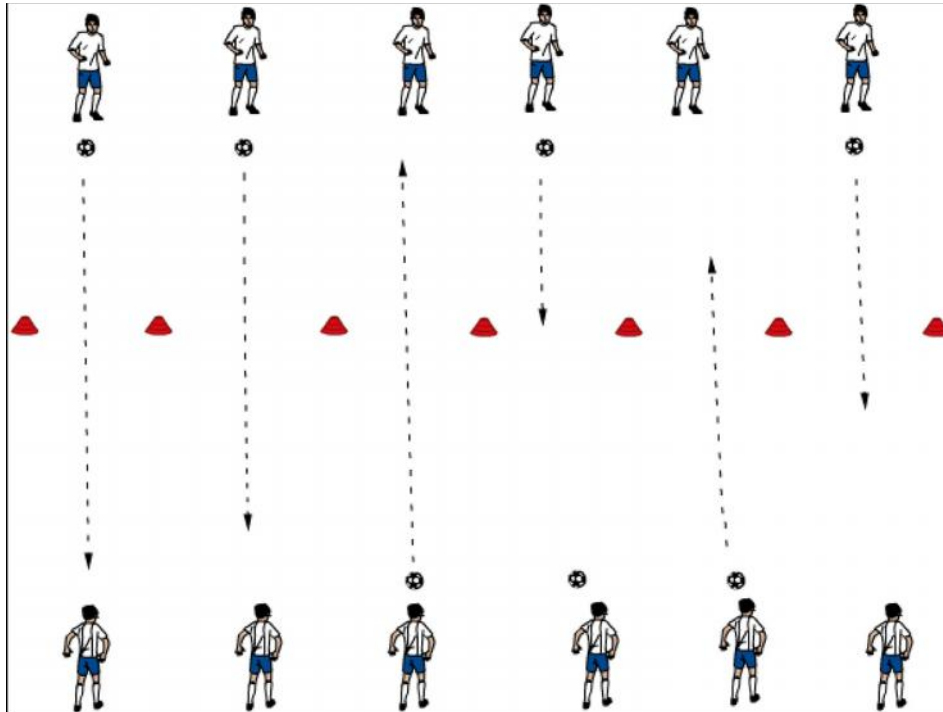
ACTIVITY 1

Set up a row of seven cones or bicycle flags, each spaced 6 yards apart. This will create six goals for the players to practice shooting. Divide the players into pairs with each pair having a soccer ball. Each pair will work at one of the goals created by the cones. One player in each pair should be on one side of the goal with the other player on the opposite side of the goal.

Before letting the players work on shooting, the coach should briefly demonstrate and explain how to properly shoot the ball with the instep. The coach should also briefly explain and demonstrate receiving a ball with the inside of the foot.

The two players then take turns shooting the ball through the goal. One player shoots the ball through the goal and the other player receives the ball with the inside of the foot. The players then repeat this, switching roles. Be sure to give the players plenty of time to practice this.

Note that this setup will allow for the players to get many chances to shoot the ball. The players are not standing in a long line, waiting for a chance to shoot the ball. This is a common mistake of novice coaches. As mentioned before, we want the players to take as many shots as possible.



Every so often, the coach should stop the action and review one or two of the coaching points for shooting. The most important point is that players should NEVER toe the ball. Using the toes to kick a ball not only is less accurate but will eventually lead to damaged toes. In fact, some players learn how to properly kick a ball by practicing in socks and no shoes.

Be sure that the players are alternating between left foot and right foot. This is VERY important. As explained below, coaches need to get players to become “two footed” as early as possible. Be sure that 50% of all shots taken are left footed.

Be sure the players are looking down at the ball at the moment that they make contact with it. They should not be looking up at the goal when contacting the ball. This is similar to golf (where the golfer looks down to see the club strike the ball) and baseball (where the batter watches the bat strike the ball).

Progression: Have the players take several dribbles before shooting on the move. Again, it is important that the players practice all shooting activities both **left footed and right footed**. At first, have the players dribble directly toward the goal and shoot from about 12 yards out.

Progression: Have the players dribble the ball at a 45 degree angle toward the goal. The coach needs to instruct the players to turn their non-kicking foot so that it is **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.

Finally, have the players dribble across the goal mouth, parallel to the goal line before shooting. Again, the coach needs to emphasize that when they shoot the ball, their non-kicking foot needs to be turned so that it is pointing toward the goal. The player must be sure to get his kicking foot around the ball so that the ball will go toward the goal. If the player's non-kicking foot is turned towards the goal, the player's hips will be able to spin the player's body very fast so that his body winds up facing the goal. And again, the player needs to be looking down at the ball when striking the ball.

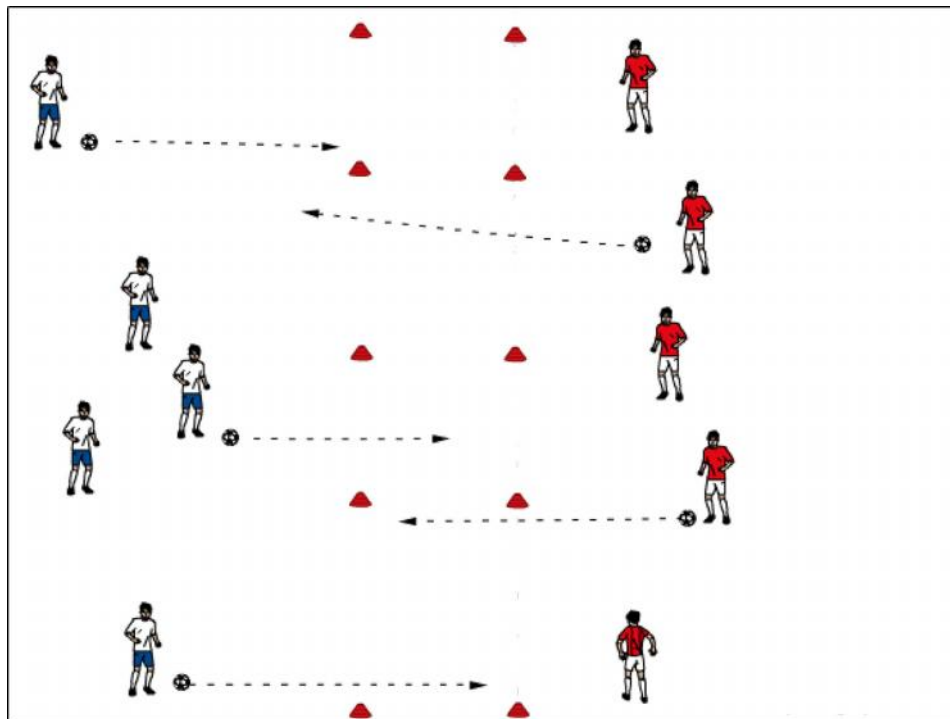
ACTIVITY 2

"Keep Your Yard Clean" - The game is excellent for working on kicking skills. The players will get a lot of chances to kick a ball, work on proper technique and develop leg power. They will also greatly enjoy playing the ball as they get to blast soccer balls down the field.

Divide the players into two teams. Put one team on one side of a field and the other team on the other side of the field. Use cones to create an "off-limits" zone between the two teams. This zone should be about eight yards wide.

Each player starts with a soccer ball. Each team tries to keep their half of the field free of balls by kicking all soccer balls in their half of the field over to the other side of the field.

Every time a ball enters a team's side of the field, a player runs over to the ball, dribbles it up toward the edge of the off-limits zone and kicks it back over to the opponent's side of the field. Players may not go in the "off-limits" zone. Any ball that goes into the off-limits zone stays there until play stops.



Stop play after a couple of minutes and count how many balls are in each team's side of the field. The team with the fewest soccer balls in their side of the field is the winner.

Have the players gather up the balls, each player starts with a ball, and play again. In between rounds, the coach should review proper kicking technique with the players.

The coach can vary the game slightly by requiring the players to use only their left foot in some rounds. Alternatively, the coach could require players to alternate feet. The first ball they kick is with the right foot, the second with the left foot, etc. The coach could also put four cones in a line on each side of the field and require the players to dribble in and out of the cones before kicking a ball down the field.

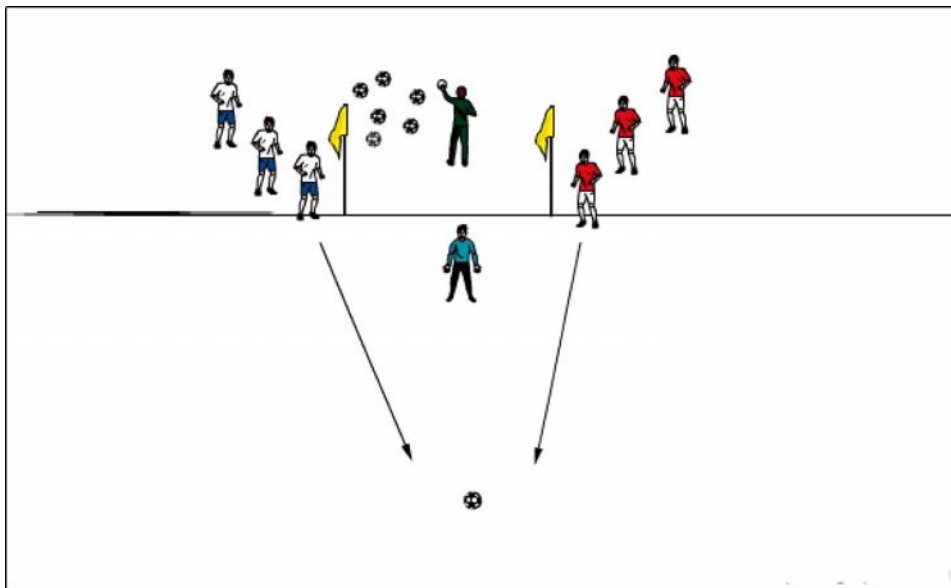
ACTIVITY 3

This activity will give players a chance to work on shooting skills while competing against another player. Young children always love to compete against one another. This activity will allow players to work on both their dribbling skills and their shooting skills.

In order to maximize player participation and minimize players standing around doing nothing, the coach should set up two separate fields, each with one goal. The head coach will work with half of the players at one goal while the assistant coach or another adult will work with the remaining players at the other goal. Each field should have only 4 - 6 players, no more.

At each goal, have two or three players stand just outside of one goal post. The other two or three players stand just outside of the other goal post. The coach stands behind the goal with as many soccer balls as possible.

The first player in each line must be touching the goal post with his foot. The coach throws a ball over the goal and onto the field, about 10 yards out from the goal. The first player in each line immediately runs out, tries to get the ball, turn toward the goal and shoot. The player without the ball tries to steal the ball from the opponent and score.



Once the ball goes out of play, the two players return to the end of the lines. The coach will quickly put a new ball into play for the next two players. Be sure to have the players rotate opponents so they do not always play against the same player. In order to maximize the number of 1 vs. 1 rounds, the coach should have a large supply of balls with him and always be ready to put a new ball into play as soon as the previous ball goes out of play.

Remember that games in this game group do not have goalies. If the coach wants, he could have one player stand in the goal and serve as a goalie. If the goalie gains possession of the ball, the play is considered to be over.

Coaching Points For This Activity:

- Be sure to have two games going at the same time.
- Minimize the amount of time each player is standing idle (playing two games at once is ideal).
- Have as many soccer balls available to use as possible.
- Put the next ball into play as soon as the previous ball goes out of play.
- Be sure the players rotate opponents so they do not play against the same player each time.

Variation: The coach stands about 20 yards away from the goal and roll the balls out towards the players as they come running onto the field from the goal.

Variation: The coach could create a third line and have three players run onto the field and compete against each other.

FINAL ACTIVITY

The final activity in any practice should always be a small game. Create two fields with goals and play two small games of 3 vs. 3. If there are not enough players, one of the games could be played 2 vs. 2. The fields should NOT be very long so that the players get plenty of chances to take shots. The goals should be about 4 or 5 yards wide.

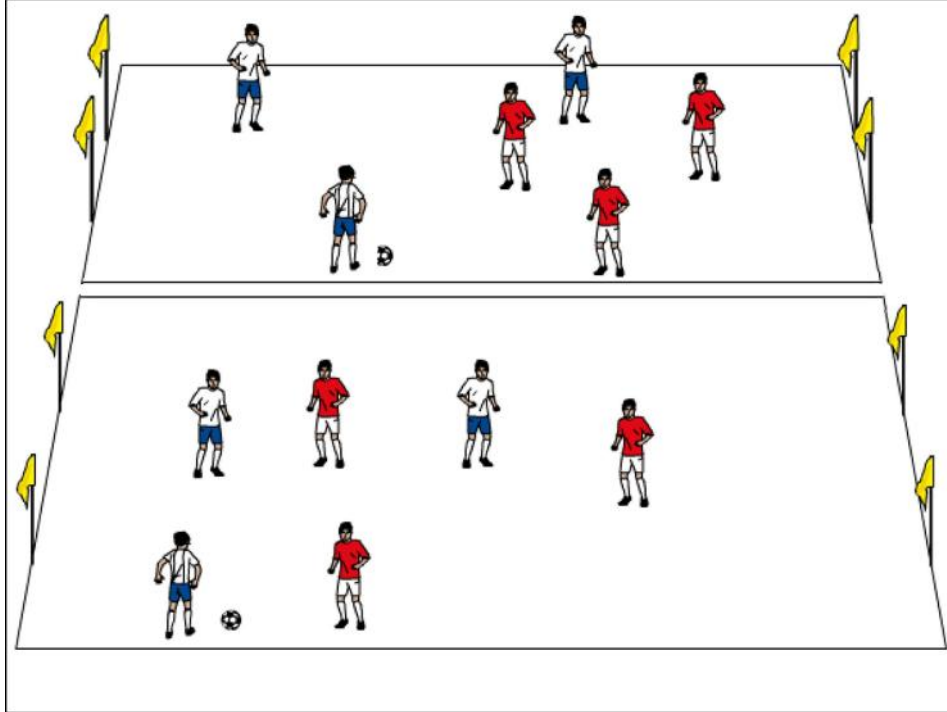
For a 3 vs. 3 game, make the field about 22 yards long and 20 yards wide. For a 2 vs. 2 game, make the field about 18 yards long and 15 yards wide.

The head coach should run one game while the assistant coach or other adult should run the other game. Each team should be in a different color shirt.

Place all extra soccer balls behind the goals so that if a ball is shot and goes out of play, the players can quickly grab a different ball and put it into play without wasting much time.

Remember that this age group does not use goalies. The concept of goalies will be introduced when the players turn seven years of age.

Rotate the teams around every 6-8 minutes so that each teams gets a chance to play against the other teams. If the there are four teams of three players each, the coach could have a tournament with each team playing the other teams in six minute games. See which team finishes with the best record.



AT THE END OF THE PRACTICE

At the end of the practice, the coach should ask himself two questions:

- 1) Did the players have a fun time at practice?
- 2) Did the practice help the players become better players?

PRACTICE SESSION # 4

DRIBBLING GAMES

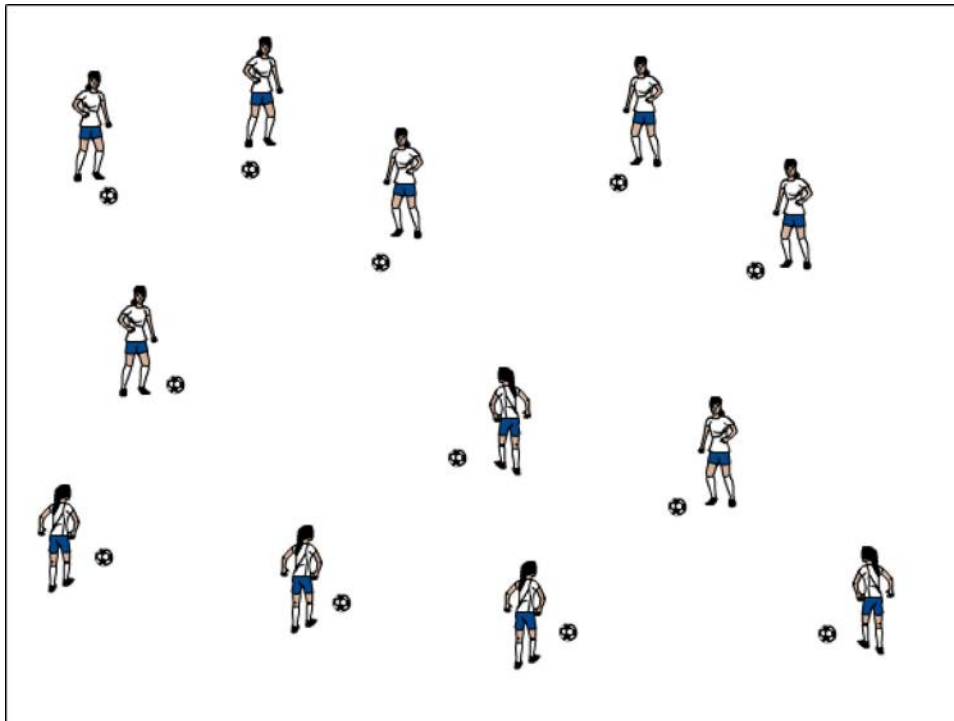
The fourth practice session will be a continuation of practice # 2 where the players were taught fun dribbling moves. For this practice, the coach will teach a few “real” dribbling moves. They will then get to try their dribbling skills against the other players in some fun dribbling games. The first activity is designed to teach the players the fundamental dribbling moves that most players use in soccer. These are the building blocks for more advanced moves that they will learn in later years. It is important that the team spends at least 30 minutes doing the first activity so they will have a good understanding of the basic dribbling moves used in soccer.

ACTIVITY 1

Start the practice using the same setup as practice # 2 with all players inside of a 25 yard square grid and each player having his own ball to work with. The players will work on several different dribbling moves, one at a time.

For each dribbling move, the coach will briefly discuss the move, demonstrate it, then have the players practice the move for a few minutes. If the coach does not feel comfortable demonstrating these dribbling moves, he should bring in an older sibling of one of the players to demonstrate or have one of the more advanced players on the team demonstrate each move.

Continue the sequence of demonstrating a move, then letting the players practice that move. Observe each players' technique. If needed, stop the players, make any needed corrections, demonstrate the move again and have them continue working on that particular move.



The coach should try to spend at least 30 minutes on this activity since they will be learning many of the main dribbling moves used in soccer and also make many hundreds of touches on the ball. Players will need significant time trying each move in order to be able to properly perform each move.

Inside Of The Foot Cut: Have each player use the **inside** of his foot to cut the ball **across** his body. The direction of the ball should change at least 90 degrees. Instruct each player to quickly swing his hips hard and get the **inside** of his foot around the ball (to the opposite side of the ball) when cutting the ball with the inside of the foot.

Outside Of The Foot Cut: This is a much more advanced move. Each player uses the **outside** of his foot to cut the ball **away** from his body. Again, the direction of the ball should change at least 90 degrees. Instruct each player to quickly swing his hips hard and get the **outside** of his foot around the ball (to the opposite side of the ball) when cutting the ball with the outside of the foot.

Step On The Ball And Turn: Each player uses one foot to reach out in front of him and step on the ball to stop it. The player then quickly uses the inside or outside of the same foot to move the ball to the left or to the right, changing the direction of the ball by at least 90 degrees. Be sure the players do not step on the ball and run past it. The ball should always remain in front of the player so that he can easily see the ball at all times. At no time should the ball ever be behind the player or underneath the player.

Inside - Outside: Each player takes a touch on the ball with the **inside** of one foot so the ball goes across his body. The player then takes a second touch on the ball with the **outside** of the **other** foot so that the ball continues going in the same direction.

After doing this move, the player then repeats the move in the opposite sequence: inside of the second foot, followed by a touch in the same direction with the outside of the first foot. As an example, the player would move the ball to his left by hitting the ball with the inside of his right foot, then continue moving the ball in the same direction with the outside of his left foot. After that, the player would reverse the sequence by cutting the ball back to his right, using the inside of his left foot, followed by a touch in the same direction with the outside of his right foot. Repeat this sequence so the ball goes up the field in a zigzag pattern.

In And Out: The player taps the ball across his body using the **inside** of one of his feet. The player quickly hops sideways in the direction that the ball is going. While hopping, he swings that foot behind the ball and over to the opposite side of the ball. The player then uses the **outside** of the **same** foot to knock the ball back in the opposite direction.

Pull Back: This move is quite advanced. With the ball well out in front of the player, the player should reach out for the ball with one foot, put the sole of the foot on the ball and then pull the ball back so it is just in front of him. The player then uses the inside or outside of the same foot to change the direction of the ball 90 degrees while swinging his hips swiftly. The player then continues dribbling in the new direction.

After the coach has let the players try each of these moves for a few minutes, the coach should have the players dribble around inside the grid. The coach then calls out the name of one of the moves AND which foot to use. Below are a few commands that the coach might call out:

Inside Cut, Left - Players cut their ball **across** their body with the inside part of their **left** foot.

Outside Cut, Left - Players cut their ball **away from** their body with the outside of their **left** foot.

Step On The Ball And Turn, Left - Players step on the ball with their left foot, then play the ball a second time with their left foot either to their left or to their right, 90 degrees.

Inside - Outside - Players dribble their ball inside the grid using the Inside - Outside technique.

Once the first player completes two figure 8s, he passes the ball to the second player who performs the same activity. Have each player perform this activity at least three times.

After awhile, stop the activity and send the players back to the starting line. Start the activity up again, but this time make it a race between the different pairs of players. See which pair of players can each go through the activity three times the fastest. Players will naturally work harder and with more enthusiasm if they are competing against the other players at practice.

Coaching Points: Challenge the players to switch feet when doing this activity so that they are always dribbling the ball with the foot **furthest** from the cone they are approaching. This means that they will use the right foot to go around one of the cones and use the left foot to go around the other cone.

A more advanced challenge for the players would be to have the players use only the insides of their feet to go around the cones the first time through (right foot when dribbling counter clockwise, left foot when dribbling clockwise) and then use only the outsides of their feet to go around the cones the second time through (left foot when dribbling counter clockwise, right foot when dribbling clockwise).

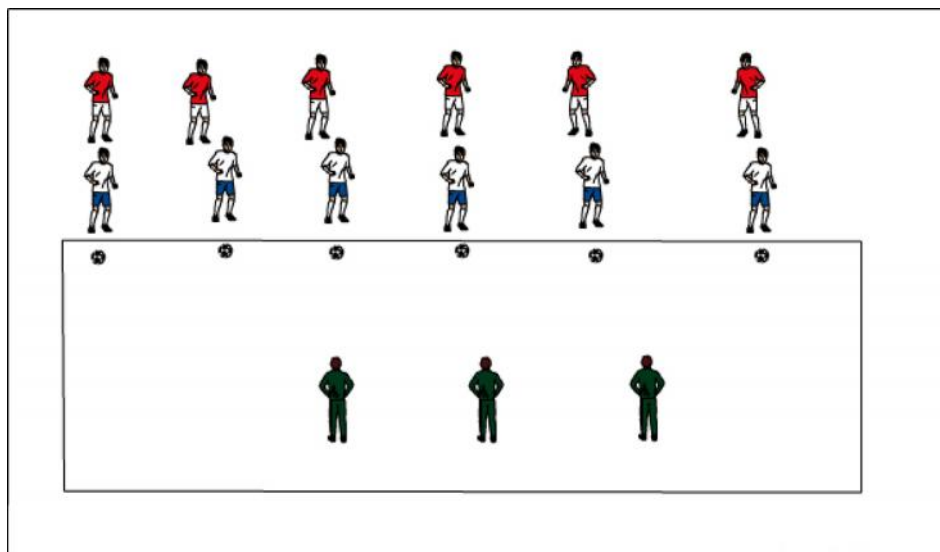
ACTIVITY 3

Create a very wide grid, about 25 yards wide, but only about 10 yards long. Each player stands on one end line with a soccer ball. Divide the players into two groups. Two or three adults (or older siblings) stand inside the playing area, each without a soccer ball.

On command, each player in the first group attempts to dribble his soccer ball from one end line to the other end line without an adult kicking his soccer ball away. When that group has completed that, the coach commands the second group of players to do the same thing. After that, the players repeat this activity, but this time they dribble back to the original starting line, one group at a time.

By alternating groups, the coaches will have be able to get in the way of more of the dribbling players. This will force more players to look up and change the direction of their dribble as they attempt to get past the coach, to the other end line.

Coaches need to be careful not to knock over the smaller players and also not kick a ball in a way that will cause it to strike a player. The main objective for the coaches is to get in the way of as many players as possible, forcing the players to look up and then use a dribbling move to change direction.



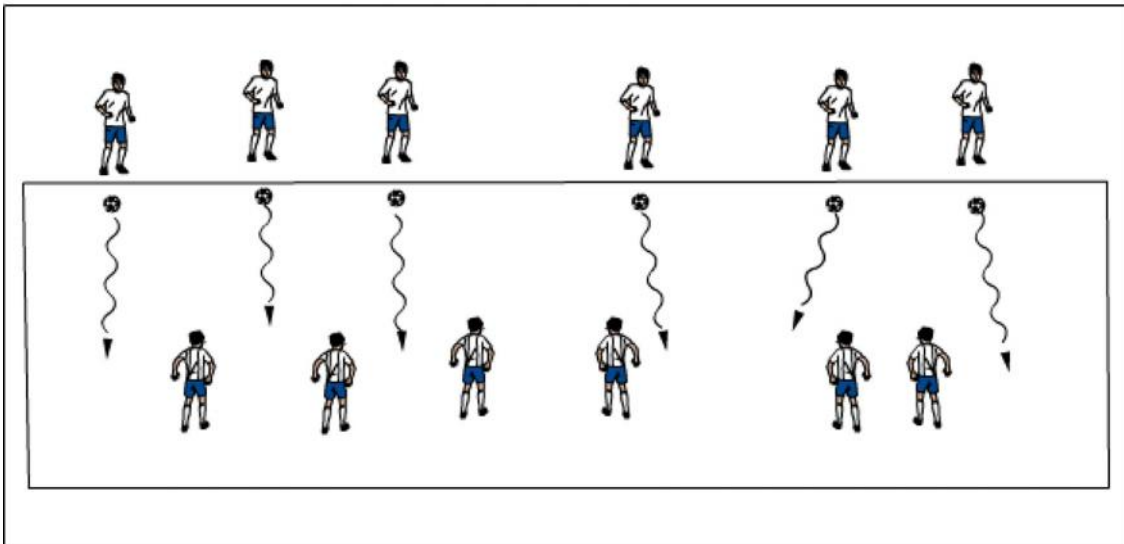
ACTIVITY 4

“Over And Back” - This is one of the best dribbling games around. This game is played at almost all LMSC training programs and camps.

Use the same grid as the previous activity, about 25 yards wide and 10 yards long. Half of the players start on one end line, each with a ball. The remaining players start in the middle of the playing area, each without a ball. If there are an uneven number of players, set up the activity so that there is one more player with a ball than without a ball.

On the coach's command, the players with a ball each try to dribble their ball over the opposite end line. If they are able to do that, they immediately turn around and try to dribble their ball back over the starting line.

Players without a ball try to steal a ball from any other player and dribble it back over the starting line.



Any player who loses his ball immediately tries to steal a ball from any player with a ball and dribble that ball back over the starting line. If a player loses a ball and then steals a different ball, he does NOT have to first go to the opposite end line, he only has to dribble the ball back over the starting line.

If a ball is knocked over one of the sidelines, the nearest player not in possession of that ball takes possession and tries to return it over the starting line.

Players without a ball may NOT go over the far end line when trying to steal a ball from another player.

Once a ball is returned over the original end line, the player with the ball picks it up and gets to start the next round of play with that ball. Once all the balls have returned back over the starting end line, play stops. The players with a ball start the next round with that ball on the end line. The players without a ball start the next round inside the playing area without a ball.

Continue playing round after round until the players become exhausted.

In each round, there will be a lot of 1 v 1 duels initially. However, as players start to return balls back over the starting end line, there will be 1 v 2 duels, 1 v 3 duels, 1 v 4 duels and even 1 v 5 duels with each player playing for himself. There are no teammates in this game, it is every player for himself.

FINAL ACTIVITY

Play one of the practice ending games described in any of the previous practices or setup a regular game with goals. Players always love to have a scrimmage at the end of practice. The scrimmage will give the players a chance to try their dribbling skills in a fun, competitive game. The coach should encourage the players to dribble the ball when they are in possession of it. Equally as important, coaches need to discourage players simply kicking the ball down the field without a purpose. Often times in end of practice scrimmages, coaches will punish this act by calling a foul and awarding the ball to the other team. The point is that players need to be working on their dribbling skills so that they can develop as soccer players.

AT THE END OF THE PRACTICE

At the end of the practice, the coach should ask himself two questions:

- 1) Did the players have a fun time at practice?
- 2) Did the practice help the players become better players?

PRACTICE SESSION # 5

GOAL SCORING

Players love to score goals. This practice session will focus on scoring goals. Players will have lots of chances to put the ball in the net. The practice will begin with players shooting without any pressure of opponents. The practice will then progress to trying to score under pressure of an opponent. The last part of the practice, as always, will be a small sided game.

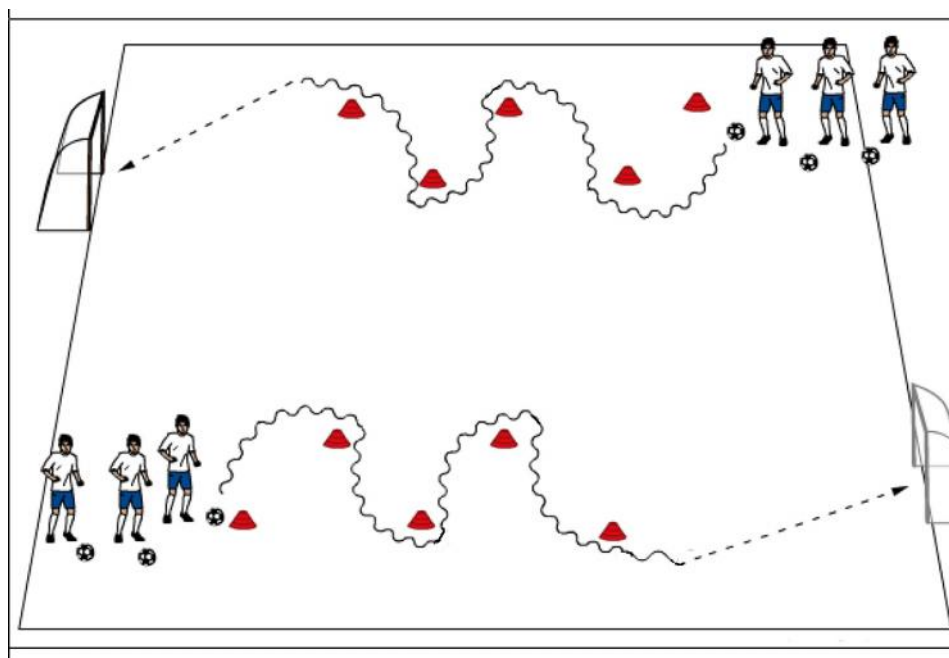
ACTIVITY 1

Set up two goals about 20 yards apart, but do not have them line up with each other. Instead, have them slightly offset, as shown in the diagram. Each player has a soccer ball to work with. Have half of the team start 20 yards from one goal and the other half of the players 20 yards in front of the other goal. Place five cones in front of each line. Be sure to stagger the cones so players will have to change direction hard when dribbling through them.

The first player in each line dribbles his ball in and out of the five cones, then takes a shot at the goal. After the player has shot, he retrieves his ball and goes to the end of the **opposite** line.

Instruct the next player to start the same procedure as soon as the player in front of him gets past the third cone. This will keep the players active and much busier than if they wait for the player in front of them to take a shot. Four players should be busy at all times in order to maximize the number of shots that each player takes.

After awhile, change the activity by moving the goals and the cones so that the players get a chance to shoot with the opposite foot. Remember that players should shoot with the foot **furthest** from the goal so that they can **swing their hips and their bodies** into each shot. In a game, if a player is coming down the right side of the field, he should almost always use his right foot when dribbling and use his right foot to shoot. If a player is coming down the left side of the field, he should almost always use his left foot to dribble and also use his left foot to shoot.



ACTIVITY 2

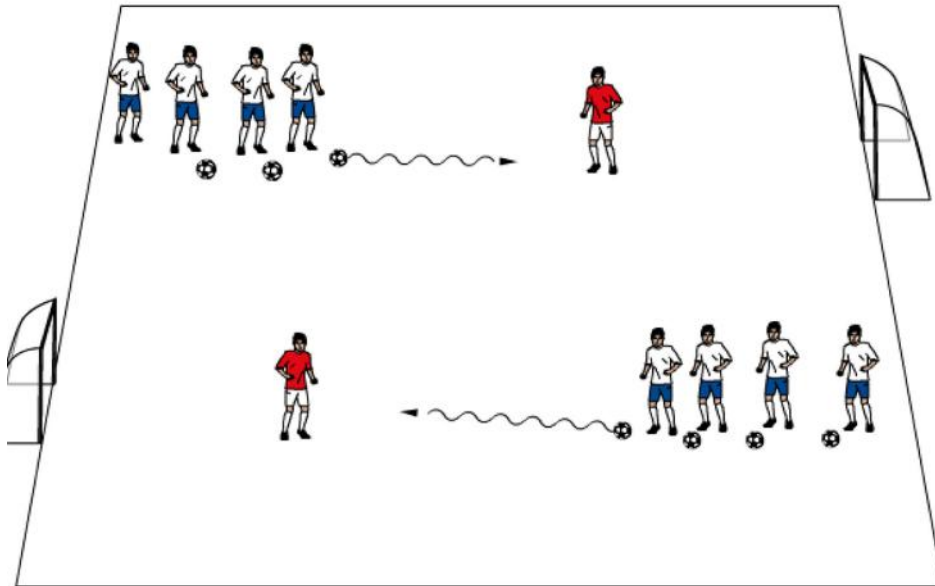
This activity will combine dribbling and shooting. Set up two fields, each about 15 - 18 yards wide. Place a goal at one end of each field. Have a defender stand about 12 yards in front of the goal. All other players at the field have a soccer ball and are in line, about 20 yards from the goal. Remember that there should be two games played with half of the team at each field.

The first player in line dribbles at the defender, tries to get around him, shoot and score. The defender tries to steal the ball before the attacking player is able to shoot. Once the play is over (either the attacker scored or lost possession of the ball), the next attacking player in line dribbles at the defender.

The player who was just attacking retrieves his ball and goes to the end of the line on the **opposite** field. This is the reason that the two fields are facing in the opposite direction.

Have each player serve as the defender for one minute, then switch defenders. Encourage the players to use their dribbling moves to beat the defender and shoot. Require the players to shoot left footed if they got around the defender on the left side of the field and shoot right footed if they got around the defender on the right side of the field.

Variation: Instead of having the defender stay on the field for a minute, change the game by having the attacking player take the defender's place if he is unable to score.



ACTIVITY 3

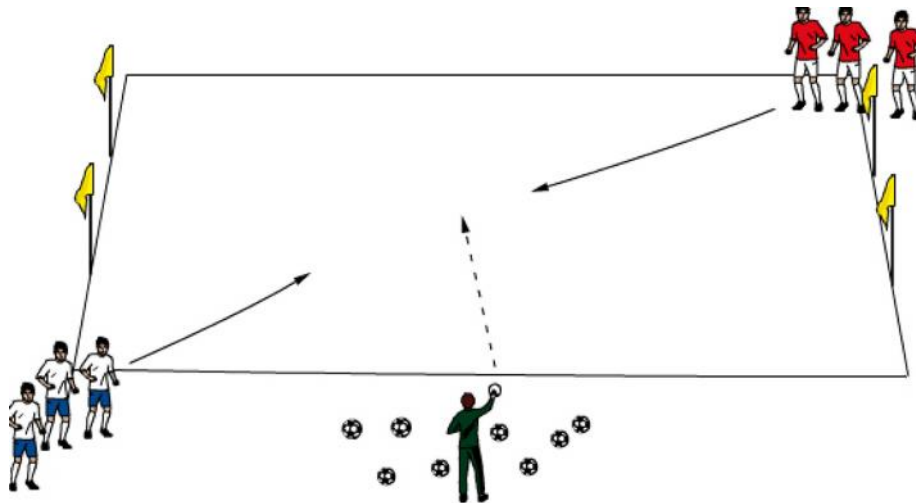
Create two fields, each about 15 yards long. Place a goal at each end of each field. Have half of the players in white shirts and half in dark shirts. Each team lines up at opposite corners of the field, on the same sideline. The coach stands in the middle of that sideline with a large supply of soccer balls.

When the coach rolls a ball onto the field, the first player in each line runs out onto the field, tries to possess the ball and take a shot on the other team's goal. Play continues until a goal is scored or the ball goes out of play. At that time, the players return to the end of their team's line. Keep track of each team's score, see which team can score 10 goals first. Be sure to change the order in each line so that players get a chance to play against different players.

Variation: The coach calls out a number. If the coach calls "one," then one player from each team comes onto the field. If he calls "two," then two players from each team come onto the field to play. The coach could also call three and make that round 3 vs. 3.

Variation: The coach calls out two numbers. The first number indicates how many players come out from the line on the left. The second number indicates how many players come out from the line on the right. So, if the coach calls "2, 1" there would be a 2 vs. 1 situation.

Variation: If a player scores, he switches over to the opposite field (assuming that two fields are setup for this activity). Players always greatly enjoy switching fields so they can show off to the other players and the coaches.



FINAL ACTIVITY

As with all other practices, have the players scrimmage for the last 20 minutes of practice. Divide the players into four teams of two or three. Create two fields with goals. Be sure that the fields are not long. Since this is a shooting game, the fields should be short. The maximum length of each field should be 20 yards, though 15 yards should work a lot better. This will enable players to take more shots. Longer fields would require them to spend too much time taking the ball down the field into shooting range. Be sure to keep the fields short.

Be sure to place all extra soccer balls inside the goals or just behind the goals so that the opposing team can quickly put a new ball into play once the previous ball has gone out of play. This will minimize the amount of time wasted while players chase down soccer balls.

BE SURE THE PLAYERS HAVE A FUN TIME!!!!

PRACTICE SESSION # 6

PASSING AND RECEIVING

This practice will introduce the players to the concepts of passing and teamwork. Players will be asked to look up when they have the ball and try to find a teammate to pass to. While this might not seem like a difficult concept, coaches need to remember that six year olds do not want to "share the ball" with anyone else, even someone on their team. Coaches will need to convince players at this age that it is often a good idea to try to get the ball to a teammate, especially someone who is in a better position to score.

In future years, when the players are in older age groups, we will teach the "inside of the foot pass" and the "outside of the foot pass." For these young players, we will only teach the "**instep pass**." The inside of the foot pass and the outside of the foot pass are both a bit too difficult for children of these ages.

Coaches should review the coaching points for the **instep kick** found in practice 3 of this manual as well as the coaching points for **receiving the ball with the inside of the foot**. Players should be striking the ball with their laces. Their toes should be pointing straight down, toward the ground. Be sure that players do NOT toe the ball when they pass it.

As with all techniques that are worked on, be sure that the players try half of their passes right footed and half of their passes left footed.

Coaches should remind players to use the **inside** of their foot to **receive** a pass. They should receive the ball so that their foot contacts the ball just **above the equator** so that the ball does not pop up. When using the inside of the foot to receive a pass, the toes should be pulled up higher than the heel to "lock the ankle."

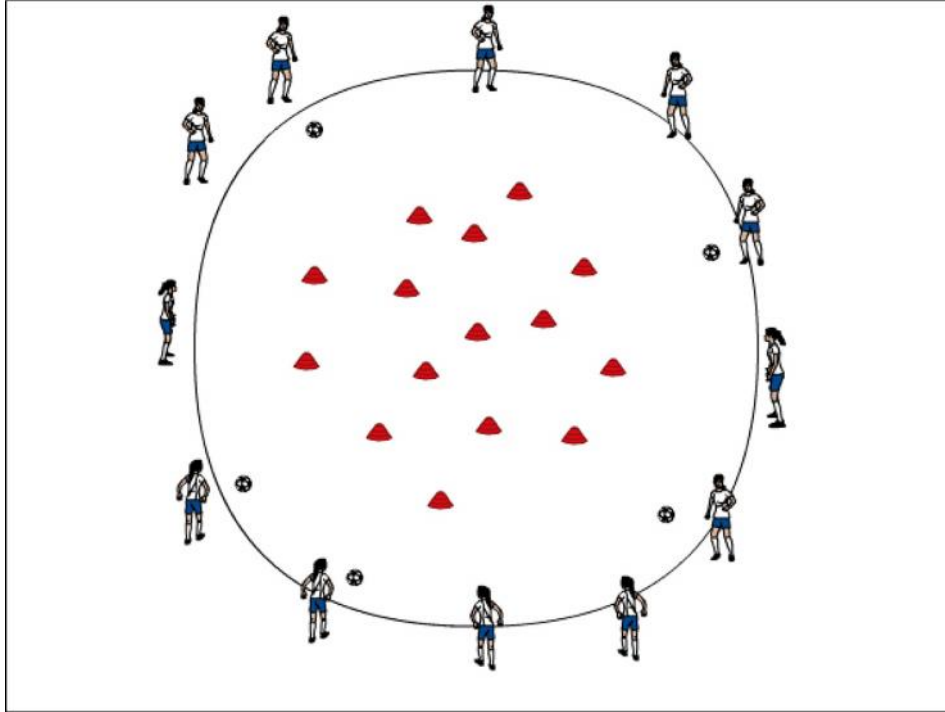
ACTIVITY 1

As the players begin to show up for practice, group the players into pairs. Have the players stand about 10 - 12 yards away from their partner. Have each pair pass a ball back and forth. Require them to make every other pass left footed. Observe each player's technique and correct any errors. Be sure that no players are trying to toe the ball. Have them use the **instep** of their foot to **pass** the ball and use the **inside** of the foot to **receive** the ball. When all players have arrived, move on to the next activity.

ACTIVITY 2

"Mine Field" - Have all of the players on the team form a large circle with a diameter of about 30 yards. Give just under half of the players a soccer ball. Place about 16 cones in the middle of the circle with the cones only about four to five feet apart from each other. Be sure the cones are placed well away from the perimeter of the circle (at least 8 yards from the perimeter).

Play starts with the players with the soccer balls speed dribbling towards the middle of the playing area. These players then dribble their ball in and out of the cones, trying not to hit any of them. Have each player dribble inside the mine field for about 10 seconds. They should not simply try to dash through the cones. This is NOT a race. Once they get through the cones, they need to quickly look up, find a player standing on the edge of the circle without a soccer ball, pass the ball to that player and take that player's spot on the edge of the circle. The player receiving the pass then dribbles into the circle and repeats the activity.



Coaching Points:

- When the player first receives a ball, he should dribble fast, towards the cones.
- As the player gets near the cones, he needs to slow down, keep the ball close to him and avoid having the ball hit any of the cones.
- Once the player is out of the mine field, the player should quickly look up, find a player on the edge of the circle who does not have a ball and pass the ball to that player.
- Keep the head up as much as possible when dribbling. Players dribbling a ball should only look down at the ball briefly in a game. By doing this, they will be able to see their teammates as well as their opponents.

ACTIVITY 3

“Keep Away From The Coach” - Using cones, create two playing grids, each about 20 yards square. Place half of the players in each grid. One ball is needed for each grid. Have a coach stand in the middle of each grid. The players play keep away against the coach. The job of the players is to pass the ball around so that the coach can't steal the ball.

The coach needs to act as if he is trying to steal the ball. Realistically however, the coach should try to put just enough pressure on the player with the ball so that the player has to quickly look up and figure out who to pass the ball to.

The coach should try to angle his approach to the player with the ball in such a way that the player will find his first choice passing lane blocked by the coach. This will force the player to use his **eyes** and his **brain** to determine a second choice of who to pass the ball to. It is important that players learn to look at all the different options of where to pass. If their first option is not possible, the player needs to realize that there are other choices of where the pass can be made. Soccer is a game that requires a lot of quick thought. Force the players to look up and make good decisions when they have the ball.

Be sure that with each pass, the player is looking to play the ball to a **specific** teammate and not just randomly kick the ball away.

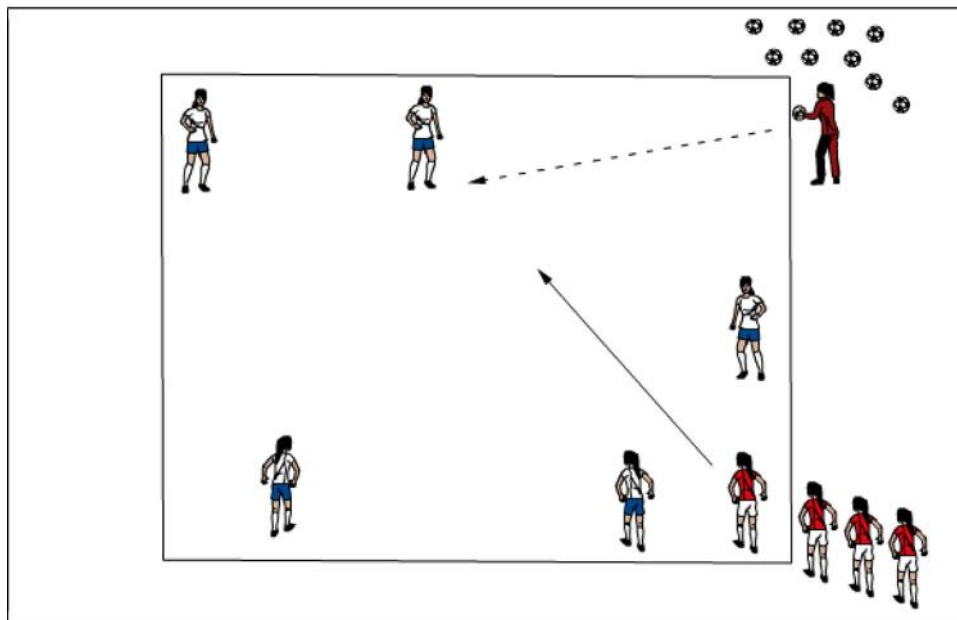
If there are enough players and at least three adults at the practice, make three grids for this activity. Ideally in a game like this, there should be at most four offensive players playing against the lone defender. Having too many attackers in one playing area will mean that each individual player will not get as many chances to receive a pass or make a pass.

ACTIVITY 4

Divide the players into two teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. Each team should have between 4 and 6 players. Create a playing area about 20 yards square. One team stands inside the playing area. The other team stands in line, just outside of the playing area. The coach stands on a different edge of the playing area with a large supply of soccer balls.

The coach plays one of the balls to a player inside of grid. As soon as the player receives the ball, one member of the opposite team runs into the grid. The team inside the playing area plays keep away from that player, trying to make as many passes as possible.

When the defender is kicks the ball out of the grid, he immediately runs out of the grid, retrieves the ball and returns it to the coach. He then returns to the end of the line. The coach puts a new ball into play and the next defender in line comes into the playing area. Continue playing for several minutes, then have the teams switch roles.



If the game proves too difficult for the attacking team, the coach can make the game easier by either making the playing area bigger or requiring the defenders to walk. If the game proves too easy for the offensive team, make the playing area smaller so the players have less time to receive the ball and determine who to next pass the ball to. If a defender is struggling to win the ball, end that round when the offensive team is able to make 10 passes.

The coach (or an older sibling) could also serve as an attacking player, helping the players establish a passing rhythm.

Coaching Points:

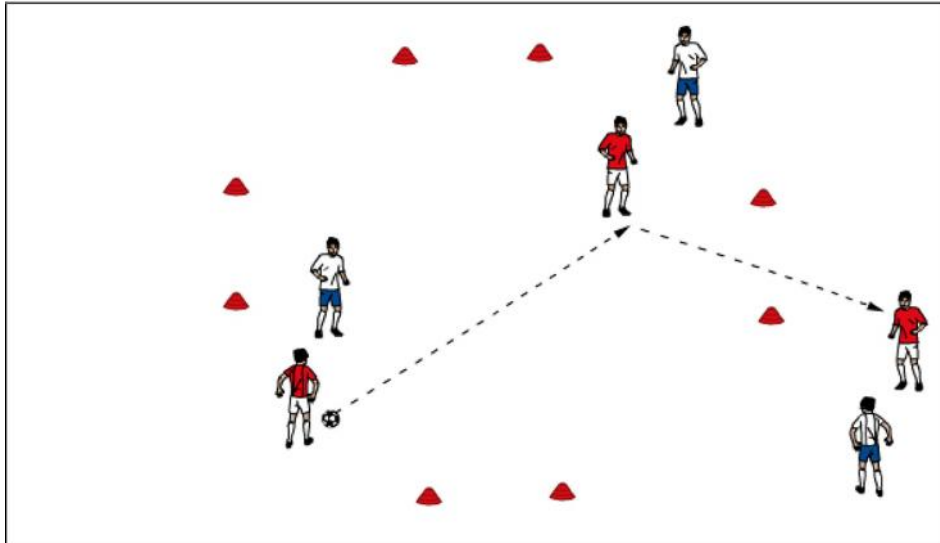
- Players need to receive the ball and quickly look up to see where their teammates are and also to see where the defender is.
- Players need to not just look up, but also look around. They should quickly figure out what their options are when they have the ball. They should not just look to play the ball to the first teammate that they happen to see. Ask them to look at teammates on their left and on their right.
- Get the attacking players without the ball to move into a position where they can receive a pass. They should NOT be standing behind the defender. Encourage them to move to open space to receive a pass. This however might be a bit too advanced for them.
- Be sure the players do not bunch up. The offensive players want to be as spread out as possible so that the defender's job is more difficult. An important concept to remember in soccer is that the attacking team wants to make the field as big as possible while the defending team wants to make the field as small as possible.

FINAL ACTIVITY

Use cones to mark out four goals, each about five yards wide. Position the four goals in a rectangle, similar to the diagram to the right. The goals should be about 15 yards apart. There are no playing boundaries in this game but there needs to be plenty of area outside of the goals for the players to run since much of the game will be played outside of the area between the four goals.

If there are 12 players, make two fields and play 3 vs. 3, otherwise, play the game 4 vs. 4 or 5 vs. 5. One team plays in white shirts, the other team plays in the team's jerseys.

To score a goal, a team must have a player in possession of the ball successfully pass the ball through any one of the four sets of cones to a teammate. If the receiving player is able to control the pass, the team gets a point.



Play continues after a successful pass through one of the goals. The team in possession then tries to make another pass through any of the four goals.

The coach should be sure to stress to the players that the teammates of the player in possession of the ball need to move around the field and get to a spot where they can receive a pass that is played through one of the goals. The concept of “movement without the ball” is a very important one in soccer. Coaches need to stress to players that the players must still be working hard even when they do not have the ball. Players need to learn to run to a spot on the field where they can help their teammate with the ball.

PRACTICE SESSION # 7

DRIBBLING GAMES, SHIELDING AND 1 v 1 DUELS

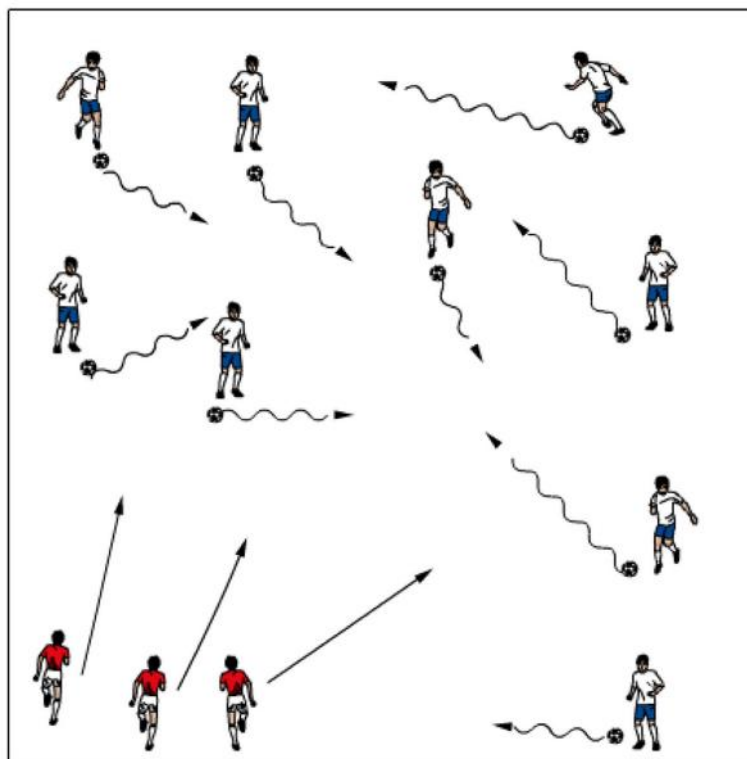
This practice will continue the all important theme of dribbling. By now, players should have the self confidence to possess the ball and dribble it down the field. In this practice, we will again have players work on beating defenders 1 vs. 1. Players will only become dribbling experts if they are given many chances to practice their moves against opponents. Coaches need to continue to encourage players to try and beat opponents by dribbling. Coaches also need to realize that they will often not succeed at this age, but by practicing their dribbling moves against opponents, they will eventually become star dribblers with the ability to score big goals in games.

ACTIVITY 1

“Clear The House” - Using cones, create a playing area about 20 yards square. Place all but three players inside the grid. The players inside the grid each have a soccer ball. The remaining three players stand off the field together, each without a ball. When the coach starts the game, the three players run into the playing area and try to knock the offensive team’s soccer balls out of the grid. The players with a ball each try to keep possession of their ball while staying inside the grid.

When a player has his ball knocked out of the grid, the player must immediately go get the ball, bring the ball back into the grid and resume dribbling around. It is important that coaches do NOT play this game where a player who has his ball knocked out stays out of the game. This will lead to too many players sitting on the sideline doing nothing for a long period of time.

Play the game for about a minute, then stop. Have three different players serve as the defenders and play another one minute round.



After a few rounds, take a short break and explain the concept of shielding to the players. Shielding a ball is when a player positions his body between the ball and the defender so that the defender is unable to steal the ball or kick it away. The player with the ball must be within playing distance of the ball (close enough to touch it) or the referee will call a foul (obstruction) on the player.

To shield a ball, the player tries to position his body so that it is between the ball and the opposing player. When shielding, the ball should **not** be under the player's body. Instead, the ball should be on the side of the body **opposite** from where the defender is.

There are two main ways to shield a ball. One way is to stand sideways to the opponent. The player with the ball leans his shoulder into the defender. The player with the ball should be positioned sideways so his near shoulder (not elbow) is pushing into the opponent. The ball should be on the foot furthest from the defender so that the defender cannot reach in and kick the ball away.

The second method of shielding is for the player with the ball to turn his back on the player trying to steal the ball. The player should have his butt sticking out a bit to give him more room to protect the ball. Again, the ball should **not** be under the player. Instead, the ball should be within reach of the player with the ball, but far enough from the defender so that the defender cannot get a foot on the ball.

In a game, when a player is shielding the ball, he should do so with his head up so that he can either see a teammate to pass to or see a space on the field where he can dribble the ball to and get away from the defender. Remind the players to look up when shielding. They should only look down at the ball occasionally when dribbling or shielding.

After reviewing the finer points of shielding, resume playing "Clear The House." The players with the ball will need to decide if they should try to dribble the ball past a defender or shield the ball from him. If the player decides to shield the ball, he should look up to try and find space to quickly dribble to and get away from the defender.

To make the game more competitive, have each defender count how many balls they are able to kick out of the grid in one minute. At the end of the round, ask each player to shout out how many soccer balls they kicked out. Add up the three scores and make that number a team score. Challenge the next set of three defenders to top the number of balls kicked out by the previous team.

ACTIVITY 2

"Killer" - Make the playing area a little bit larger, perhaps 25 yards square. All players start inside of the playing area, each with a soccer ball. Instruct the players to dribble around, inside the area. Have each player try to maintain possession of his ball and also try to kick away the other players' soccer balls. Be sure that they only try to kick away someone else's ball while they are in possession of their own ball.

Encourage the players to go after the other players and not just try to hide with their ball. They should take risks by dribbling towards other players and trying to kick the other players' soccer balls away. Also encourage players to try and shield the ball from the other players when another player is trying to steal their ball.

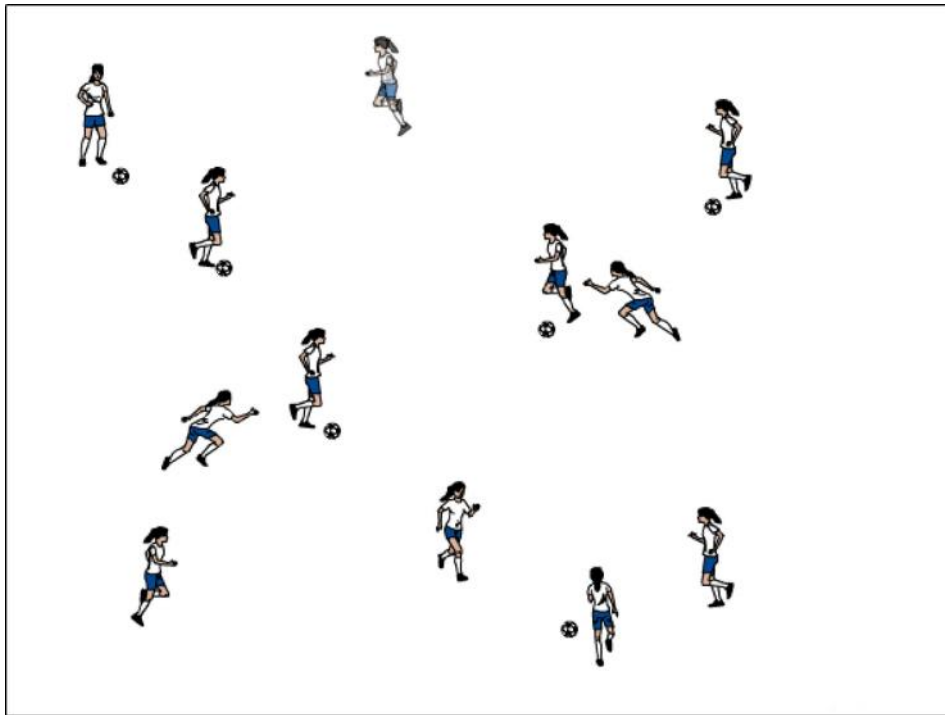
If a player has his ball kicked out of the playing area, he must immediately retrieve the ball and bring it back into the playing area. He may NOT kick out someone else's ball until he has brought his ball back into the playing area.

ACTIVITY 3

“The Take Away Game” - This has been a favorite game for many LMSC teams over the years. This game takes place in the same 25 yard square grid as the previous activity. All of the players start inside of the playing area, but only half of the players start with a soccer ball. If there is an odd number of players in the game, have there be one more player with a ball than without a ball.

When the coach yells out “attackers, start dribbling,” the players with soccer balls start dribbling around inside the grid while the other players (the defenders) stand still. The coach then yells “Defenders, play.” At this point, the players who do not have a soccer ball each try to steal someone else’s soccer ball. They do not simply try to kick it away. Instead, they try to steal it. If they are able to steal a ball, they keep possession of it. Any player who loses his ball must then find a **different** player in possession of a ball and try to steal that ball. The player may not go after the player who just stole the ball from him.

Similarly, if a defender forces a player to dribble his ball out of bounds, the defender takes possession of that ball. The player who lost the ball must then try to steal a ball from some other player who is in possession of a ball.



After about a minute, or when the players get tired, the coach yells “Stop.” The players then try to quickly pick up a soccer ball. The players who were unable to pick up a ball must do some sort of fun punishment such as walk around the field for five seconds imitating a duck, a monkey or Frankenstein. Once the players have had a short time to rest, start the game up again in the same manner.

Players without a ball will often try to walk around in this game. The coach needs to strongly encourage the players without a ball to work hard to take away someone’s soccer ball.

One way for the coach to control the difficulty of the game is to vary the number of soccer balls used. Typically the game will have about one ball for every two players. The coach can make this game a bit more difficult by taking away one soccer ball. Now there will be more defenders playing against fewer players in possession of a ball.

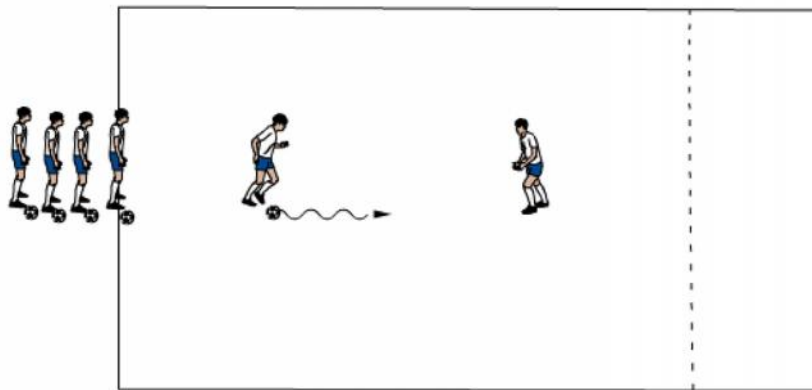
FINAL ACTIVITY

“Ding” - Set up two playing areas, each about 18 yards wide. Create a three yard long end zone at the end of each grid. Have one defender stand about three yards in front of the end zone. All other players in the game have a ball and are in a line about 12 yards from the end zone. Be sure to set up two similar playing areas so that players do not stand in a long line waiting for a chance to play. Ideally, there should be 5 or 6 players in each group.

Play starts with the first player dribbling his ball into the field. He tries to dribble his ball around the defender and into the end zone. To score, he must step on the ball inside the end zone so that it is not moving inside the end zone. The defender is NOT allowed to cross over the line, into the end zone. Play continues until a goal is scored, the defender steals the ball or the ball goes out of the playing area.

If the attacking player scores, he dribbles back to the end of the line.

If the attacking player does not score, the defender retrieves the ball and goes to the end of the line. The player who was just playing as the attacker becomes the new defender.



Once the play has ended, the next attacker **immediately** dribbles his ball into the playing area.

This is one of my all time favorite games. It is an excellent game for teaching players how to beat opponents 1 v 1. There are several variations to this game which my travel teams play regularly at practice. The reason that the game is called “Ding” is that I always yell “Ding” whenever an attacking player loses possession of the ball and the play is over.

Coaching Points:

- Be sure to have two fields setup so players are constantly busy. There should only be five or six players at each field so that players are not waiting long to play.
- Encourage players to attack the defender and not just hold onto the ball or shield it. The attacking player needs to find a way to get past the defender and into the end zone.
- Encourage the players to try the various dribbling moves that they have worked on in practice.
- Do not allow the defender to go into the end zone.
- Ideally, the defender should try to be about four yards in front of the end zone. It is very difficult for a defender to prevent a goal if he is standing at the edge of the end zone.
- The attacking player may not simply kick the ball into the end zone. He must cross into the end zone while still in control of his soccer ball. This is why the player must step on the ball inside the end zone. Do not allow a goal to count if the ball rolls outside of the end zone before the attacking player is able to step on it.
- If a defender is struggling with player after player scoring on him, the coach should stop the game and have a different defender take his place.

PRACTICE SESSION # 8

PASSING AND RECEIVING

ACTIVITY 1

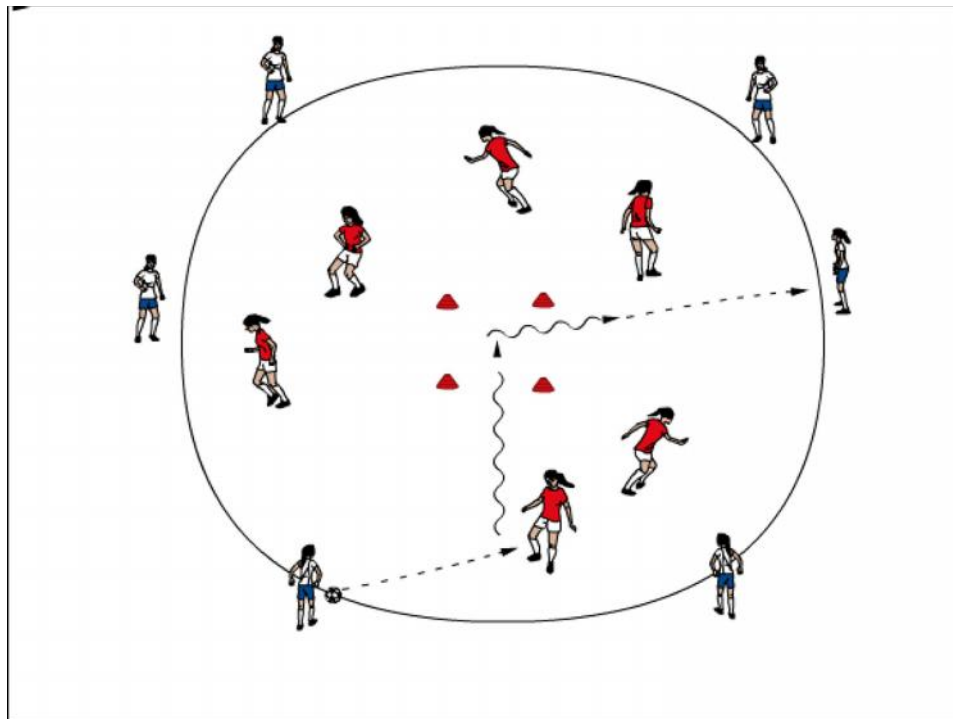
As the players arrive at practice, put the players into pairs and have each pair pass a ball back and forth. Each pair should be about 10 yards apart. Ask them to alternate feet with their passes, first with the left, then with the right, etc. Watch their technique to make sure they are kicking the ball properly and also receiving the ball properly. Be sure to review the coaching points for instep passing and receiving listed in practice session # 3. When all players have arrived at practice, move on to the next activity.

ACTIVITY 2

Using cones, create a circle about 20 yards in diameter. Place four cones in a square in the middle of the circle with each side being about four yards long. Put half of the players inside of the cones to start, each without a soccer ball. The other half of the players each have a ball and stand on the perimeter of the circle.

When the coach says go, each player inside the cones runs toward a player on the edge of the circle and calls for a pass. Be sure the players call out the name of the player who they wish to receive a pass from. When playing in a game, it is important that players learn to “demand” a pass from a teammate when they want the ball.

The inside players receive the pass, turn and dribble inside the square marked by the cones. They then immediately dribble out of the square in any direction, toward any player on the edge of the circle who does not have a ball. The player will need to look up when dribbling to find a player on the perimeter without a ball. Players on the edge of the circle who do not have a ball should call for a pass from any player in the middle who has a ball. The players in the middle who have a ball then make a pass to the player on the edge of the circle who calls for a pass.



After passing to a perimeter player, the middle player runs back through the cones, runs out of the circle in any direction, looks to find a different player on the edge of the circle who has a ball, runs towards that player and calls for a pass.

The activity continues for about a minute. The coach then stops play and switches the players on the edge of the circle with the players who were inside the circle, running around. Repeat this sequence several times.

The coaches should ensure that the following are happening each round:

- Players are using the proper passing technique (ball struck with the laces, not the toes)
- Players are using the proper receiving technique (inside of the foot, received at the equator)
- Players without a ball are calling for passes by shouting out the name of a player with a ball
- Players are using both their left foot and their right foot when passing and when receiving

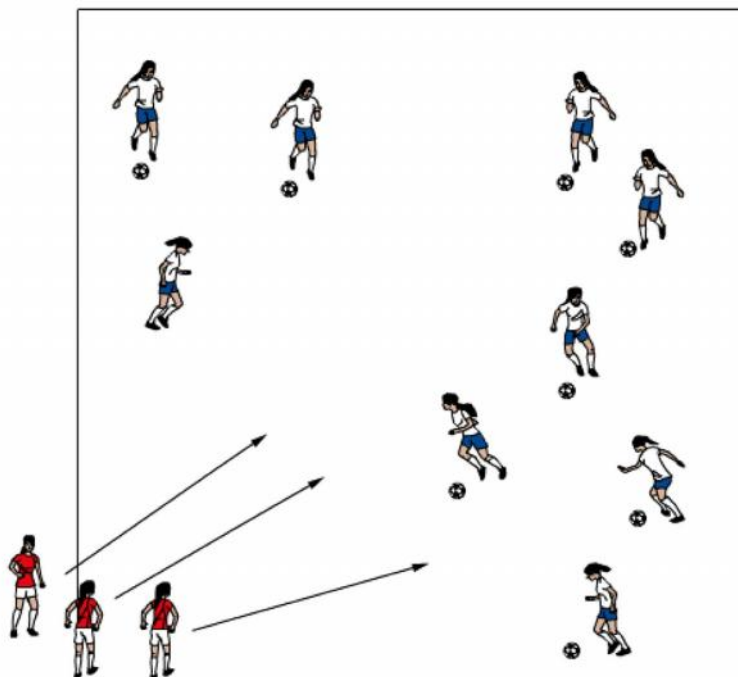
Variation: The players on the perimeter of the circle could pick the ball up with their hands and bounce the ball to the players in the middle as they approach. The players in the middle would have to learn to receive the bouncing ball by either lifting their foot up (again meeting the ball at the perimeter) or possibly using their thigh or chest to receive the ball and control it. For these young ages, stress to the players that they bounce the ball and not throw the ball up in the air.

ACTIVITY 3

Create a grid about 25 yard square. Place all but three players inside the grid, each with a soccer ball. The other three players stand together at one corner of the grid without soccer balls. The three defenders should wear a shirt color different than the other players or at least hold shirts in their hands so that the players know who the attackers are and who the defenders are.

On command, the three defenders run into the grid and try to kick the soccer balls out of the grid. Once a soccer ball is kicked out of the grid, the ball stays out of the grid. All of the offensive players stay in the grid and work together to keep the remaining balls inside the grid.

This game therefore starts out as a dribbling game with each player having a ball, but evolves into a passing game where the offensive players pass the remaining balls around, trying to keep them away from the three defenders.



The coach should time how long it takes the three defenders to knock all of the balls out of the playing area. When the last ball leaves the grid, the coach stops his clock and yells out how long it took the defenders to kick all the balls out of the grid. The coach then picks three new players to be the defenders, challenging the next set of defenders to knock the balls out of the grid in less time.

Coaching Points:

- When a player has his ball kicked out of the playing area, he should remain inside the grid and call for a pass from any teammate who is under pressure from a defender.
- When the game gets down to only a few balls, the game should be mostly passing, with very little dribbling.
- The coach can control the level of difficulty for this activity by making the playing area larger (easier for the attackers) or smaller (easier for the defenders). The coach can also change the number of defenders that run into the grid each time. If the players are not able to make enough passes, switch the activity to having only two defenders.

ACTIVITY 4

Create two grids, each about 20 - 25 yards square. Place four (or five) offensive players and one defensive player (who is holding a shirt to identify himself as the defender) inside each grid. The attacking players play keepaway against the one defender, trying to make as many passes as possible. When the ball goes out of bounds (either through a bad pass or the defender knocking it out), the attacking player who caused the ball to go out of play becomes the defender and play is restarted. See how many passes a group can make before the ball goes out of play.

If one player is constantly winding up as the defender, change the game so that players rotate, in order, being the defender.

If the attacking team is struggling, have a coach or older sibling also play as an attacking player, trying to establish a good passing rhythm. Of course, if the coach makes a mistake, the coach will have to take a turn on defense.

Encourage the players to spread out throughout the grid. Initially they will all swarm around the ball, making it difficult to complete passes. Let them play a bit, then stop the game and explain to them how they will do much better once the offensive team spreads out all over the playing area.

Coaches should have several balls on hand for each grid so that if a ball goes far out of play, another ball can be quickly put into play, thus minimizing the amount of time wasted in between rounds.

Coaching Points:

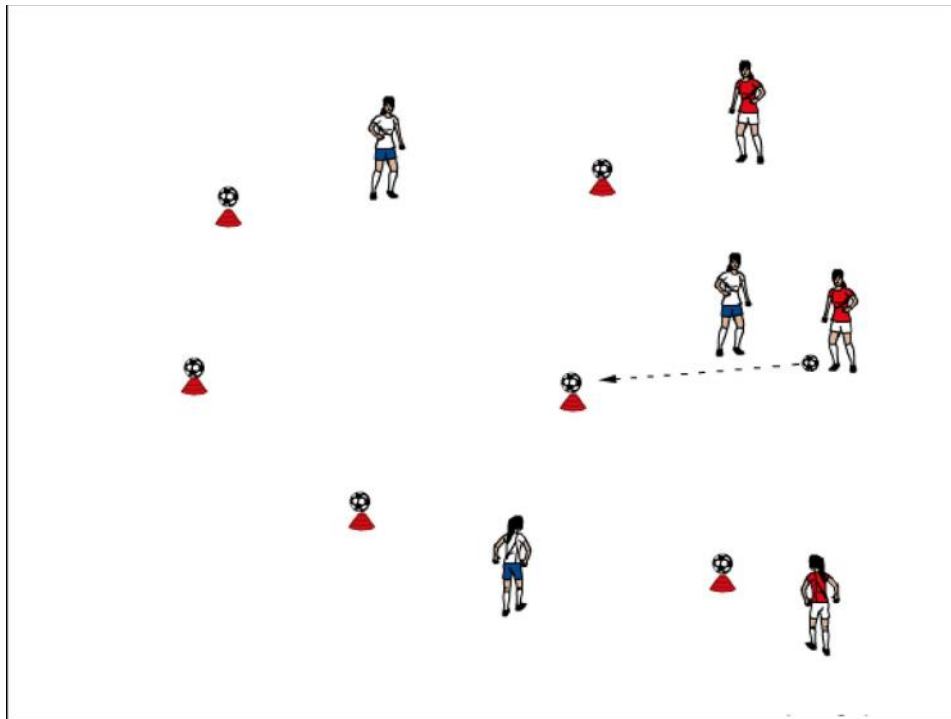
- Be sure that when a player gets the ball, he looks up and tries to figure out which players he can pass to. Be sure players look around and don't just kick the ball aimlessly. Also, the players should not just pass the ball to the first teammate they see since there might be a different teammate in a better position to receive a pass.
- During a break in the action, tell players that in soccer, the most important parts of their body are **their brain and their eyes**. If you ask the players, they will think their feet or legs are the most important parts of their body in soccer. Stress to them that players need to **see** the field and **think** when they are on the field. This is why we as coaches should not constantly bark out instructions in a game. When coaches do this, they prevent their players from learning to think and make decisions. As players get older, soccer becomes a game of making good, quick decisions while under pressure of an opponent. Players need to learn to think fast in a game. They will often make mistakes, but they need will never succeed unless they are given many chances to fail first.

FINAL ACTIVITY

The final activity will be a game that the players will enjoy. If there are 12 players, have two simultaneous games of 3v3. Otherwise, divide the players into two equal teams and play one large game. Do not create any field boundaries for the game. Instead, put six cones down, randomly positioned inside the playing area. Carefully place a soccer ball on top of each of the six cones. There is also one regular ball which will be used in the game.

The object of the game is for a player to pass the game ball in such a way that it knocks the ball off of one of the cones. When a cone is knocked off of one of the cones, that team gets credit for a goal. The player who scored the goal must quickly run over and put that ball back on top of the cone it was resting on. The game does not stop when a goal is scored, but the player who scored the goal may not resume play until the ball is placed back on top of the cone.

After the players have had a chance to play this game for a few minutes, stop the game. Encourage the players to spread out over the field on offense so that the team in possession of the ball can pass the ball to a teammate who is standing alone, near one of the balls perched on top of a cone. The players will soon realize that they will have trouble scoring if they are bunched up around the game ball but will have a lot more success when they start to pass the ball around the area to teammates who are alone, near one of the balls perched on top of a cone.



AT THE END OF THE PRACTICE

At the end of the practice, the coach should ask himself two questions:

- 1) Did the players have a fun time at practice?
- 2) Did the practice help the players become better players?

PRACTICE SESSION # 9 AND BEYOND

FUN GAMES THAT TEACH SOCCER

The last few practices of the season should concentrate on the players having fun while playing small sided soccer games that help them to learn the game and develop their skills. The head coach should pick out about three games in this section and play them during the last practices of the season. Each of these games will help the players to gain a better understanding of the game, help them develop their skills and, most importantly, provide them with a fun time as their season winds down.

It is recommended that the coach choose three different games each practice. Each game should last about 30 minutes. The coach could also play any fun activity that was played earlier in the season. If there was a particular activity that the was productive for the players and enjoyed by the players earlier in the season, the coach should consider running that activity again.

The main objective at these practices is for the children to have fun. If the children end the season on a fun note, then they will certainly look forward to playing soccer again in future seasons and be more likely to want to work on their skills to become better players.

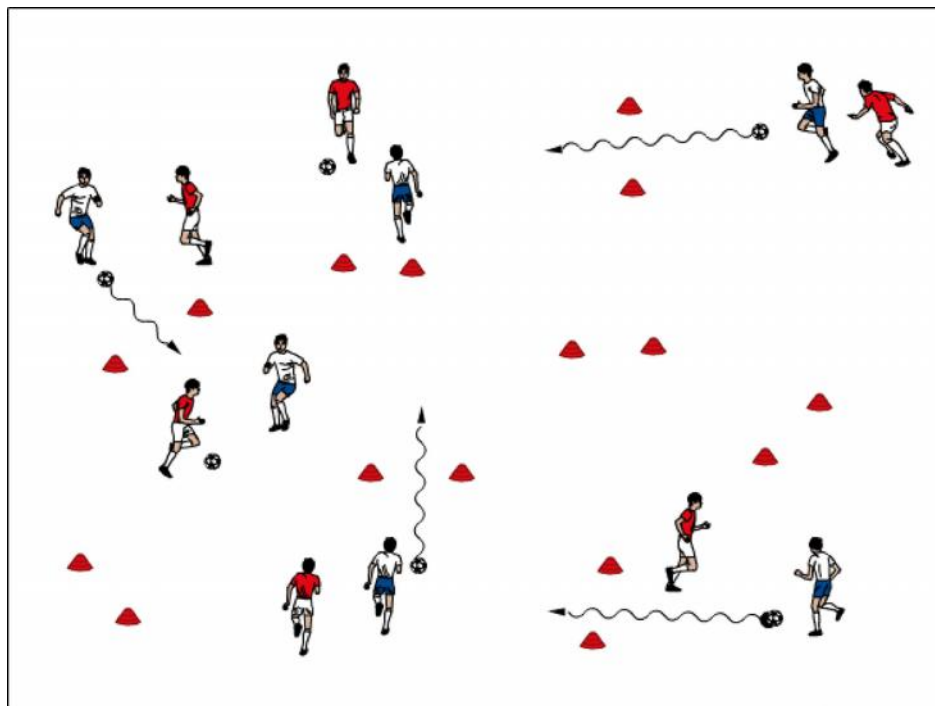
At these young ages, having **FUN** is the most important thing for the players.

1 V 1 THROUGH CONES

The coach places about eight pairs of cones on the field. Each pair of cones should create a four foot gate. There are no boundaries for this game, just be sure the players do not go near anything dangerous such as a road, a tree or a bench.

The players are placed in groups of two. Each pair of players has a ball. Each pair of players may start anywhere in the playing area.

Each pair of players start out by passing their ball back and forth. When each pair of players appears ready, the coach yells "go" to start play.



The player **with** the ball tries to keep possession and dribble the ball through any of the gates.

The player **without** the ball tries to steal the ball from his opponent and dribble through any of the gates.

When a goal is scored, the player with the ball then tries to dribble and score through another gate. He may not score on the same game two times in a row. Goals may be scored in either direction at each gate. Ask the players to keep track of how many goals they score.

Play is continuous for one minute. At that point, the coach stops play. See which player in each pair of players had the most goals, then have the players switch partners and play again. If desired, have each player who just won in the previous round play against another player who also just won. The important thing for the coach is to rotate opponents after each round.

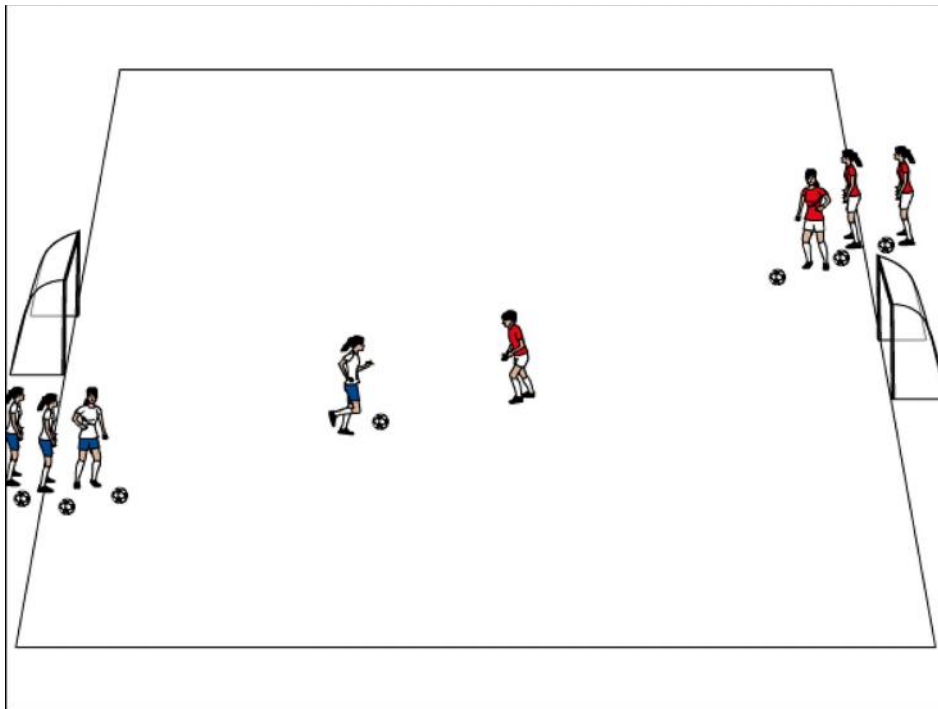
1 V 1 TRANSITION GAME

Create a 20 yard by 15 yard grid with a goal on each end line. Half of the players are in white shirts, standing in a line a few yards to the side of one of the goals. The other half of the players are in dark shirts, standing in a line a few yards to the side of the other goal.

The first player in each line comes onto the field, one of them with a ball. The two players play 1 vs. 1, trying to score on the other team's goal. When the ball goes over the end line (either in the goal or not in the goal), the player defending that goal immediately leaves the field. The player at the front of the line on that end line immediately dribbles a new ball onto the field. The player who just shot the ball immediately becomes the defender for the new ball just put into play.

Play continues with players constantly playing 1 vs. 1. The players in line need to be aware that when the ball goes over their team's end line, the next player in line must immediately dribble a new ball onto the field.

This game is ideally suited for six players, three on each team. It is a high work rate game with players working hard, then going off the field, resting. If there are 10 or more players, the coach should set up two playing fields so that four players are in action at all times. It is important that players not be standing in line too long during the game. Smaller numbers on each team will result in many more touches on the ball for each player.



2 V 2 TRANSITION GAME

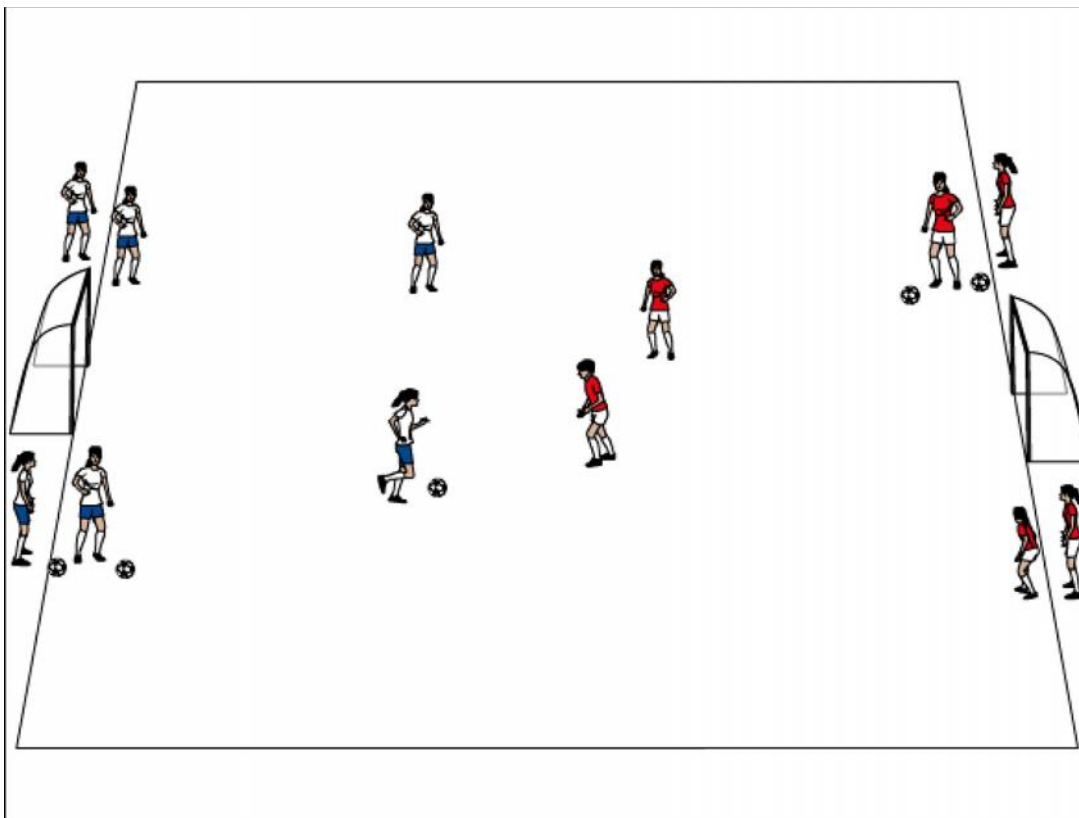
Create a 25 yard by 20 yard grid with a goal on each end line. Divide the players into two equal teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. For each team, place half of the players in a line a few yards to the left of the goal and the other half of each team in a line a few yards to the right of the goal. The players in one of the lines for each team each have a soccer ball.

The first player in each line comes onto the field to create a 2 vs. 2 game. One team starts with a ball. Each team tries to score on the other team's goal.

When the ball goes over one of the end lines (either in the goal or not in the goal), the two players defending the goal on that end line immediately leave the field. The players at the front of each line on that end line immediately enter the field with a new ball and attack the other goal. The pair of players who were just on offense immediately become the defenders.

Play continues with players constantly playing 2 vs. 2. Players standing in line need to be aware that when the ball goes over their team's end line, the two players at the front of their team's two lines immediately enter the field with a new ball.

This game requires a minimum of eight players since there needs to be two players on each team ready to replace their two teammates on the field. Ideally, there should be five players on each team so players have a little bit of time to rest in between rounds. This is a rather intense game that requires a lot of work and an appropriate amount of rest in between rounds.



COLLECT THE CONES GAME

This game requires at least 10 tall cones (at least six inches high). If the coach does not have tall cones, he can instead use 10 small cones, each with a soccer ball balanced on top.

Create two rows of five cones on the field with the cones about four yards apart from each other. Each row of cones should be well inside the playing area.

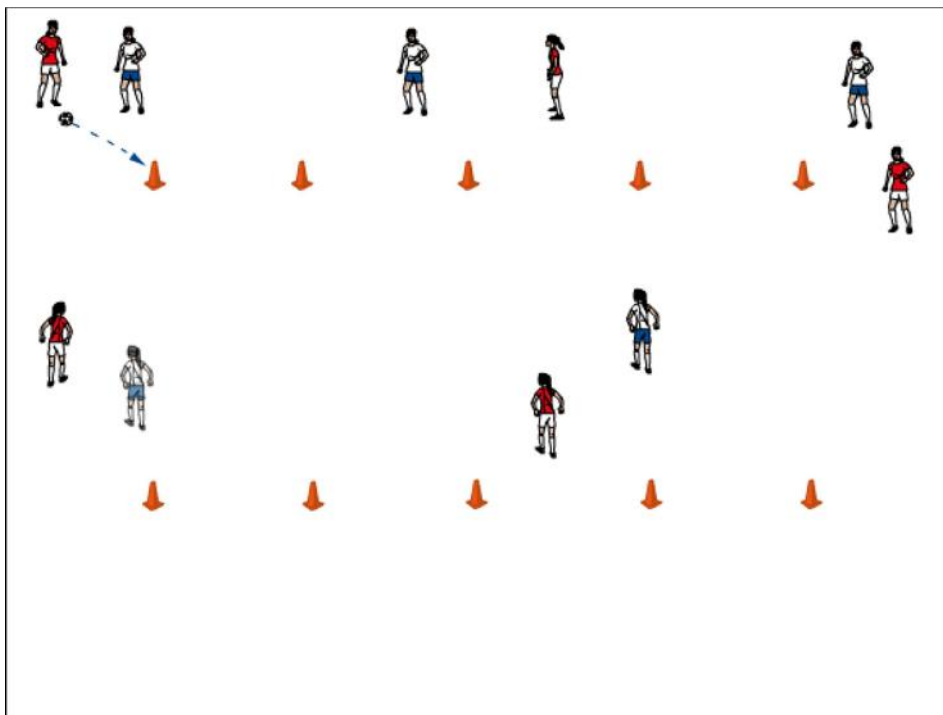
There are no out of bounds lines but coaches should ensure that players do not go near anything dangerous such as a road, trees, benches, etc.

Divide the players into two equal teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. One team defends one row of cones while the other team defends the other row of cones.

The object of the game is for each team to try and kick the game ball at any one of the opponent's cones so that the game ball knocks over the cone. When a cone gets knocked over, the player who knocked over the cone immediately runs over to the cone, picks it up and quickly carries it back to the row of cones that his team is defending. The player then puts that cone in line with the other cones that his team is defending. Play continues while this is happening. The player carrying the cone back to his team's line of cones may not rejoin play until he has placed the cone in line with the other cones his team is defending.

Play the game for a set amount of time. Whichever team has the most amount of cones in their line when the coach stops play is the winner.

Ideally, this game should be played with cones that are at least six inches in height. If the coach does not have tall cones, he could instead play with regular flat cones positioned upside down. By doing this, the players have an easier time deciding if a cone was struck during the game. Another way to play the game if the coach does not have tall cones is to place a soccer ball on top of each of the small cones. Now, when a player kicks the game ball and hits a ball sitting on top of a cone, the player must pick up the cone and the ball that was on top of the cone, carry both objects back to his line of cones, set the cone down and place the ball back on top of the cone.



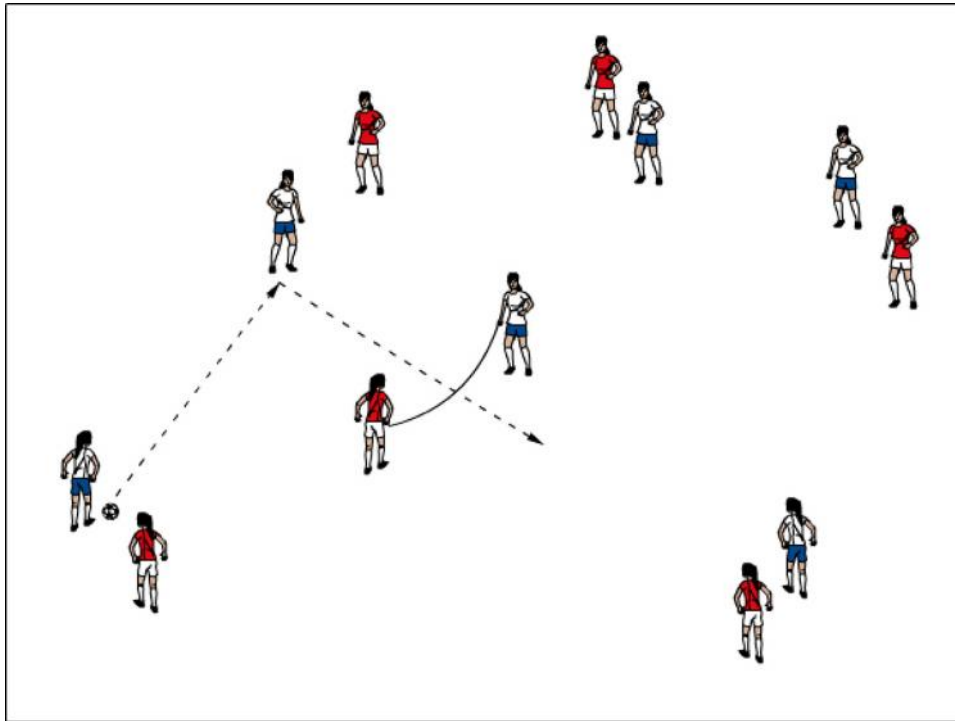
MOVING GOAL GAME

Divide the players into two equal teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. Play on a very large field, sidelines and end lines won't be needed. Just be sure players do not go near anything dangerous.

The coach will need to bring a piece of rope to play this game. The rope should be about five yards (15 feet) long. Each team has one player holding one end of the rope. The two players holding the rope stand far enough apart so that the rope is stretched out, parallel to the ground and not drooping. The two players holding the rope stand in the middle of the field.

The two teams each try to score by shooting the ball between the two players holding the rope. They are serving as goal posts. The ball must be kicked under the rope which is serving as the crossbar. Goals may be scored going in either direction. The fun part of this game is that the players holding the rope may move around while the game is going on, but they must keep the rope tight and not drooping. Of the two players holding the rope, **only the player whose team is in possession of the ball may move.** His job is to position the "goal" so that it is easier for his team to score. When his team loses possession of the ball, he may no longer move. When the other team has the ball, the opposing team player holding the rope may move around, trying to create a better angle his team to score.

Play continues after a goal is scored. Only stop play when the ball goes out of the playing area or when the players need a water break.



THREE TEAM GAME

Create a rectangular field with a goal (about five yards wide) on each end line. Divide the players into three teams with each of the three teams wearing a different shirt color. Two of the teams start on the field and play a regular game. The third team is off the field to start. Play continues until a goal is scored. When that happens, the team on the sideline replaces the team that allowed the goal. Continue playing in this manner with the team on the sideline replacing the team that just allowed a goal. If desired, the coach could challenge the players to see which team can be the first team to score three goals in a row.

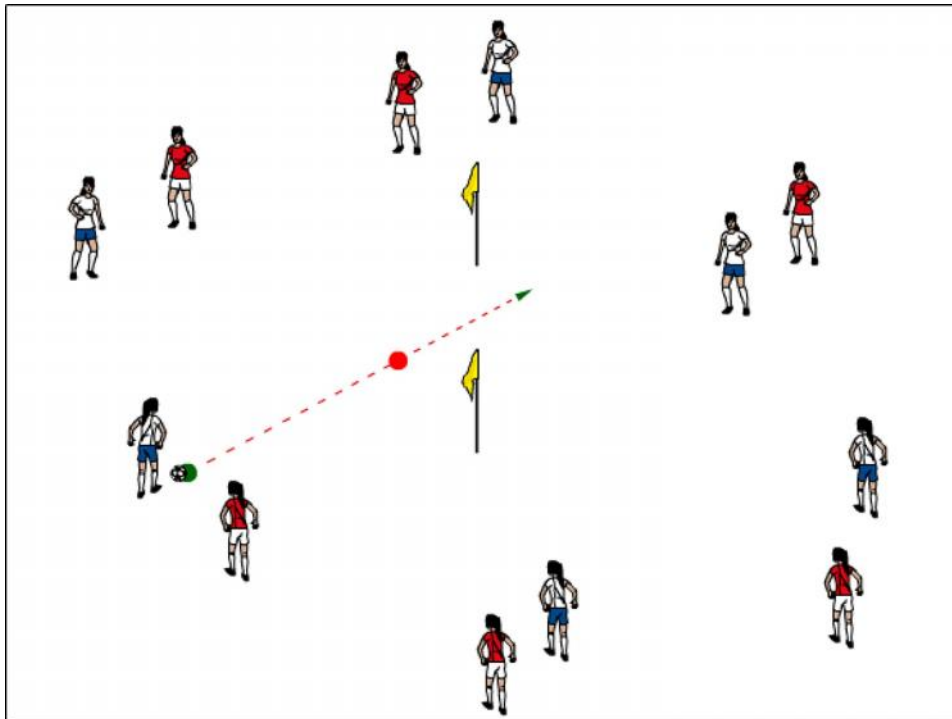
TWO WAY GOAL GAME

Set up a large field (as much space as is available). Using two corner flags or two bicycle flags, put a large goal (about five yards wide) in the middle of the playing area. Divide the players into two equal teams with each team wearing a different shirt color.

Each team tries to score by kicking the ball through the goal. One team may only score by shooting the ball through the goal in one direction while the other team may only score by shooting the ball through the goal in the opposite direction. Play continues after a goal.

Players may NOT run through the goal while the game is going on. Instead, they must around the outside of the goal posts.

Since players are not allowed to run through the goals, they will soon figure out that it is more efficient for the players on their team to spread out and pass the ball from one side of the field to the other.



1 v 1 v 1 GAME

Three players will be competing against each other in this activity.

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

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

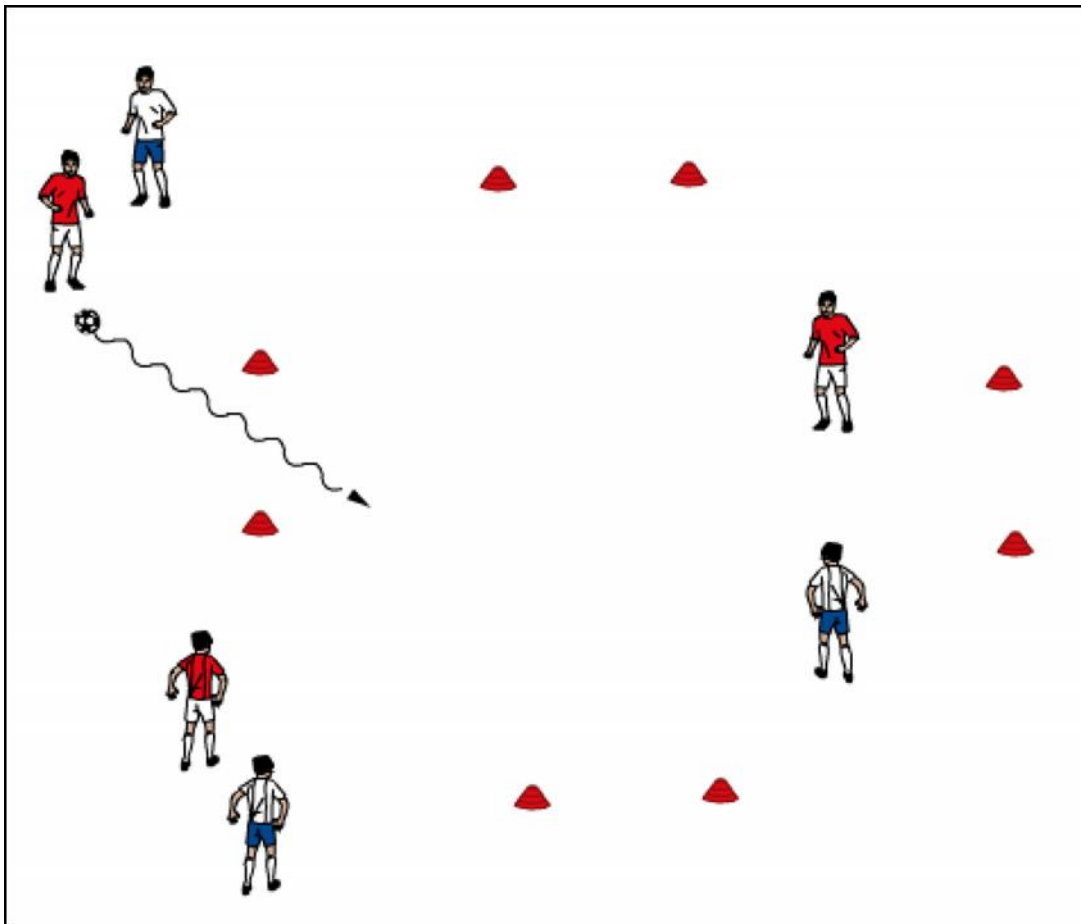
PLAY TO FOUR SMALL GOALS (DRIBBLING)

This game is setup similar to the four goal game in practice session 6 found earlier in this manual. Using cones, create four small goals, with each goal about two yards wide. Have the four goals positioned in a square with each goal about 10 yards from the other goals.

The game is played by two teams of two to four players each. If there are at least eight players at practice, the coach could set up two fields so two games of 2v2 or 3v3 can be played at the same time.

To score a goal, a player must **dribble the ball**, under control, through any one of the four goals. Goals may be scored going in either direction. Play continues after a goal, but the player scoring may not immediately turn around and dribble through the same goal, in the opposite direction.

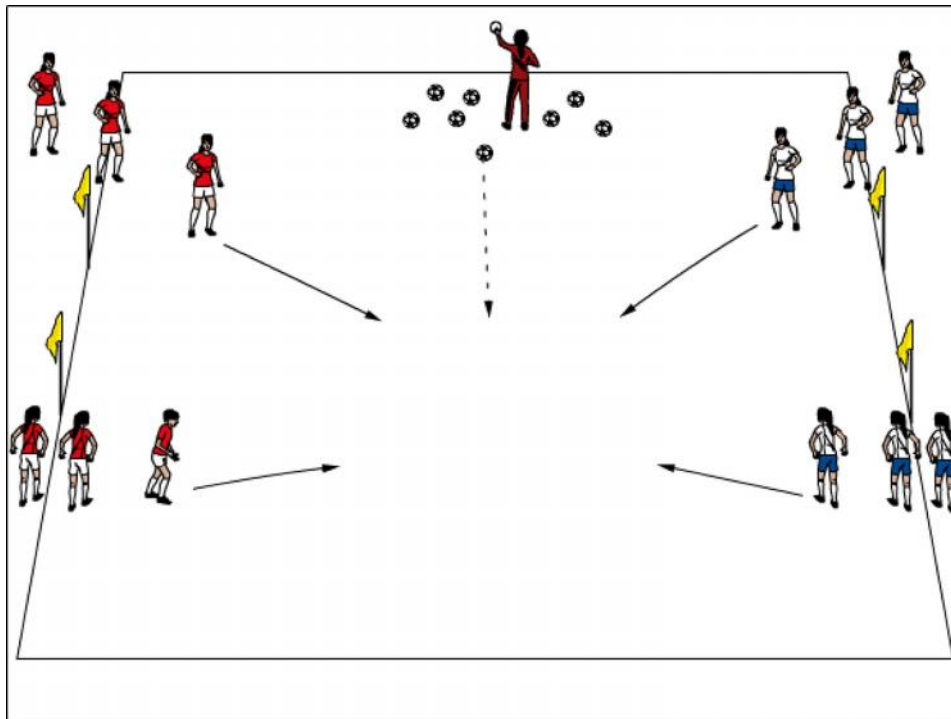
Play the game for about three minutes or until the players get tired. After that, change the teams and opponents so that all players have a chance to play with and against all of the other players.



2 V 2 FROM THE END LINES

This game requires a minimum of eight players (four on each team). Create a grid about 20 yards long and at least 15 yards wide. Using corner flags, bicycle flags or cones, create a goal about four yards wide on each end line. Divide the players into two equal teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. Place one team on each end line with half of the players on each team standing a few yards to the side of each goal post.

The coach stands at the middle of one of the sidelines with as many soccer balls as are available. Play starts with the coach rolling a ball onto the field. The first player in each line runs onto the field and plays a game of 2 vs. 2. Play continues until the ball goes out of bounds. At that time, the players return to the ends of their team's two lines. The coach then rolls a new ball onto the field and the next players in line run onto the field to play. Keep track of each team's score, see which team can reach 10 goals first.



SCORE AND CHANGE TEAMS

This is a fun game to play when there is an odd number of players. Divide the players into two teams with one team having one player more than the other team. Have one team in white shirts and the other team playing in their team uniforms. Create a rectangular field with a goal about four or five yards wide on each end line.

Play a regular game with one extra rule: When a player scores, that player immediately runs off the field, switches shirt colors, then re-enters the field, playing for the other team.

This is a fun game that players like. Be sure the players are able to immediately change from one shirt color to the other without wasting much time. If there are nine players at practice, this game will mostly be played either 5 vs. 4 or 4 vs. 5. The fun part will come when the team with fewer players scores. The game will then become 6 vs. 3, though that likely won't last long.

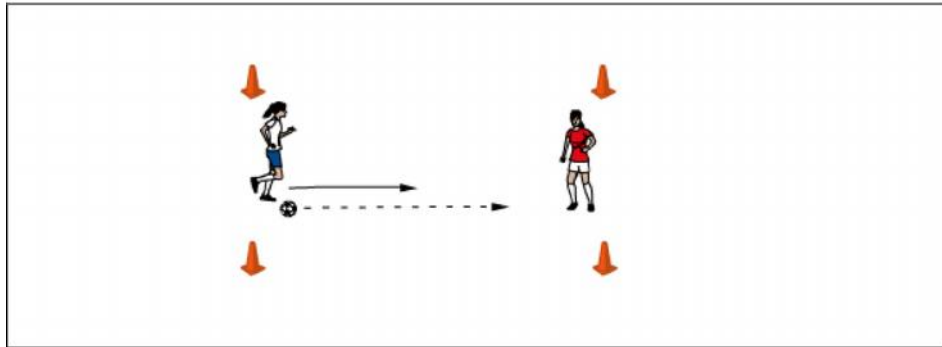
If there are 10 players at practice, make two fields and have five players play at each field. With this setup, the game will mostly be 3 vs. 2 or 2 vs. 3, though occasionally there will be a 4 vs. 1 advantage.

1v1 TO TWO CONES

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

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

If desired, keep track of each player's score. In each round, one player gets a win and one player gets a loss. See which player has the best record at the end of the activity. Announce who has the two top scores, but be sure to not announce the scores of any player who lost more games than he won. One of the main reasons for keeping score is that players will work harder in any activity when score is kept. Young players love to compete in activities. It is the job of the coaches to keep the competitive level healthy.



MAD DASH ACROSS THE FIELD

Create a square grid with each side about 15 yards long. Place one or two players on each side of the grid, each with a ball. Place two players in the middle of the grid. These players should wear pinnies (or at least hold them) to identify themselves. The players in the middle do not have a ball.

When the coach starts the game, the players on the edge of the playing area try to dribble their ball across the grid, to the other side. These players try to do this as many times as possible, going back from one side of the grid to the other. Note that half of the players will always be going east-west while the other half of the players will always be going north-south.

The two players in the middle of the grid (the ones either wearing pinnies or holding them) try to prevent players from going through the grid. They try to kick away the soccer ball of any player who runs through the middle. These "defenders" may not leave the grid. Defenders must always remain inside the grid.

Play for about a minute, then stop the game and switch defenders. If the game appears too easy for the dribblers, change the game to having three defenders instead of two.

The coach will need to encourage all players to go across the grid as many times as possible. The coach should also encourage players to use their various dribbling moves to get past any defender that is trying to kick their ball away. Discourage players from simply standing on the sidelines. While it is fine to wait a bit before dribbling over to the other side, the coach will need to get players moving as much of the time as possible.

GAME TACTICS FOR 4 V 4 SOCCER

Six year old players will only be able to comprehend the simplest of game tactics (strategies and decisions). At this age, it is more important for the players to simply develop their technical skills in a game environment. Complicated tactics should not be taught at this early stage of their careers. This section of the coaching manual will discuss basic tactics that can be taught to six year olds. Coaches however should concentrate their efforts on developing the individual technical skills of the players. Most importantly, coaches need to make sure that the players learn to love the game and have fun.

SYSTEMS OF PLAY

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

For six year olds, players will likely find playing a “position” too difficult or too limiting. Once the game starts however, most of the players will immediately start chasing the ball all over the field until they get tired. This is a natural thing for six year olds to do and should not be of much concern to coaches. Players will have a better chance of understanding positions when they are older.

If desired, the coach could ask them to play a 1-2-1 formation. This is also known as a “diamond shape” since there will be one defender who stays back a little bit more than the other players, one forward to stay up the field a little bit more than the others and two midfielders who run up and down the field. Again, many players will forget what position they were told to play as soon as the game starts.

If a coach does try to play such a formation, the coach should not allow the one forward to stay all the way up the field by the other team’s goal. That player still needs to come back somewhat, at least to midfield, when the other team is on the attack. While players are not introduced to the offsides rule until they turn eight years of age (if in the travel team program) or nine years of age (if in the intramural program), it is still important that they learn to not “cherry pick.”

Similarly, the one defensive player should **not** be instructed to stay back by his team’s own goal. In regular soccer, defenders move way up the field when their team has possession of the ball, often going well into the other team’s half of the field. Coaches should not instruct a player to stand back by his own goal. **All players** should move up and down the field with the flow of play. This however will stop once the players start to get tired. At that point, the coach should try to substitute a new player into the game for any player unable (or unwilling) to continue running up and down the field.

TACTICAL IDEAS FOR SIX YEAR OLDS

There are some basic tactical concepts that we can instill in six year olds. Coaches are encouraged to read these over and try to teach these basic concepts to the players.

THE NO BOOM BALL RULE - This is the most important tactic that we can teach players. When a player has the ball, he should have the confidence to possess the ball. The player should not be afraid to dribble down the field towards the other team’s goal. It is very important that players gain confidence in possessing the ball. Coaches should **never** allow players to simply boom the ball down the field. Unfortunately, parents and coaches often cheer this, but it is not good soccer and does not help develop skill. Teams should move the ball down the field by dribbling the ball and passing the ball, though passing will be a bit too advanced for many six year olds.

Think of soccer like you think of basketball. In basketball, players either dribble the ball down the court or pass the ball to get down to the other end of the court. Players never blindly heave the ball down to the far end of the court. Similarly, basketball players are never instructed to throw the ball out of bounds. In soccer, we should never ask our players to kick the ball out of bounds. It is much better for them to try and work the ball down the field through dribbling and passing. This will give the players a chance to develop their skills. Coaches should never discourage them from dribbling the ball or passing the ball, even if they wind up giving the ball to the other team.

PASS, DRIBBLE OR SHOOT - When a player has possession of the ball, he should be allowed to do any of three things with it. The player may pass the ball or dribble the ball to get the ball down the field. When close enough to the other team's goal, the player should be encouraged to shoot. Players should never simply blast the ball down the field without a purpose. Remind players that they may "pass, dribble or shoot" when they have the ball. Coaches however should let the players decide for themselves whether to pass, dribble or shoot. These decisions need to be made by the players, not by screaming coaches or parents. Loud parents or coaches who constantly shout instructions to the players only hinder the players' ability to develop their decision making skills.

DO NOT OVERCOACH - Too many well meaning coaches try to micro-manage their teams by constantly shouting out instructions. While this is well meaning, the actions of the coaches will take away the decision making from the players. Soccer is a game of making quick decisions. Players need to be able to think on the field. By constantly shouting out instructions to the players, we are only teaching the players to react to the voice of the coach and not teaching them to think on their own.

Coaches should instead let the players try creative things with the ball. If they do something that was not smart, the coach could later discuss the play with the player and suggest better ideas. During a practice, when a player makes a poor decision with the ball, the coach could stop the play and let all of the players discuss different options that were available on the specific play. Perhaps that player or another player could come up with an idea that would have been a better option. Again, put the decision making and thinking in the control of the players.

KEEP THE BALL OUT OF THE MIDDLE ON DEFENSE - One simple tactic we can teach our kids is that when the ball is right in front of their own goal, quickly get it out of the goal mouth since most goals are scored there. This does not mean we tell the players to kick the ball out of bounds. Instead, they should quickly dribble (or pass) the ball out towards the closest sideline or quickly dribble the ball down to the other end of the field. The player could pass the ball up field to a teammate, but he should never be encouraged to simply blast the ball down to the other end of the field. Players should be discouraged from dribbling or passing the ball across their own goal mouth unless they are confident that they will not lose possession of the ball.

CROSS THE BALL FROM THE WINGS ON OFFENSE - When a team has the ball deep in the other team's half of the field, near the sideline, players will not have a good angle to shoot the ball. Instead of shooting, the player should cross the ball, meaning they pass the ball across the goal mouth for a teammate to try and redirect into the goal. At older ages, this is often a key offensive tactic. Players will dribble the ball down the wing and cross the ball into the goal mouth, far enough away from the goal so that the goalie cannot get to the ball. The player's teammates will try to redirect the crossed ball into the goal. For six year olds, it is enough for coaches to let players know that crossing the ball across the goal mouth is a viable option to consider.

PASSES MAY GO FORWARD, BACKWARD OR SIDEWAYS - At some point in time, players will start to understand the concepts of teammates and passing. When they do start to understand these concepts and begin to pass the ball in games, the coach should let them know that passes may be made in any direction. Players should not be discouraged from passing the ball backwards to a teammate, especially when the player with the ball is facing his own goal and a defender is right on his back.

DON'T BUNCH UP - As mentioned, most players at this age will not understand playing positions on the field. They will instinctively chase the ball all over the field until they get tired. Coaches will need to constantly remind players to not bunch up together. It is natural for players this age to do this since their eyes are all glued to the ball. When the players get older, they will have a better understanding of positions on the field, staying on one side of the field, etc. For now, the coaches should periodically ask them to not bunch up around the ball all the time.

PLAY WITH YOUR BRAINS AND YOUR EYES - Let players know that the two most important parts of their bodies in a game are their brains and their eyes. Soccer is a game of making quick decisions. Players need to play with their heads up so they can see the field and determine what to do when they have the ball. Soccer is not just a game of kicking and running. There is a lot of thinking that goes on. Players need to make quick, intelligent decisions throughout the game.

ENCOURAGE PLAYERS TO GO 1 V 1 AGAINST OPPONENTS - One of the main jobs of the coach is to develop each player's technical skills. One way to help do this is to encourage players to try and beat their opponents by dribbling past them. If they lose the ball, it is OK. At least they tried. They will not be able to fully develop their dribbling skills unless they are given the green light by the coaches to try and beat their opponents in 1 v 1 situations in both practices and on game day.

OVERVIEW OF GAME TACTICS - The above summary of game tactics for 4 v 4 youth soccer is designed to give coaches of six year old players an overview of how a team should play on game day. Coaches should not spend a lot of time teaching complicated tactics to young players. Most of the youngsters will be too young to comprehend these tactics. Similarly, players will not have the patience to sit and listen to coaches talk about complicated tactics at practice. The tactics discussed above should be touched upon at some point during the season, but not stressed for any length of time. They are the most basic, fundamental tactics that six year olds will be able to understand.

Too often, coaches try to stress complicated tactics in order to try and win games. It is important to remember that the role of the coach in our six year old program is NOT to win games, but to teach each players the basic skills of the game and then encourage the players to work on these skills in games and practices. Keep the teaching of tactics to a minimum.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TACTIC - As mentioned before, the most important thing by far that a coach needs to do is make sure that **ALL OF THE PLAYERS ARE HAVING FUN**. Coaches should never lose sight of this.

BEYOND THE 6 YEAR OLD INTRAMURAL DIVISIONS

This coaching manual was written for our six year old age groups (the boys Bantam Division and the girls Microns Division). The formats used for the older divisions in our club are different. Each age group in our program is designed allow for maximum player development and maximum enjoyment of the game.

7 - 9 YEAR OLD DIVISIONS - The seven year old boys (Juniors Division), 8-9 year old girls (Protons Division) and 8-9 year old boys (Intermediates all play with goalies. Instead of playing games with four players on the field, games are played with each team having four field players and a goalie on the field (5v5) in the Juniors Division. The Protons and Intermediates play with five field players and a goalie. The fields will be slightly larger and the goals will be slightly larger. Instead of having up to 12 players assigned to a team, there will be up to 14 players on a team. Similar to the six year old divisions, there will be two simultaneous games played each week. The Protons and Intermediates Divisions will use a size 4 ball.

10 - 11 YEAR OLD DIVISIONS - These divisions are a lot different than the 7 - 9 year old divisions. Instead of playing on two small fields at the same time, the teams play one larger game of 9 vs. 9. Positions are stressed a lot more. Teams usually play with a goalie, two defenders, three midfielders and two forwards. This is known as a 2-3-2 formation. Throw-ins are used instead of kick-ins when the ball goes over the sideline. The very complicated offsides rule is used as well. While individual skill development is still stressed, a greater emphasis is placed on group tactics and team tactics. This is the same format that is used in the Travel Team Program which starts with the Under 9 age group.

12 - 14 YEAR OLD DIVISIONS - These age groups play full sided 11 vs. 11 soccer, similar to adult leagues. They also use a size 5 soccer ball. Games are played on full sized fields (roughly 105 yards long and 65 yards wide) with regulation size goals (8 yards long, 8 feet high.) The general philosophy of coaching older players is similar to that used for six year olds with some minor modifications. The following list describes the general coaching methodology for older players:

- As with younger players, stress a particular theme each practice. Pick a particular theme to work on at each practice (e.g., shooting, passing, dribbling, etc.). Start the practice in the Fundamental Stage (no opponent) and progress to the Match Related Stage (opposition added, not necessarily at 100 percent and not necessarily the same number of defenders as attackers). Finish practice in the Match Condition Stage (small sided games with restrictions and/or special conditions imposed to emphasize on the specific technique worked on earlier in the practice).
- Allow for plenty of time for the players to work on their skills under pressure of an opponent. Coaches need to put the players in fun, competitive games which will allow the players to work on and develop their technical skill.
- Players need to be moving as much as possible in all activities. Practice activities that do not involve movement will be of limited value and also be boring to the players. It is especially important to have the players running around as soon as possible, preferably in the very first activity of each practice, so they can burn off some of the excess energy they have from earlier in the day.
- Elementary TACTICS (decision making) should be worked on at most practices. Tactics answer the questions of **when, where and why** to do something whereas technique only answers the question of **how** to do something.
- Maintain a high ball per player ratio. The Fundamental Stage should always have a 1:1 or 1:2 ball to player ratio. For older groups, small sided games may involve slightly more players, but should be designed to give all players a lot of touches on the ball and give them the chance to make many quick decisions. Coaches should remember that two simultaneous games of 3 vs. 3 will lead to much quicker player development than one game of 6 vs. 6.
- Older, more experienced players need to deal with increased pressure from an opponent. Coaches of older players will be able to use most of the activities in this manual with small modifications.

The following are items that the coach can modify for older, more skillful players:

- ◆ Lower the attacker : defender ratio in practices. Use more defenders (or use less attackers) in activities in order to properly challenge the attackers.
 - ◆ Instruct defenders to play with more intensity, forcing the attackers to play faster.
 - ◆ Tighten (reduce) the field space (grid size) to force the attackers to play the ball quicker and with more accuracy.
 - ◆ Reduce (or eliminate) the number of neutral players or sideline players.
 - ◆ Reduce the maximum number of touches on the ball. In some activities, require the players to play two-touch or even one-touch if the players can play at that level.
 - ◆ The coach must determine how much pressure the players can **successfully** handle and adjust each of the above parameters to make the activities challenging and successful. Players will not develop in the absence of pressure and will not develop when there is too much pressure.
- Players will always put out the most effort in competitive situations. This is especially true of older players. The Match Condition Stage is what players like most in practice since this is where players play small sided games. The coach should keep score in these competitive situations in order to bring out the best in the players. The coach should be sure to play small sided games that impose conditions and restrictions which will produce the desired type of play (i.e., concentrate 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 to work on, based on those observations.

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 and soccer knowledge, they will need to be challenged more. It is very important that coaches stay ahead of the players in terms of knowledge, especially their technical and tactical knowledge of the game.

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

- Attend local coaching seminars and clinics.
- Enroll in the various levels of coaching courses offered by the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) or the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA).
- Read some of the large selection of soccer coaching books on the market.
- Reread this Coaching Manual periodically for new ideas.
- Read *The LMSC Manual For Coaches Of 7 - 9 Year Old Teams* or *The LMSC Manual For Coaches Of 10 - 14 Year Old Teams*.

LMSC pays the entire cost of any coach who successfully completes any of the USSF or NSCAA coaching schools as well as the cost of attending soccer clinics, seminars or workshops.

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

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

- Ensure that each player is having FUN and develops a love of the game.
- Develop each player's skills so that he or she 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 youth soccer for several decades at various levels, including:

- 37 years of youth coaching for Lower Merion Soccer Club, located 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 as head coach at the high school varsity level
- 20 years as President of Lower Merion Soccer Club, serving over 2600 youth players each year

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, 14 Indoor State Championships, 18 Delco League division one championships and numerous indoor and outdoor tournament 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
- Central League High School Coach Of The Year (high school), 2018, 2012, 1997
- Del-Val League Coach Of The Year (high school), 2004

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. Another former player is a candidate for the USA Men's 2022 World Cup Team. Another former player was a starter for the USA in the 2015 Under 20 World Cup. Two former players became 10 year veterans of Major League Soccer (MLS). Several others have gone on to play in Major League Soccer. Many of his former players played college. Several of his players from many years ago are now coaching soccer at various levels, including college, high school, MLS and in Lower Merion Soccer Club.

