

LOWER MERION SOCCER CLUB



COACHES MANUAL FOR OUR 7 - 9 YEAR OLD TEAMS

(2019 Edition)

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This Coaches Manual Is Written For The Following Intramural Age Groups:

Juniors Division	7 year old boys
Intermediates Division	8 - 9 year old boys
Protons Division	8 - 9 year old girls

Included in this coaches manual are a season's worth of practice sessions, geared for children of these age groups, as well as a brief section on game tactics for 5 vs. 5 and 6 vs. 6 soccer.

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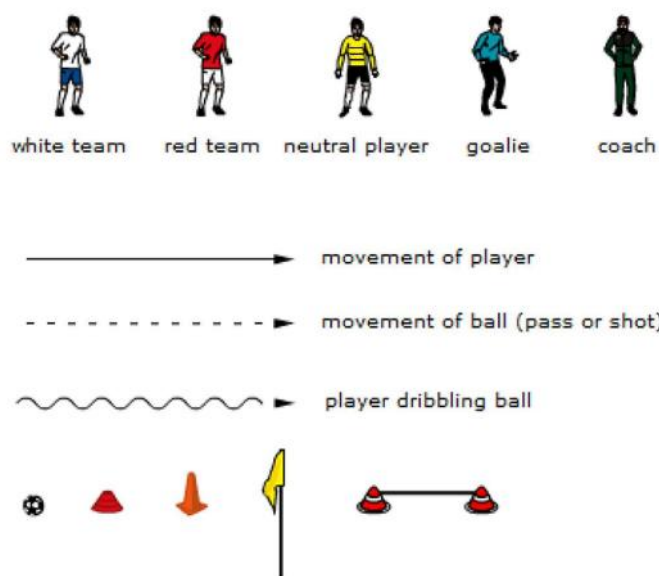
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Coaching A Youth Soccer Team (Introduction)	4
Practice Session #1: Dribbling And Individual Footwork	13
Practice Session #2: Shooting, Receiving And Goalkeeping	20
Practice Session #3: Dribbling And 1 Vs. 1 Play	25
Practice Session #4: Passing And Receiving	29
Practice Session #5: Dribbling, Shielding, Tackling And 1v1 Games	33
Practice Session #6: Shooting, Scoring And Goalkeeping	37
Practice Session #7: Dribbling And 1 v 1 Competitions	40
Practice Session #8: Passing And Receiving	44
Practice Session #9: Wing Play And Shooting	48
Practice Session #10: End Of Season Fun Competitions	52
Additional Activities and Fun Games	57
Game Tactics For 5 Versus 5 Soccer	72
Beyond the 7 - 9 Year Old Intramural Divisions	76
About The Author	78

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 7 - 9 year old divisions. Each practice session will focus on a particular skill (dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.) and assumes a maximum of 14 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 practice sessions progress, in order, through three distinct 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 90 minutes long. The coach should divide the practice session equally between the Fundamental Stage, Match Related Stage and the Match Condition stage (about 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 7 - 9 year old divisions to playing two simultaneous games of 5 v 5 (four field players and a goalie). 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.

GOALKEEPERS

At LMSC, age groups up through six years of age do not use goalies. The seven year old divisions are the youngest divisions where goalkeepers are used. For the 7 - 9 year old age groups, teams should have the players rotate the goalkeeper position. No player should be playing goalkeeper exclusively. Coaches should have all players take a turn at goalkeeper so that they get a chance to experience playing that position. But, no player should be playing the majority of time in goal in these age divisions.

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't 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 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 young 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 7 - 9 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
5 v 5:	40 yards x 40 yards	40 yards x 35 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 7 - 9 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 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 each players' 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 field 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 when trying a dribbling move before they will be able to 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

Using cones, create a grid about 25 yards square. Have all the players stand inside the grid. Each player has his own ball to work with. The players will work on several different dribbling moves, one at a time. Give the players plenty of time to try these dribbling moves over and over.

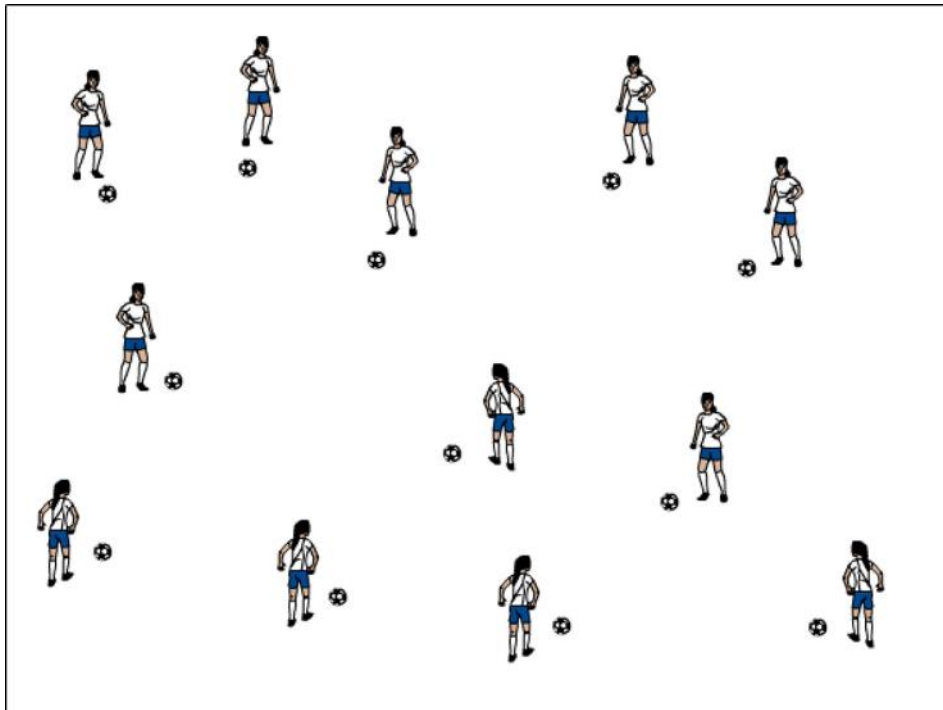
For each dribbling move, the coach will briefly discuss the move, demonstrate it, then have the players practice the move for a few minutes. If the coach does not feel comfortable demonstrating these moves, he should bring in an older sibling of one of the players to demonstrate or have one of the more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

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. The player's toes should be pointed **IN** when performing this move.

Outside Of The Foot Chop: This is a much more advanced move. Each player uses the **outside** of his foot to push 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. The player's toes should be pointed **OUT** when performing this move.

Pull Back: With the ball well out in front of the player, the player reaches out with his leg and puts the sole of the foot on the ball, then pulls the ball back to his side. While pulling the ball back, the player must rotate his body in the direction of the ball so that he is **ALWAYS** facing the ball. The player rotates 180 degrees (while always in sight of the ball), then quickly dribbles away in the opposite direction, using the foot that he did **NOT** pull the ball back with. Be sure that the players do not pull the ball behind them in a way that the ball rolls under and behind them. They must pull the ball back while rotating towards the ball so that they see the ball in front of them at all times.



Scissors: While dribbling, the player uses one leg to step over the ball (swinging his leg out, away from his body) to make the defender think he is going to dribble in that direction. The player then uses the outside of the other foot to knock the ball to the side and dribble around the defender in that direction.

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

Matthews Move: 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, then quickly swings the same foot behind the ball. He then uses the **outside** of the **same** foot to knock the ball back in the opposite direction, then dribbles away with that foot. This move is often referred to as the Matthews Move, in honor of England soccer legend Stanley Matthews from the 1950s.

Gorilla Move: The ball is out in front of the player, but off to one side. The player reaches out and puts the sole of his foot on the ball. The player then pulls the ball diagonally back and across his body while hopping and spinning a bit so that the ball rolls back, towards his plant foot. The player then dribbles the ball away in the opposite direction with the opposite foot.

After the coach has let the players try these moves for a few minutes each, 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 of the commands that the coach might call out:

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

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

Scissors, Left - While dribbling, the player uses his left leg to step over the ball (swinging the leg out, away from his body), then uses the outside of the right foot to play the ball in the opposite direction.

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

Matthews Move, Right - Players tap the ball across their body with the inside of their right foot, hop to their left, then swing their right foot behind the ball, quickly tap the ball in the opposite direction with the outside of their right foot and dribble away to their right.

Pull Back Left - Players reach out to put their left foot on the ball, then pull the ball back while rotating to the left. They change the direction of the ball 180 degrees, then dribble away with their right foot.

The coach could also add a few extra commands, including:

- “Red Light” - players have to quickly step on the ball and freeze their motion.
- “Green Light” - players resume dribbling after the “red light” command was given.
- The number, 1, 2 or 3 to indicate how fast they should dribble. “1,” means that the players should dribble slowly, “2” means that the players dribble at about half speed and “3” means that the players dribble around as fast as they can. The coach should only have them dribbling at full speed for short bursts, before having them slow up.

Be sure to remind the players to keep their **HEADS UP** so they do not dribble into the other players.

ACTIVITY 2

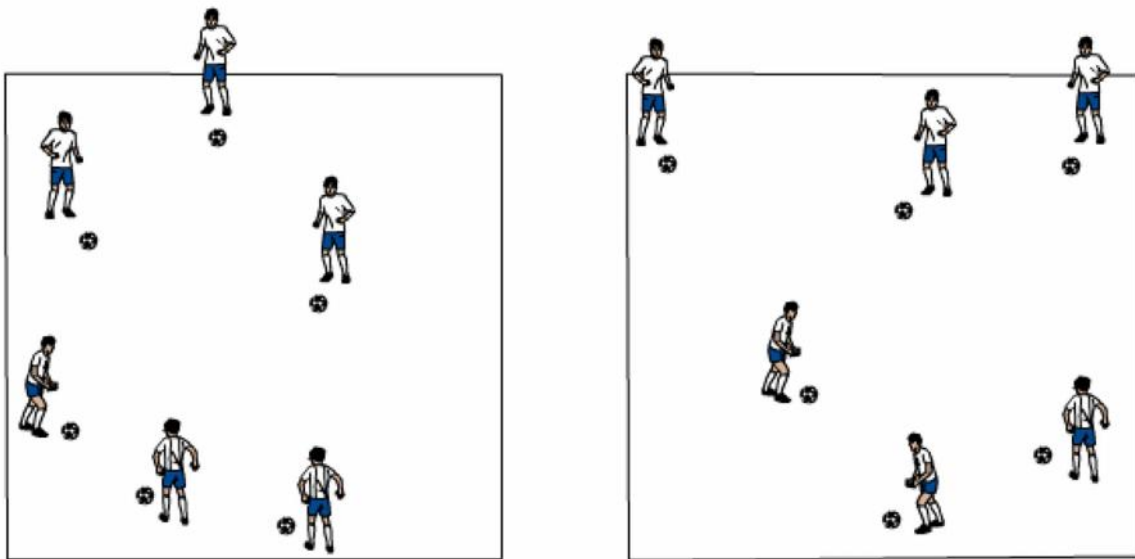
"Knock Out" - This is a competitive activity which the players will enjoy a lot. Using cones, create two 15 yard square grids. Each grid is separated by five about yards. Place half of the players in one grid, each with a ball. Place the other half of the players in the other grid, each with a ball.

Every player dribbles his ball around inside his own grid and tries to kick away the other players' soccer balls. Each player tries to maintain possession of his ball and may not leave his ball unattended while trying to kick away someone else's ball. When a player has his ball knocked out of his grid, he must immediately get his ball, dribble it over to the other grid and join in that game.

A player may not kick out someone else's ball unless he is in possession of his own ball.

Be sure to NOT change this game by making it an 'elimination' contest because too many players will wind up watching the game from the sideline as the game progresses. Always allow players to be able to re-enter a dribbling game even after their ball gets knocked out of the playing area.

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



ACTIVITY 3

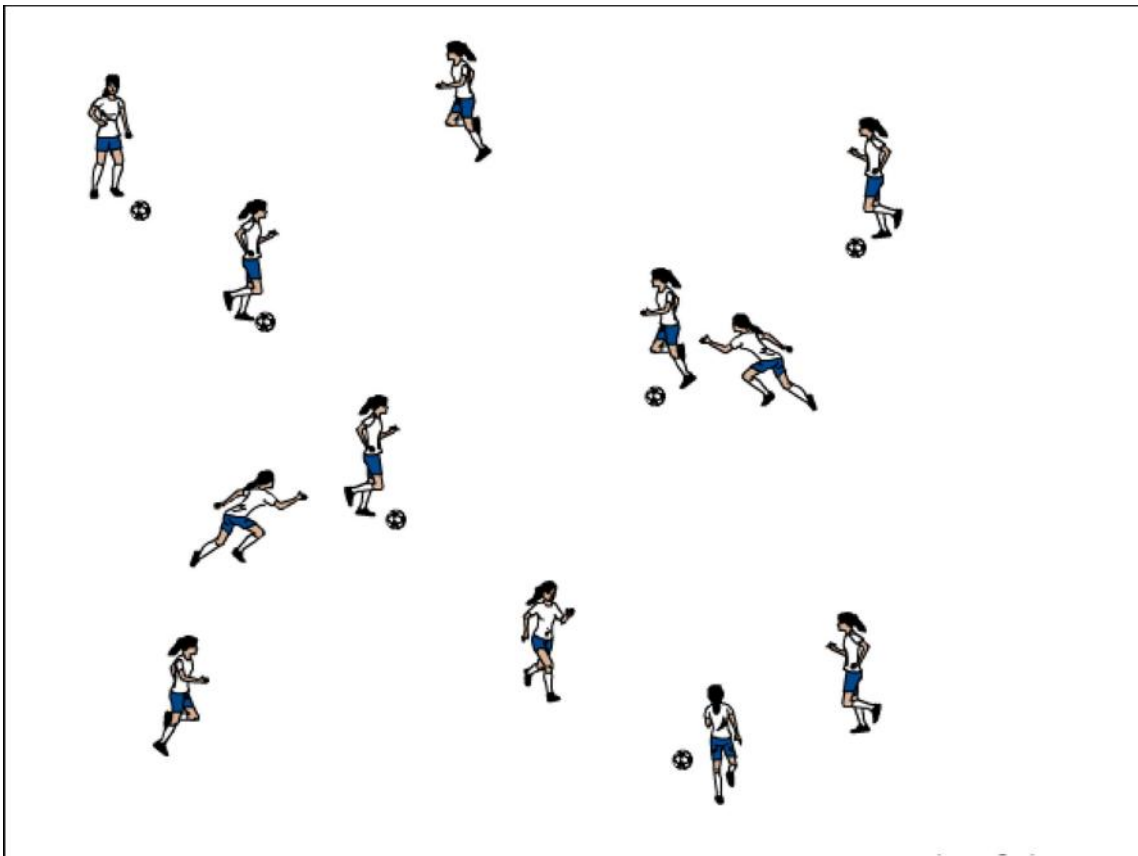
"Take Away" - Create a grid about 25 yards square. Place all players inside of the grid, but only half of the players have a soccer ball. The coach starts the game by telling the players with soccer balls to begin dribbling inside of the area. The players without soccer balls remain stationary. Once the players with soccer balls are moving, the coach instructs the players without soccer balls to start play.

The players without a soccer ball try to steal a soccer ball from any player with a ball. When a player has his ball stolen, he must try to steal some other player's ball. The player may NOT steal back the ball that he just lost.

If a player without a ball forces someone to dribble their ball outside of the grid boundaries, he gets to take over possession of that ball.

In this game, players will be continuously taking a soccer ball from someone, then having that ball taken away by someone else.

After about 90 seconds, the coach yells "STOP." The players then quickly try to pick up a ball. The players who were not able to pick up a ball have to do some type of fun punishment such as five star jumps (the player reaches down to touch the ground with his hands then jumps up as high as he can with his arms up in the air while yelling "I'm A Star") or some other fun punishment.

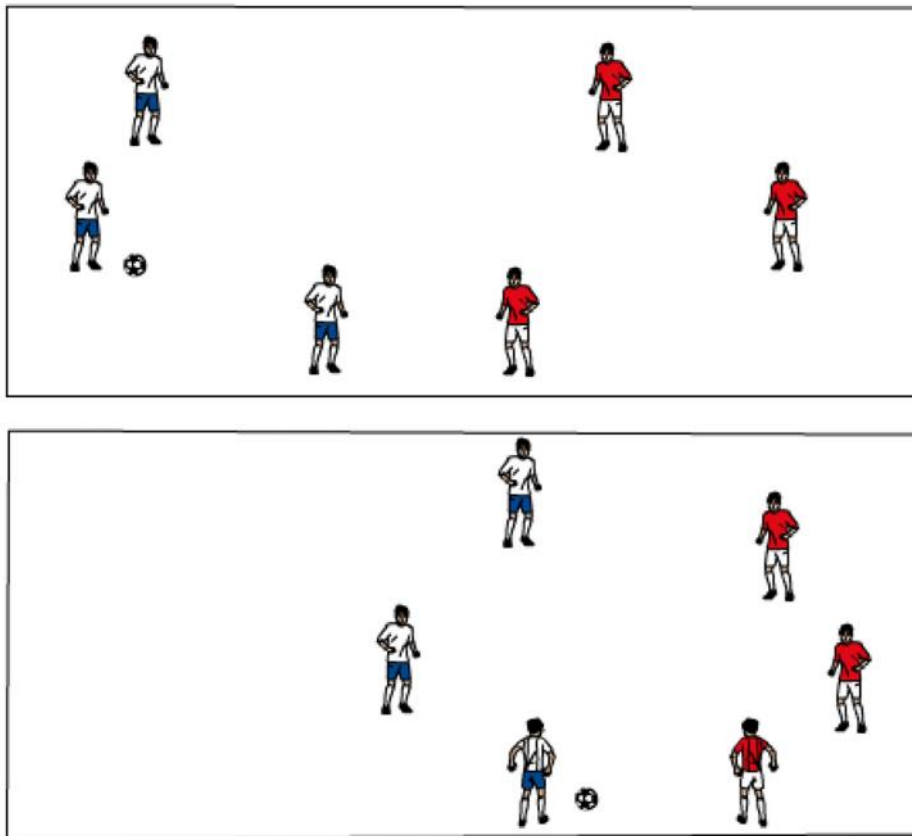


FINAL ACTIVITY

The final stage of practice should always be some type of small sided game between two teams. The coach can add one or two special rules or conditions to the game to make the game more exciting and to have the players work on the skill that they practiced on earlier in practice. Since the focus of this practice was on dribbling, this end of practice game is designed to encourage players to dribble the ball in a fun, competitive game.

Set up two fields side by side, each about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide. Play two games of 3 v 3 with no goalies. Goals are scored by dribbling (not shooting) the ball under control over the opponent's end line. To score, a player must dribble the ball over the opponent's end line and then step on the ball. The player may not simply kick the ball over the end line.

After 10 minutes, rotate the teams around so that each team gets a chance to play all three of the other teams. If there are not enough players at practice for two games of 3 v 3, make the fields each about 20 yards long and 15 yards wide and play two games of 2 v 2.



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 try to dribble the ball under possession and 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 soccer ball (size 3 for Juniors and Quasars Divisions, size 4 for Intermediates and Protons Divisions) 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 to provide 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 team roster with all players' names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses so that the parents of 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

SHOOTING, RECEIVING & GOALKEEPING

The second 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 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.

In a later practice session, the players will be taught how to use the inside of their foot and the outside of their foot to pass. For this practice however, we will focus kicking the ball with the instep (laces) and receiving the ball with the inside of their foot.

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 at the intended target at the moment the ball is struck.
- The **eyes are 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 of the kicking leg 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 the 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 young players.

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 that contact is made at the equator.

ACTIVITY 1

Set up a row of eight cones or bicycle flags, each spaced about five yards apart. This will create seven 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. 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. The coach should also briefly explain and demonstrate receiving a ball with the inside of the foot.

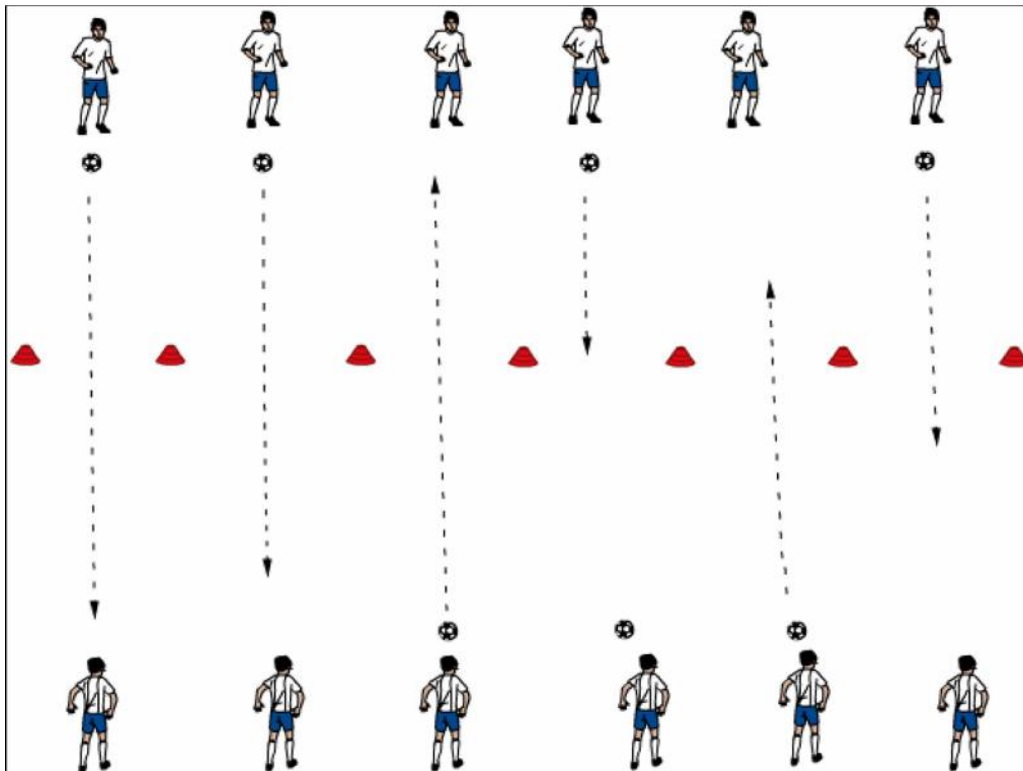
The two players take turns shooting their ball through the goal. One player shoots the ball through the goal and the other player receives the ball with the inside of the foot. The players then repeat this, switching roles. Be sure to give the players plenty of time to practice this.

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 before, 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).



ACTIVITY 2

Change the field setup slightly so that there are only four goals. Now, at each one of the goals, have two shooters (one at each side of the goal as before) and one goalkeeper. Briefly talk with the players about the role of the goalkeeper. The coaching points for goalkeepers are noted below.

As before, have the players take turns shooting, but now a goalkeeper will try to stop the shots. When the goalie makes a save, he should pass the ball to the player on the opposite side of the goal. Have the players rotate around so that everyone gets a chance to play goalkeeper.

As the players get the hang of this activity, change it slightly so that the shooters strike a moving ball instead of a stationary ball. First, have them shoot while dribbling towards the goal.

Later, have them shoot while dribbling parallel to the goal line. Before shooting, they need to turn their **non-kicking foot** so that it is pointed directly **at the goal**. Thus if the shooter is dribbling parallel to the goal line and about to take a right footed shot, he must first turn his left foot so that it is pointing directly at the goal. This will enable the shooter to turn and swing his hips when shooting, enabling him to get more power on the shot.

COACHING POINTS FOR GOALTENDING

- Goalkeepers should be taught to use their hands anywhere inside the penalty area. If they can get to a ball in the box before the other players, they should "move their body to get their hands to the ball." Similarly, if there is a ball outside of the penalty area that they can get to before any other player, they should run outside of the box and play the ball just as a field player would.
- In 5 v 5 soccer, goalies should learn to be the first part of the offense. They should be encouraged to dribble the ball outside of the penalty area. When the goalie's team is on offense, the goalie should move well beyond the goalie box and offer his teammates a drop pass when needed.
- It is important for goalkeepers to realize that this position is not just a "hands" position, but also a "feet" position. They must learn to move their feet to get to the ball when making a save. Ideally, they want to move to get their body behind every shot. Goalies must be discouraged from making kick saves. They should always work to get their hands to the ball.
- Low shots should be caught with an underhand grip and brought in to the chest. High shots should be caught with the hands together in such a way that their thumbs are touching and their index fingers are almost touching, forming a diamond. After making a save, the ball should be brought in to the chest.
- If the goalie cannot catch the ball, the goalie should use his hands to deflect the ball away from the goal. The coach needs to show the players where on the field the goalkeepers may use their hands. For the 5 vs. 5 age groups, the goalie area is defined by a line going across the field, parallel to the goal line, six yards out from the goal line.
- After making a save, the goalie should try to throw the ball to a teammate. If nobody is near the goalie, he may put the ball on the ground and dribble the ball up the field, starting the attack. The goalie should have his head up while dribbling so that he can find an open teammate to pass to. If there is plenty of space, the goalie may take the ball up beyond the midfield line and take a shot.
- If the goalie elects to throw the ball to a teammate, he should throw it to a teammate who is near the sideline. The goalie should not throw the ball down the middle of the field if there are opponents in that area of the field who could intercept the pass and quickly shoot.

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 about 12 feet wide. 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 about 5 - 7 players, no more.

Have one player serve as goalie. Have two or three players stand just outside of one goal post. Two or three other players stand just outside of the other goal post at that goal.

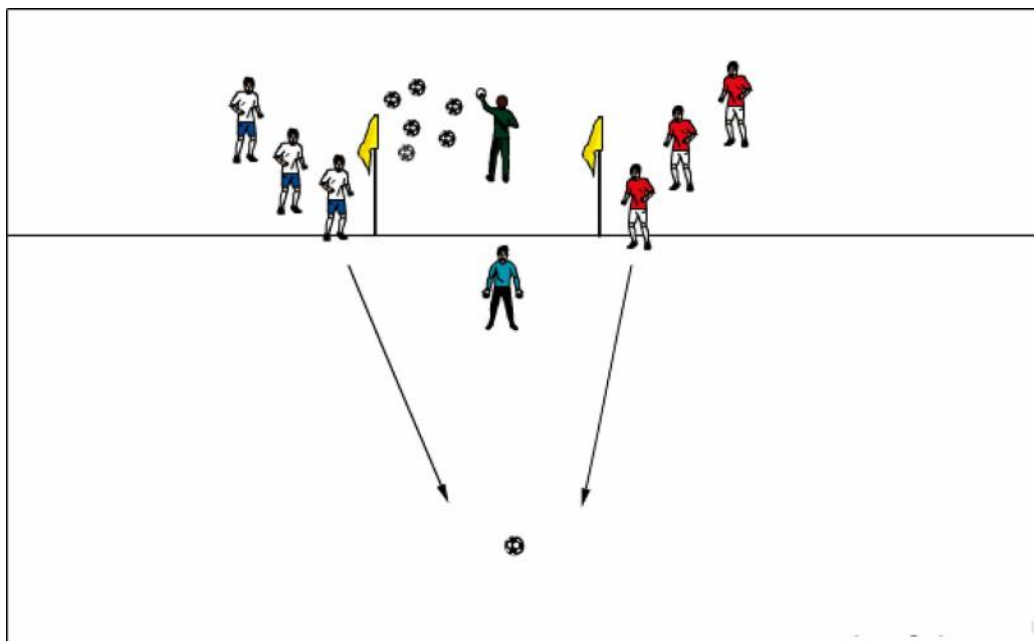
The coach stands behind the goal with a large collection of soccer balls. The first player in each line must be touching the goal post with his foot or hand. The coach throws a ball over the goal and onto the field, about 10 yards out from the goal. The first player in each line immediately runs out to try and get the ball, turn towards the goal and shoot it. The player without the ball tries to steal the ball from the opponent, shoot and score.

Once the ball goes out of play, the two players return to the end of the lines. The coach quickly puts 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.

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.
- 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.

As a variation to this activity, the coach could stand about 20 yards away from the goal and roll the balls towards the players as they come running onto the field from the goal.

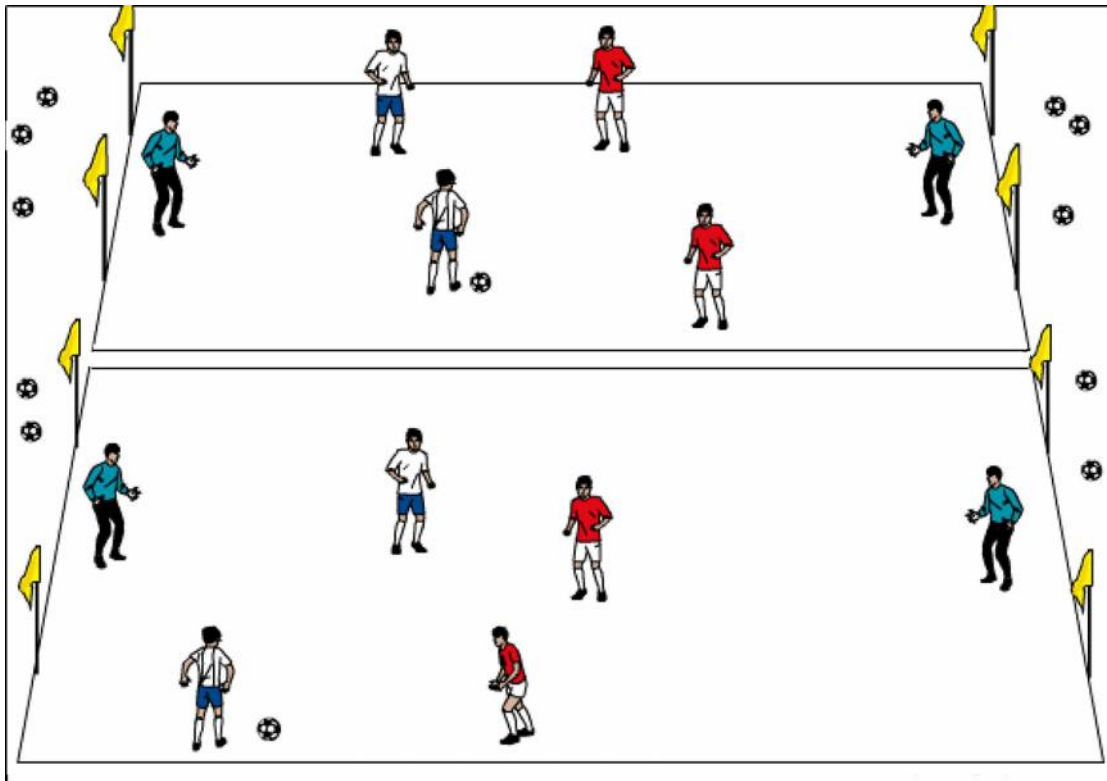


FINAL ACTIVITY

The final activity in any practice should always be a small sided game. Create two parallel fields, each about 20 yards long and 15 yards wide. Use cones or bicycle flags to make goals about 4 - 5 yards wide on each end line. Play two small games of 3 vs. 3 (two field players and a goalie). The fields should NOT be very long so that the players get plenty of chances to take shots.

The head coach should run one game while the assistant coach or other adult should run the other game. Each team should be wearing a different shirt color. Rotate the teams around every 6 - 8 minutes so that each team plays the other three teams.

Place all extra soccer balls behind the goals so that if a ball is shot, the players can quickly grab a different ball and put it into play right away. Soccer balls should only be retrieved when all the balls have been kicked well out of play or when the players need to take a water break.



PRACTICE SESSION # 3

DRIBBLING AND 1 VS. 1 PLAY

ACTIVITY 1

Repeat activity 1 from the first practice, with the players again working on individual dribbling moves. Stress to the players that they will need to be able to dribble the ball well in order to succeed at the games that will be played later in this practice.

In order to become successful at dribbling moves, players will need a lot of time to work on them. Have the players work on as many of the moves as possible before they become bored.

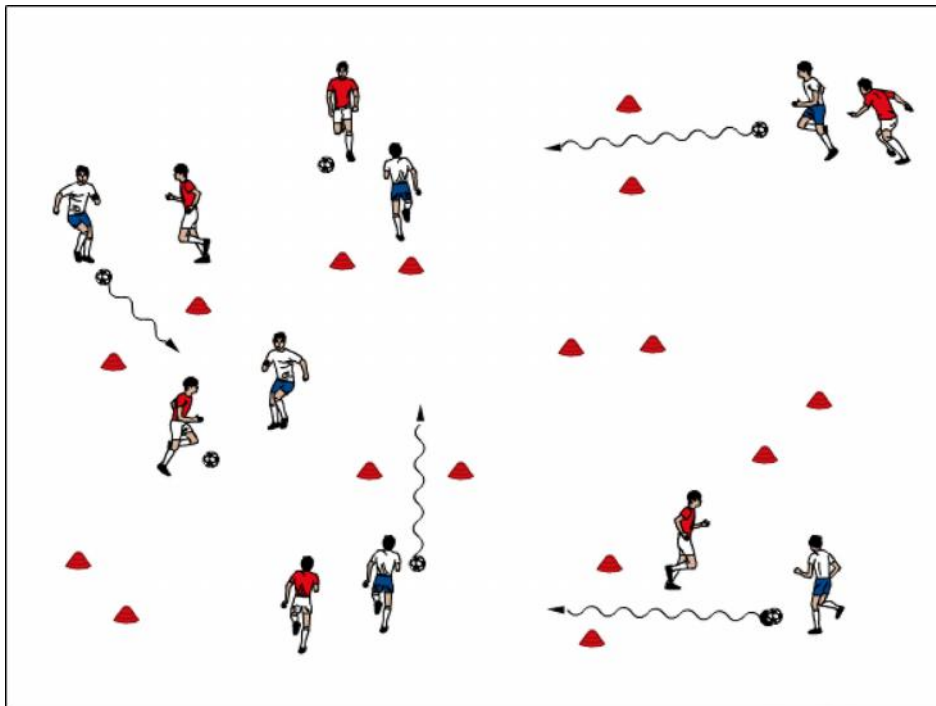
The focus of the remaining activities in this practice will be not only be on dribbling, but on being able to get past opponents with dribbling moves. One of the main objectives that coaches want to accomplish with 7 - 9 year old players is to have them be able to control the ball and have confidence in their dribbling skills when taking on opponents 1 vs. 1.

ACTIVITY 2

"1 v 1 Through Cones" - The coach places about ten pairs of cones on the field. The cones in each pair are about four feet apart. There are no boundaries for this game, just be sure that 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, with each pair having one ball. Each pair of players may start anywhere in the playing area.

Each pair of players start out by passing the ball back and forth. When the coach yells "go," the player with the ball keeps possession and tries to dribble the ball through any of the pairs of cones.



Play continues with each player trying to maintain possession of the ball and dribble through any of the pairs of cones. The player without the ball tries to steal the ball from his opponent and dribble through as many pairs of cones as possible. When a player scores, the ball is still in play but that player may not turn around and go back through the same pair of cones in the opposite direction.

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 won in the previous round. The important thing for the coach is to rotate opponents.

ACTIVITY 3

“Ding” - Using cones, set up a playing area about 15 - 18 yards wide. Create a three yard long end zone at the far end of the area. 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. Set up two 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 at each field.

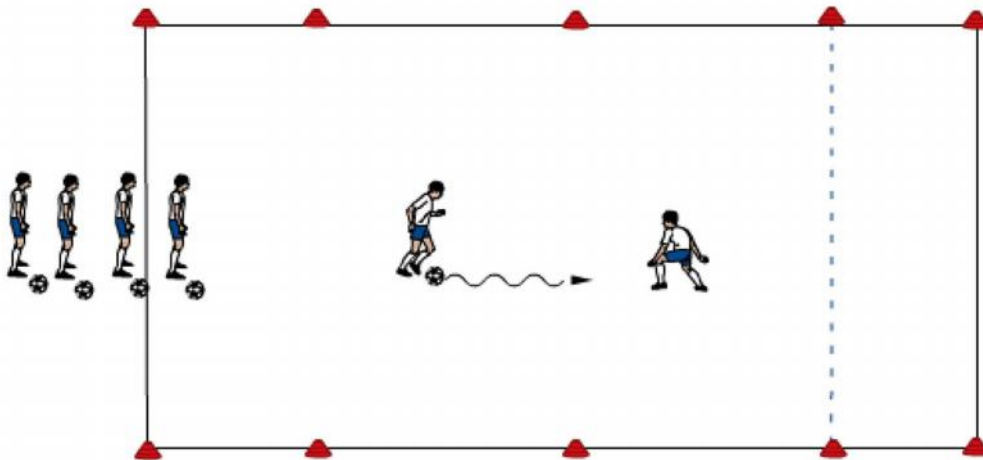
Play starts with the first player dribbling his ball onto the field. He tries to dribble his ball around the defender and into the end zone. To score, he must step on the ball inside the end zone so that it is not moving inside the end zone. The defender is **NOT** allowed to cross over the line, into 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 of 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.



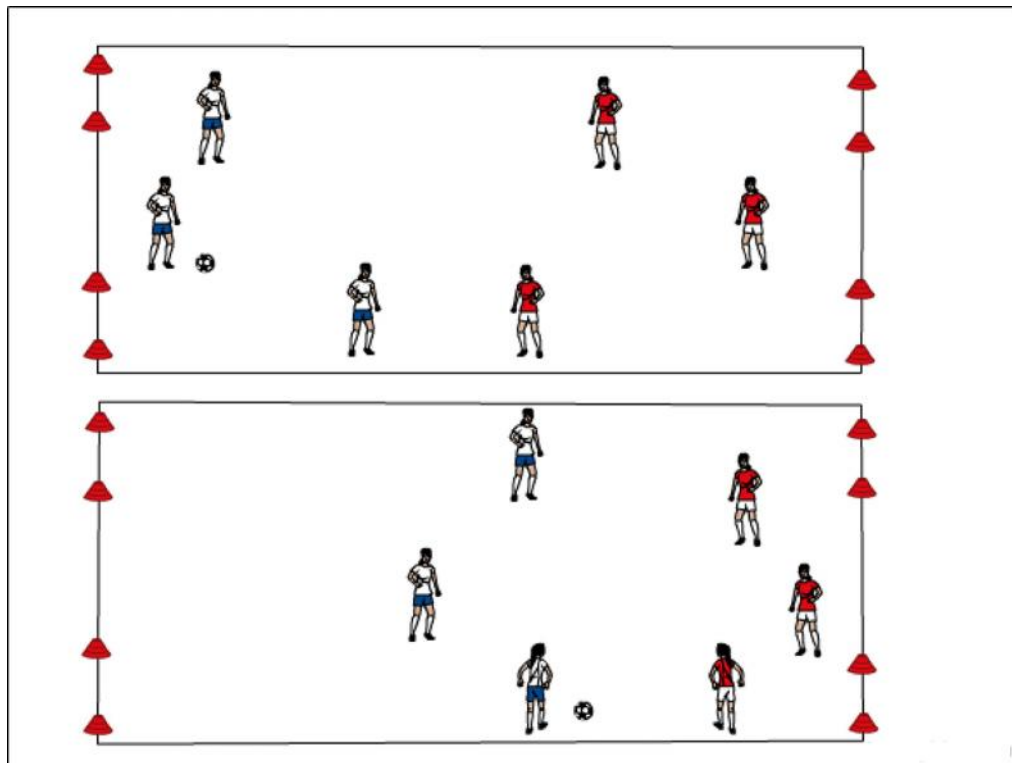
Coaching Points:

- 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 three or 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 and player after player are scoring on him, the coach should stop the game and have a different defender take his place.

FINAL ACTIVITY

The final activity of this practice will be a dribbling game similar to the one in the first practice. This time however, the coach uses cones to create **two** small goals 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.

Coaches should not allow a goal to count unless the player is able to dribble through one of the pairs of cones and step on the ball within a few steps of going through the cones. Do not allow a goal to count if the player did not have possession of the ball when he went through one of the goals.



The reason for having two small goals on each end line is that players will eventually figure out that if one side of the field is too crowded, it is more productive to quickly switch the ball to the other side of the field (either by dribbling the ball or passing the ball). Coaches should initially not tell the players this. Instead, let the players figure it out on their own.

Similar to previous practices, the final activity should have two games of 3 vs. 3 being played. 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. It is very important for coaches to convince all of the players that they need to dribble the ball and be confident in possessing the ball in a game.

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

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 improve?

PRACTICE SESSION # 4

PASSING AND RECEIVING

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. Be sure that no players are trying to toe the ball.

When all the players have arrived at practice, stop the activity and go over the coaching points of how to properly pass the ball. There are three methods of passing that will be taught during this practice. The first is the "instep pass" which is almost exactly the same as shooting. The second method is the inside of the foot pass which is used to make short, accurate passes. The third method to be taught is the outside of the foot pass which might prove too difficult for players of these ages to do.

Go over each technique one at a time and have the players work on each technique, passing and receiving the ball back and forth with their partner.

Also, teach them to receive the ball with the inside of their foot. This is the most common way to receive a pass, though they can use the instep (laces) or outside of the foot to receive a pass as well.

COACHING POINTS FOR PASSING AND RECEIVING

INSTEP (LACE) PASS

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

INSIDE OF THE FOOT PASS (PUSH PASS)

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

OUTSIDE OF THE FOOT PASS

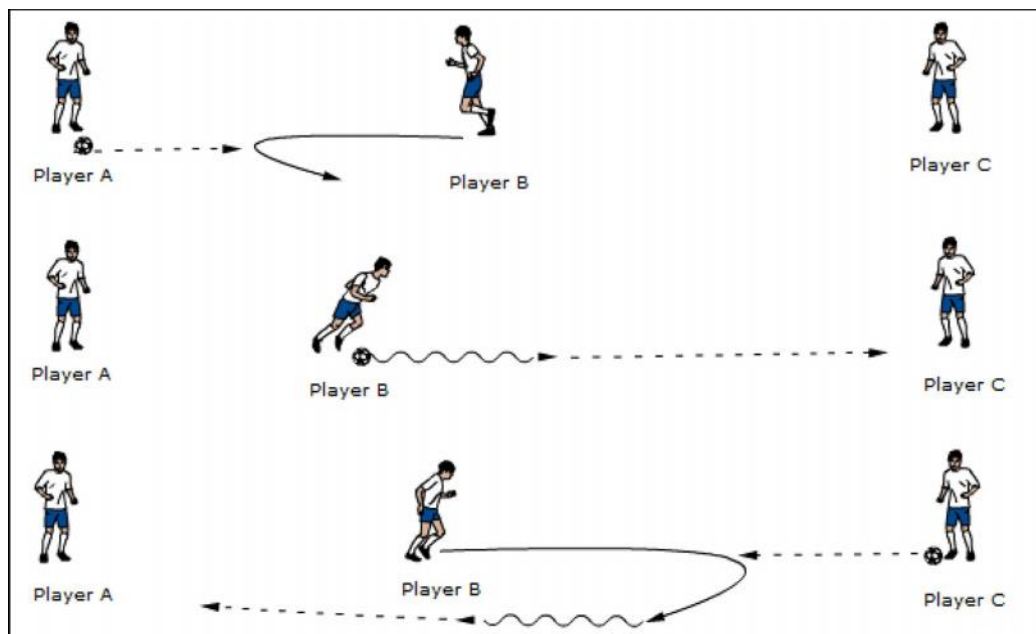
- This is a VERY advanced technique and should only be worked on by older players.
- Toes are turned in, towards the non-kicking foot.
- Lock the ankle by lowering the toes so they are well **BELOW** the heel.
- The non-kicking foot does not have to be pointing towards the intended target.
- The ball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

TECHNIQUES FOR RECEIVING A PASS

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

ACTIVITY 2

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

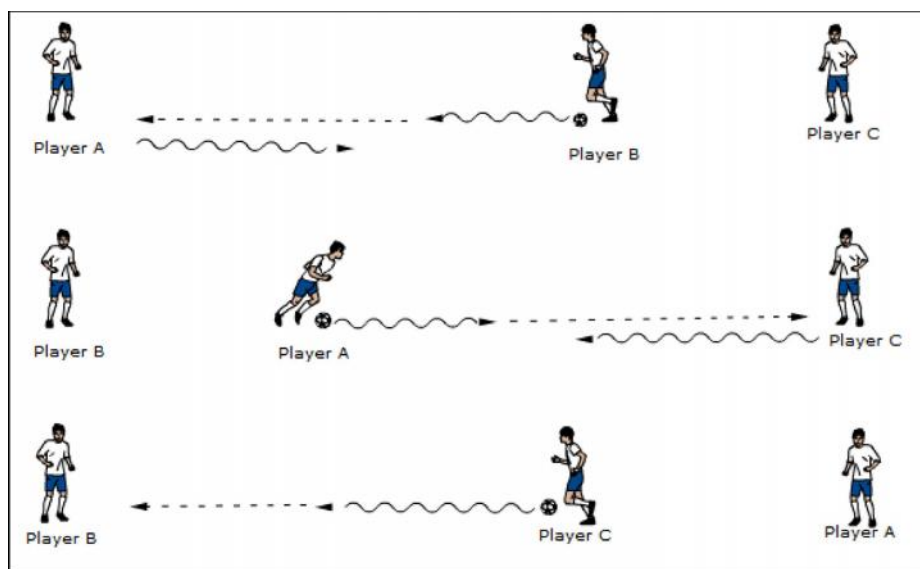


More advanced players should try to receive the ball facing sideways to the player passing the ball so that they can easily see what is in front of them, not just what is behind them. Receiving a ball in this manner is referred to as being “sideways on.”

ACTIVITY 3

Start with the same setup as before. Player B starts with the ball and passes to player A. After player A receives the ball, he dribbles into toward player B and past him. The two players exchange places. Player A dribbles towards player C and passes the ball to him. Player C receives the pass and dribbles toward player A and past him. The players then switch places. Player C then dribbles towards player B and repeats this rotation.

Be sure the players make half of their passes left footed.



ACTIVITY 4

Divide the players into two teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. Using cones, create two grids each about 20 yards square. The grids are set about five yards from each other. Place one team in one grid with one ball and the other team in the other grid with one ball. Give each player in each grid a number (1, 2).

This activity is a keepaway game where players work as a team to keep the ball from an opponent by passing the ball. The game starts with the coaching calling out a number. The player on each team who was given that number runs into the opponent's grid. The team with the ball plays keepaway from that player, trying to keep the ball in the playing area for as long as possible. The lone defender tries to knock the ball out of the playing area. Once both groups have had their ball knocked out, the defenders return to their respective grids. The coach then calls out a different number and play starts up again with the next pair of players running into the opposing team's grid, trying to kick the ball out of play.

The coach can make this into a fun contest by giving one point to the team that was able to keep the ball in their grid the longest.

At first, the offensive players will bunch up towards the ball. The coach will need to constantly remind the players to spread out, all over the playing area, in order to make it more difficult for the defender to knock the ball out of the opposing team's playing area.

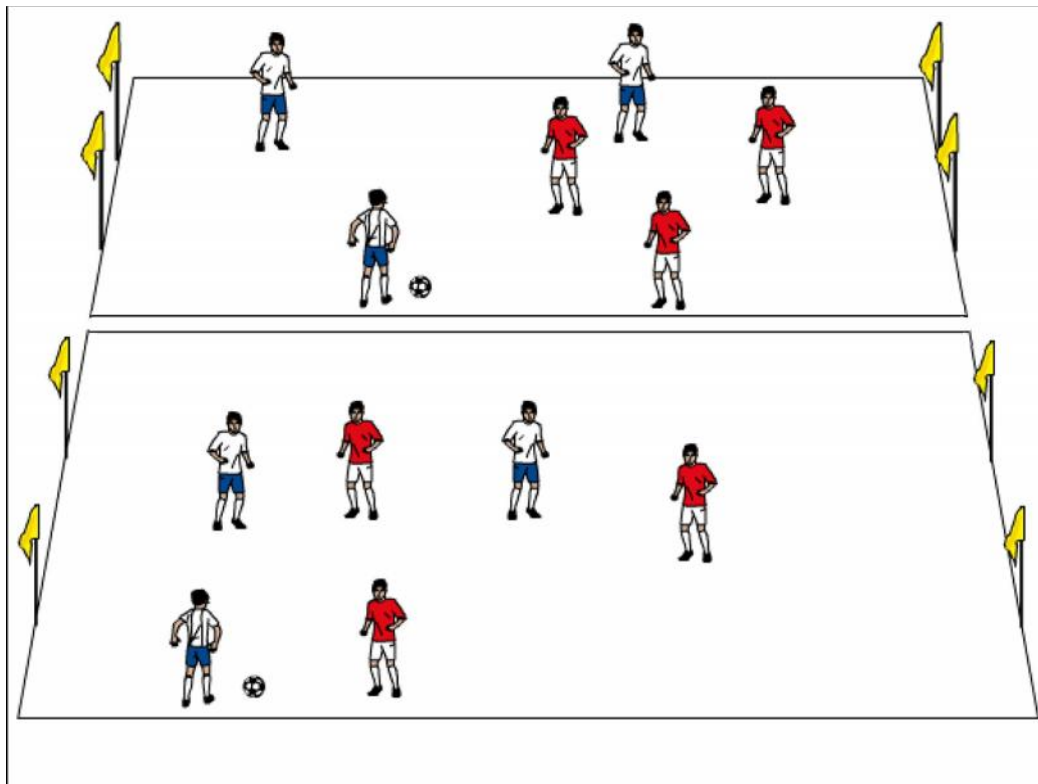
Variation: If the players start to get the hang of this activity, the coach can make the grids a little bit bigger (maybe 25 yards square) and repeat the activity but this time with the coach calling out two numbers. Now, two players from each grid will run over to the opposing team's grid and work together to knock the ball out of the opposing team's playing area.

FINAL ACTIVITY

Setup two fields about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide with a 12 foot long (or longer) goal on each end line. Create four teams, each with three field players and no goalie. Play a regular 3 vs. 3 game except that teams are required to make three consecutive passes before they are allowed to take a shot on goal. If the team loses possession, their pass count returns to zero.

For an easier variation to this game, require that teams initially only make a minimum of one pass before scoring. After a team scores, require that team to make a minimum of two consecutive passes before they may score again. If a team has scored two goals, require that team to make at least three consecutive passes before they may score, and so on.

As another variation to this activity, each team plays with two field players and a goalie. Now, when a team has possession of the ball, their goalie joins in the action, trying to help their team make the required number of passes. Soccer rules state that a goalie may not pick up a pass made from the foot of a teammate so the goalie will have to use his feet to receive passes. However, since the other team will not be allowed to shoot right away if they steal the ball, the goalie will have enough time to move up the field and help his two teammates make the required number of passes.



PRACTICE SESSION # 5

DRIBBLING, SHIELDING, TACKLING AND 1 V 1 GAMES

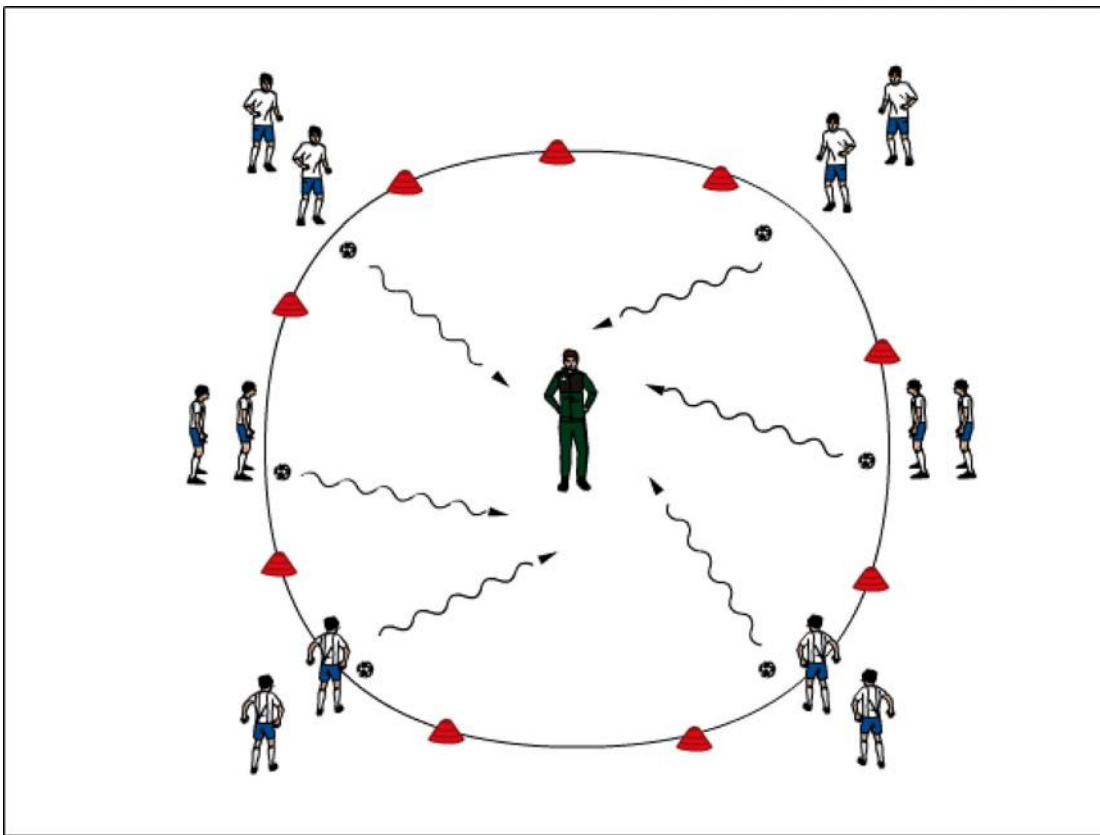
ACTIVITY 1

Divide the players into groups of two, each pair with one ball. Each pair of players stand together at the edge of a circle 8 yards in radius with the coach standing in the middle of the circle. The first player in each pair dribbles the ball around the coach, around his partner, around the coach again and then back to his partner. The player's partner then repeats the activity. Continue alternating players.

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

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

- Have the players dribble the ball left footed (clockwise) around the coach one time and right footed (counter clockwise) the second time around.
- Have the coach walk around in the circle to force players to look up and change their direction.
- Make the activity more competitive by allowing the players to kick other players' soccer balls away. They may only kick another player's ball away when they are in possession of their ball. The coach may also kick balls away as the players try to dribble around him.



ACTIVITY 2

In this activity, we will teach the players how to properly shield a soccer ball. Shielding is a technique used when a player has the ball and uses his body to prevent an opponent from stealing the ball.

The coach should go over the coaching points of shielding (see below) and then have a couple of the pairs of players demonstrate proper shielding technique. After a few players have properly demonstrated how to shield a ball, have the players compete against each in the following shielding game:

Group the players into pairs with each player standing five yards away from his partner. The players quickly pass a ball back and forth. When the coach yells "GO," the player with the ball tries to shield the ball from his partner while his partner tries to steal it from him. The players try to play keep away from each other. After about 30 seconds, the coach yells "STOP." The player who has the ball at the end is the winner. Switch partners and repeat the activity.

Players should not "run away" from their opponents. Instead, they should use their bodies to shield the ball. One of the most common mistakes young players make when shielding is to only control the ball their stronger foot (usually their right foot). This will cause players to sometimes control the ball with the foot nearest the defender, making the ball easy to steal. Players must learn to shield both with both the right foot and the left foot. Always control the ball with the foot FURTHEST from the defender.

Variation: Play this game 1 v 1 v 1. Each player tries to get control of the ball and keep it away from the other two players. Each player is playing for himself. Again, be sure that the player with the ball does not run away from his opponents. Instead, he must work hard to shield and maintain possession from both of his opponents.

COACHING POINTS FOR SHIELDING

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

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

ACTIVITY 3

This activity will help teach players how to properly execute a “block tackle.” Tackling is the term used to legally take the ball away from a player. Divide the players into pairs with each pair having a ball.

Have the players in each pair stand two yards apart, facing each other, with a ball in between them. On the count of three, each player steps up to the ball and strikes the ball simultaneously with the **inside** of their **right** foot. Repeat the activity with both players striking the ball simultaneously with the **inside** of their **left** foot. Be sure the players strike the **top half of the ball**. The player’s toes should be pointed out so that contact is made with the inside of the foot. The player’s toes should be pointed up, higher than the ankle, in order to properly lock the ankle. The non-kicking foot should be planted next to the ball.

COACHING POINTS FOR THE BLOCK TACKLE

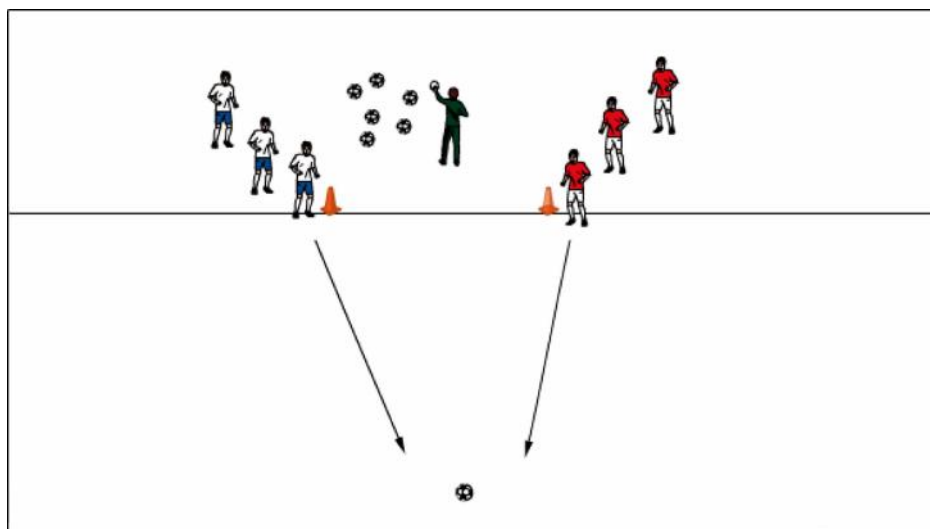
- The defender must position his body so that he is standing directly behind the ball, not off to the side of the ball.
- Place the non-tackling foot **next to** the ball by stepping forward.
- Crouch down to lower the center of gravity.
- Use the inside of the foot. Lock the ankle by keeping the toes up, higher than the ankle. Drive the foot through the ball. Do not slow the foot down when it arrives at the ball.
- Always make contact with the **TOP HALF** of the ball so the ball does not roll over the foot.
- Move the lead shoulder forward powerfully as the foot strikes the ball.

ACTIVITY 4

Place two cones on the ground, about 10 yards apart. Have one short line of players stand just outside of each cone. The coach stands between the cones, but a few yards back. The coach throws a ball out about 10 yards onto the field at which time the first player in each line runs out onto the field.

The two players compete for the ball. Each player tries to get possession of the ball, turn and dribble it back, under control, through the two cones while preventing the other player from doing the same thing.

Play continues until the ball has gone over the starting line. If a player is able to dribble the ball, under control, through the two cones, he gets a point. The player does not get a point if he dribbles the ball over the end line but not through the cones. The player also does not get a point if he simply kicks the ball through the two cones. He must maintain control of the ball after going through the cones.



When that round is over, the coach immediately throws another ball out for the next two players in line to play. Continue playing this game with the players regularly changing opponents. In order to maximize player involvement, there will need to be two fields going at the same time. Have players switch fields occasionally so that everyone gets a chance to play against all of the other players on the team.

FINAL ACTIVITY

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

Make a very wide grid, about 25 yards wide and only 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 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.

The 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.

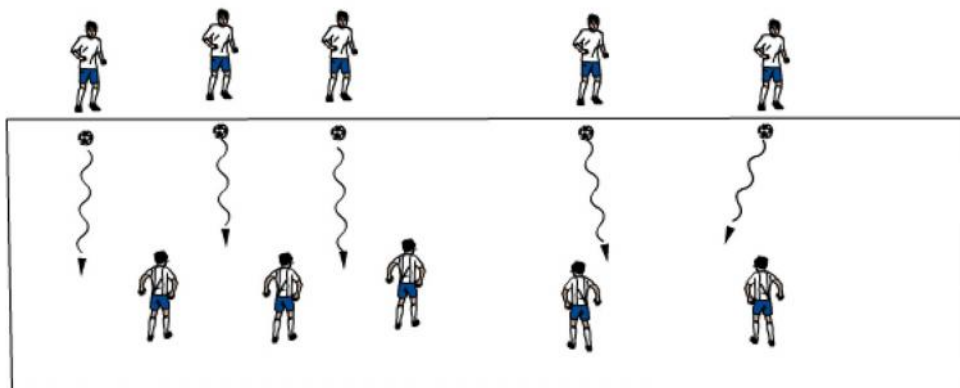
If a ball is knocked over one of the sidelines, the nearest player not in possession of that ball takes possession of the ball. He must dribble the ball back into play from the point where the ball went out of play and try to return it over the starting line.

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

Once a ball crosses over the original end line, the player quickly tries to pick it up before anyone else can pick up the ball. Once all the balls have returned back over the starting line, play stops. The players with a ball start the next round with that ball on the starting 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.

Coaches Note: If there are more than 11 players, play with three groups. One group are the attackers, each with a ball. The second group are the defenders. A third group, equal in number to the other groups, rests. After each round, the players who did not pick up a ball go off the field and rest. The group that was resting goes onto the field and plays defense. Again, be sure the number of attackers is equal to (or at most one greater) than the number of defenders and the number of resting players. Thus, if there were 13 players, play with five attackers, four defenders and have four players resting.



PRACTICE SESSION # 6

SHOOTING, SCORING AND GOALKEEPING

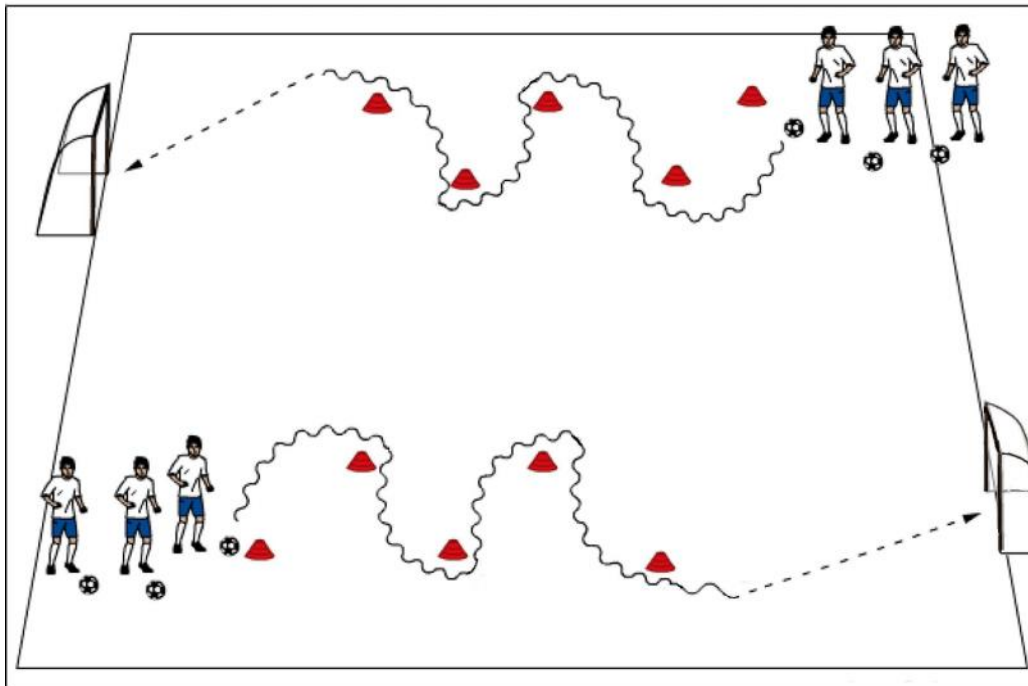
ACTIVITY 1

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 below. Each player has a soccer ball to work with. Have half of the players start 20 yards in front of one goal and the other half of the players 20 yards in front of the other goal. Stagger five cones in front of each line. The cones should be about four yards apart and positioned so that the player must constantly change direction while dribbling towards the goal.

The first player in each line dribbles his ball, under control, 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 in each line to start the same process 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 (see the diagram below). 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

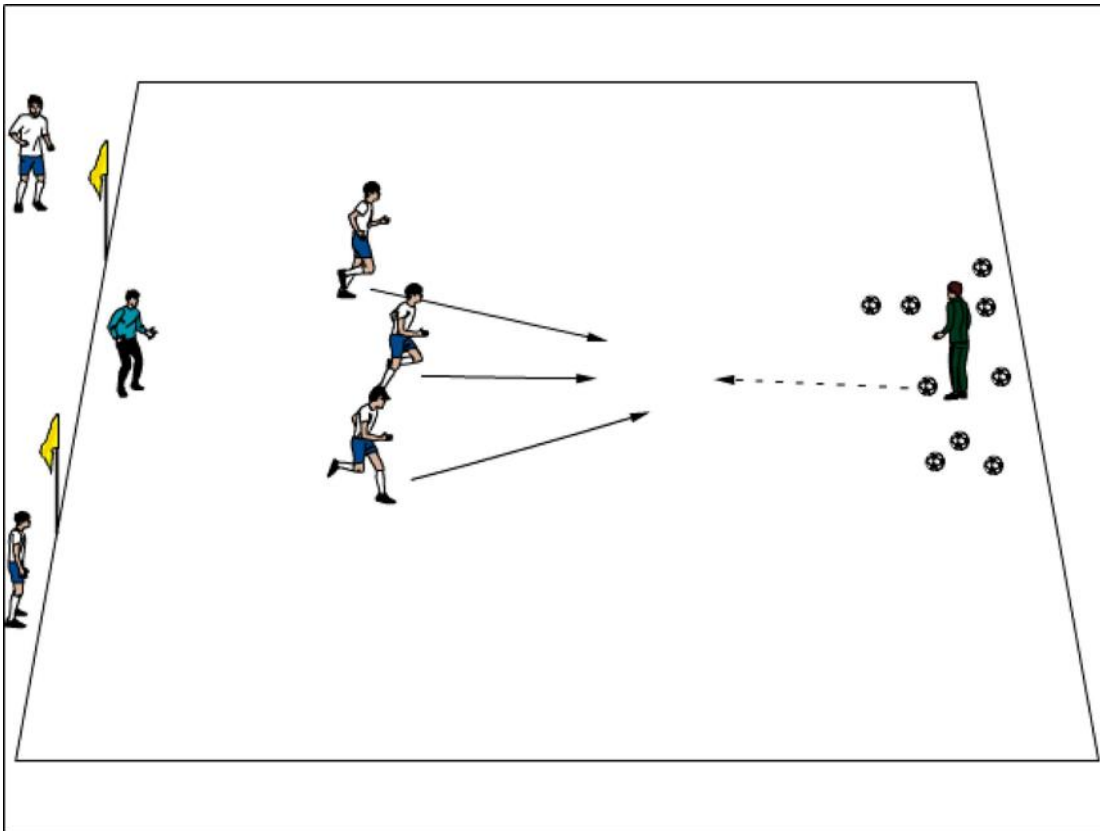
"1 v 1 v 1, Turn And Shoot" - Divide the players into two separate groups of at least six players. Each group has a goal (about 12 feet long) to shoot at. At each field, a coach stands 20 yards from the goal with a large supply of balls. Three attacking players stand 12 yards from the goal line. The goal is defended by a goalie. The three attacking players each try to score on the goal while also trying to prevent the other two players from scoring on the goal. The game is always a 1 vs. 2 situation for the player who has the ball.

The remaining players stand behind the goal line, retrieving shots that go wide of the goal. One player should be near the coach, helping the coach organize the soccer balls. That player can also collect the balls that the resting players behind the goal have collected and kicked back.

The coach serves a ball into the playing area. The three field players compete for the ball. The player who gets to the ball first tries to turn and shoot. The other two players try to steal the ball from him and take a shot of their own. When the ball goes out of bounds or the goalie gets possession, the play is over and the coach immediately puts a new ball into play for the same three attacking players.

The players not active in the game should collect the soccer balls as they go out of play and return them to the coach while play continues. Be sure when they kick balls back to the coach, they do not interfere with the game that is going on.

Each round should last about 75 - 90 seconds. By that time, the players will likely be exhausted. The player who scored the most goals is the winner. Rotate the players around so that the three players who just played now serve as the goalie and the ball retrievers. Three players who were not playing in that round (the goalie and the players retrieving the shots) now go onto the field up and compete against each other in the next round.



ACTIVITY 3

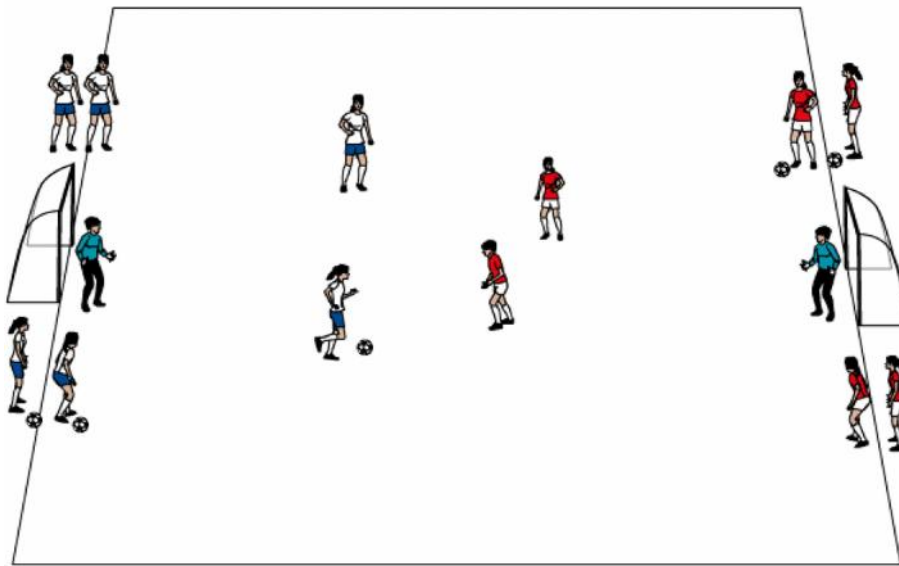
"2 vs. 2 Transition Game" - Create a 25 yard by 20 yard grid with a goal on each end line. Divide the players into two equal teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. For each team, place half of the players in a line a few yards to the left of the goal and the other half of each team in a line a few yards to the right of their goal. The players in one of the lines for each team each have a soccer ball. Each team also has a goalie.

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 a goal line (either in the goal, over the goal or wide of the goal), the two players defending that goal immediately leave the field. The two players at the front of the lines on that goal line immediately enter the field with a different ball and attack the other goal. The pair that just shot the ball become the defenders, trying to stop the two players just entering the field with a ball.

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 goal line, the players at the front of their team's two lines immediately enter the field with a new ball.

This game requires a minimum of ten players since there needs to be two players on each team ready to replace their two teammates on the field. Each team also needs a goalie. Ideally, there should be six 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.



FINAL ACTIVITY

Create a field that is not very long, but is wide. A field 20 yards square would work fine. Divide the players into two equal teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. Use cones or corner flags to make a goal on each end line. For this game, the goals need to be **VERY** wide, possibly 10 yards in width. This is wider than a normal full size adult goal which is only 8 yards wide.

Each team has **THREE GOALIES** (this is why the goals are so big). The goalies are only allowed to play a few yards in front of the goal line, they may not travel around in the field play. The remaining three or four players on each team are field players. Since the goals are so wide, the players will have an incentive to shoot whenever possible. The whole idea of this game is for players to attempt as many shots on goal as possible.

Players rotate between playing goalie and playing in the field. Encourage the players to shoot whenever possible. All extra soccer balls should be placed just inside the goals so that when a ball is shot and goes out of play, one of the goalies can quickly put a different ball into play.

PRACTICE SESSION # 7

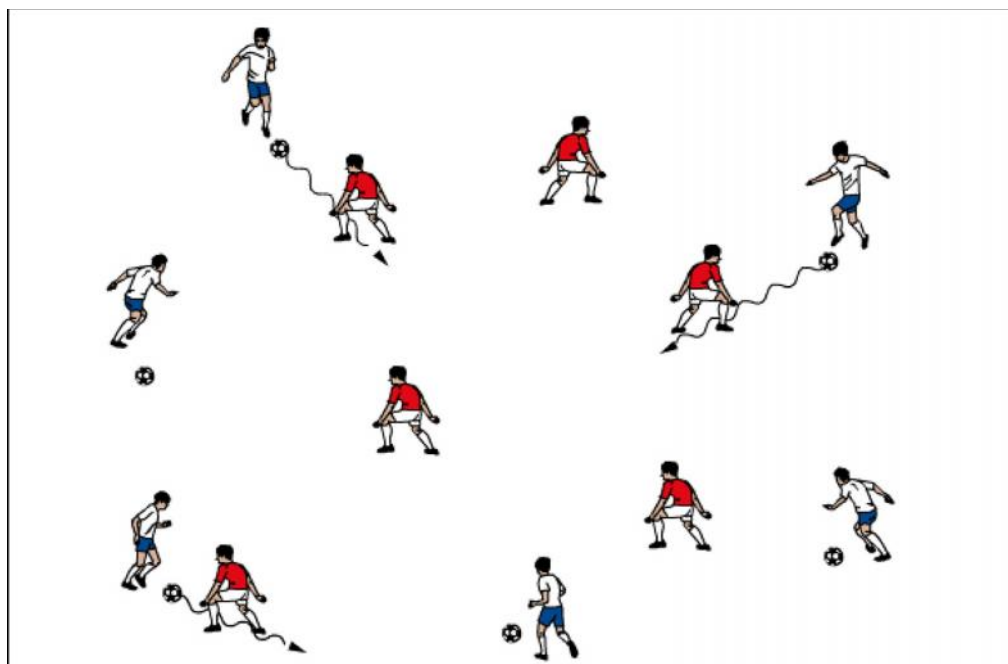
DRIBBLING AND 1 v 1 COMPETITIONS

This is another practice which focuses on dribbling and 1 vs. 1 competitions. The reason that we spend so much time working on dribbling and 1 vs. 1 competitions is that they are the most important skills that coaches can teach young players. Coaches of young players should not spend much time teaching complicated game tactics. Instead, coaches should concentrate on teaching players to master the ball and beat opponents. If players can master these skills at young ages, they will have a good chance of becoming high level players when they get older.

ACTIVITY 1

Divide the players into two groups with each group wearing a different color shirt. One group spreads out randomly inside a large playing area, about 25 yards square. This group of players stand with their legs spread far apart. They do not have soccer balls. The players on the other team each have a ball. On command, each player dribbles toward any of the resting players and lightly taps the ball through the legs of that player. The player then dribbles over to another resting player and repeats this. Each of the dribbling players tries to dribble through as many of these "gates" as possible in one minute. At the end of a minute, the teams switch roles. Repeat this several times.

After each group has tried this several times, change the activity. Now, the resting players spread out in the playing area again, but stand with their legs together. Now, each player on the dribbling team tries to dribble a full circle (360 degrees) around as many different players as possible in one minute. The coach should vary the task each round. First, have the players use the insides of their feet to dribble the circles around the resting players. The next round, have the players use the outsides of their feet to dribble the circles around the resting players. The coach can also vary each round by requiring the players to dribble only with their right foot or only with their left foot. Again, both teams alternate between resting and playing in one minute intervals.



Next, change the activity slightly by having each dribbling player dribble up to a resting player, tap the ball between the resting player's legs, then dribble a full circle (360 degrees) around that player. The dribbling player then dribbles up to a different resting player and repeats the activity. Again, have the players keep count of how many times they are able to do this in one minute. Require the players to go to a different player each time and not just stay at the same player for the entire minute.

As a fun variation, allow dribbling players to kick away the soccer ball of any other player who is active in the activity. Now the players not only have to try and perform the require dribbling skill, but also have to prevent the other active players from knocking his ball away. The coach can also join in this activity, walking around the area while the activity is going on, trying to knock away any soccer ball that comes near him.

ACTIVITY 2

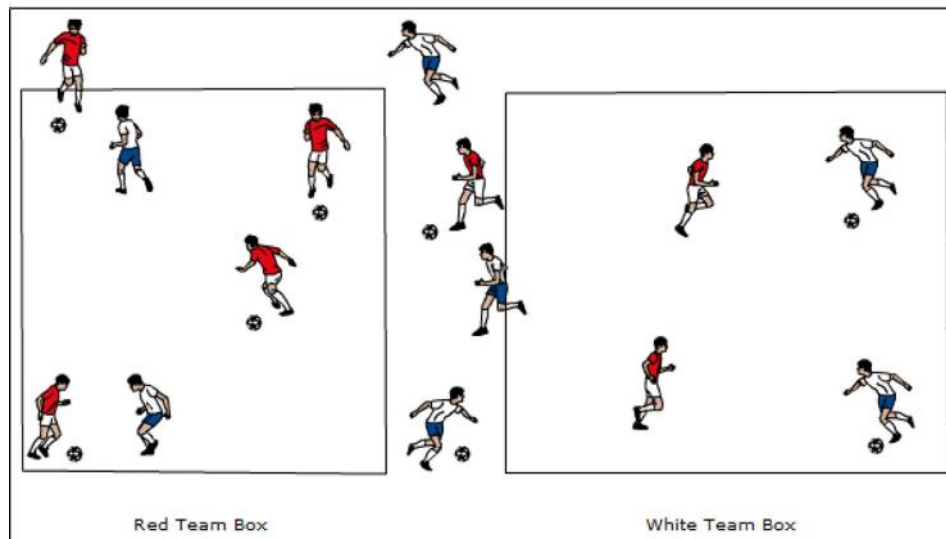
"Team Take Away" - Create two square grids, each about 15 yards square. Place the grids about four yards away from each other. Divide the players into two equal teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. The players on one team start in one grid while the players on the other team start in the opposite grid. Have half of the players on each team (or just over half) start with a ball. The other players start without a ball.

When the coach starts the game, the players with a ball dribble around inside their grid. The players without a ball run over to the other team's grid and try to either steal a ball or kick a ball out of the opponent's grid. When they do that, they dribble that ball back to their grid. When a player has his ball stolen or kicked out of his grid by an opposing player, the player must immediately run over to the other team's grid to steal a ball.

Players may only steal a ball from an opponent when they are inside of the opponent's grid. Players may not steal a ball that is not inside of their opponent's grid.

Play this game for about two minutes, then stop play. The players immediately try and pick up a ball. There are two ways to make this activity be a competitive game:

- At end of each round, any player who does not have possession of a ball inside of his own grid must do some type of fun punishment
- At the end of each round, count how many players on each team are in possession of a ball. Whichever teams has fewer soccer balls must do some type of fun punishment. For this type of game, it is best to use an odd number of balls to avoid ties.



Note: A “fun punishment” could be three star jumps (the player touches the ground with both hands, then jumps up as high as he can with both arms in the air while yelling “I’m a star”), two push ups, bark like an angry dog, imitate a donkey, walk like Frankenstein, etc.

The coach can make this game more difficult by removing another soccer ball in future rounds of play.

ACTIVITY 3

“1 v 1 To Human Goals” - Divide the players into groups of four. Two of the players (A and B in the diagram below) stand about 8 yards apart, facing each other with their legs spread apart as wide as possible. Their legs form the goals which will be used in this competition. These two players are stationary throughout the activity. The other two players (X and Y below) will be competing against each other in the activity. They start about five yards apart, equal distant from the two players who are serving as goals.

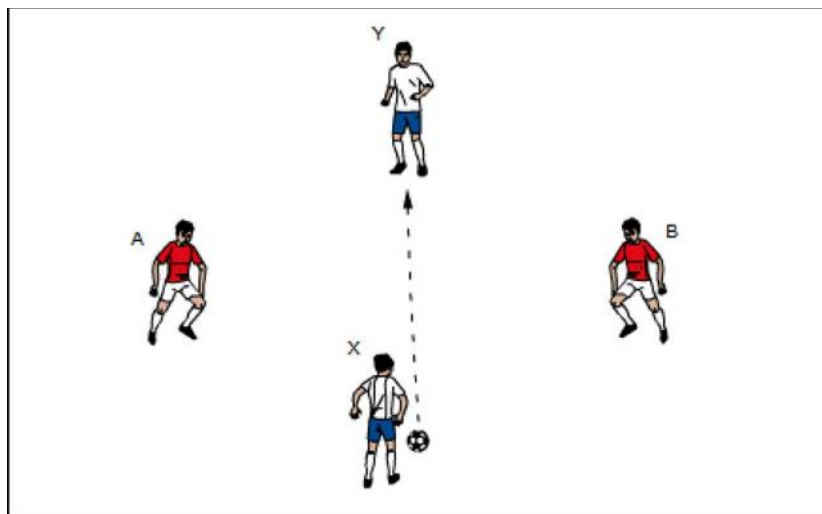
The two players who are playing (X and Y) start by passing the ball back and forth. When the coach says go, these two players start playing 1 v 1 against each other, each trying to dribble (not pass or shoot) the ball between either of the two other player’s legs (A and B). To score a goal, a player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

The coach starts all the groups at the same time. The ball is in play continuously for about 60 seconds, at which time the coach stops all the games. Play does NOT stop when a goal is scored. When a player scores a goal, he immediately tries to get the ball and score another goal through either the same goal or the other goal. After a round has ended, the players who served as the goals (A and B) play each other while the two players who just played (X and Y) serve as the goals.

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

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

This game is excellent for getting players to learn to cut the ball hard and go in a different direction. If the defender has one of the goals closed off, the player with the ball should quickly change direction and attack the other goal. Do not let each round last for more than a minute since this game is very physically demanding.



FINAL ACTIVITY

“Team Ding” - This is a “team” version of the Ding series of games described earlier. All of the Ding games have proven to be quite popular with my players and are great at developing 1v1 skills.

Create a grid about 15 - 18 yards in width and 13 yards in length. Each end of the grid has a three yard end zone. The middle zone is about 7 yards long. One team lines up at the corner of one end of the grid. The other team lines up at the opposite end. Each team wears a different shirt color. Place a flat cone or marker about four yards from the sideline on each end zone line.

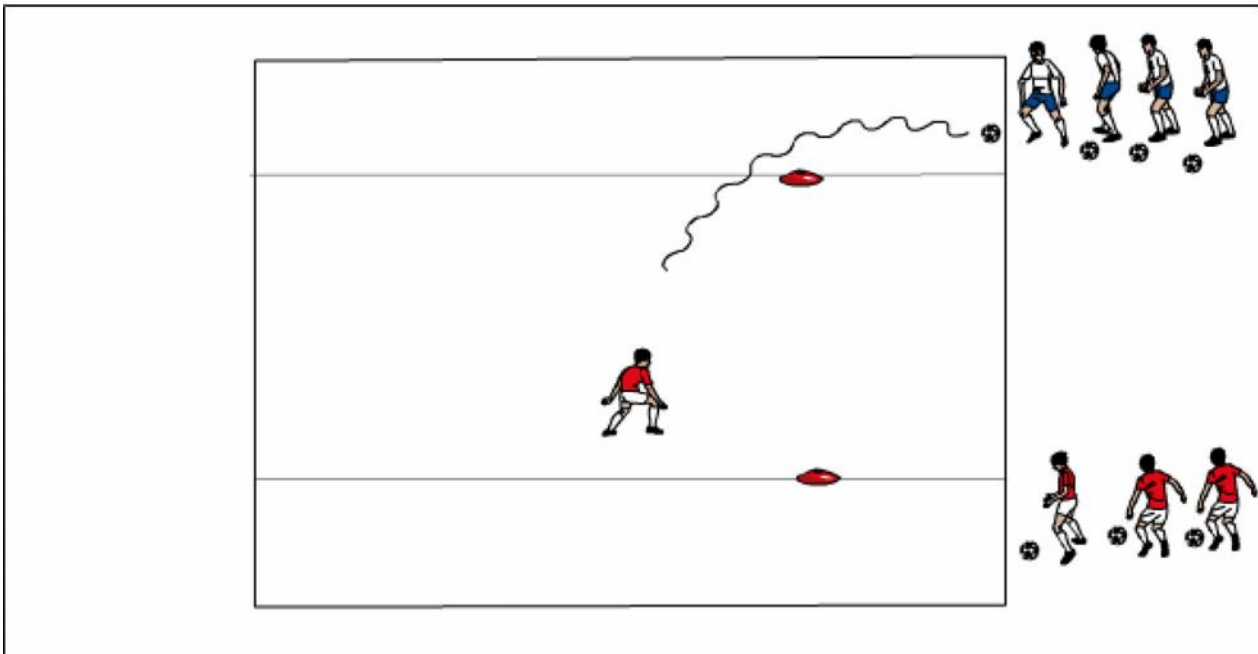
One team starts on defense with one of their players positioned in the middle zone. The other team starts on offense. The first player on the attacking team dribbles his ball along his team’s end zone line, around the cone and onto the field of play. That player then tries to dribble his ball under control into the opposing team’s end zone and step on the ball inside the end zone. The defender may not go into the end zone at any time.

If the attacker is able to score: The team gets a point. The attacking player then returns to the end of his team’s line. The player at the front of that team’s line then dribbles onto the field and tries to score. The same defender remains out on the field. Play continues with the next attacking player trying to score. Each successful goal gives that team another point.

If the attacker does not score: The defending player gets the ball and goes to the end of his team’s line. That team now goes on offense. The attacking player who was unable to score stays on the field and becomes the defender. The other team now goes on the attack and tries to score as many goals as possible, one player at a time, until the defender prevents that team from scoring.

The teams continue alternating being the attacking team and the defending team, changing roles each time a player is unable to score. The game ends when one team reaches 15 points.

To make this game more exciting, pretend this is like an NFL football game. Have a coin flip to see who attacks first, have an assistant coach be the “instant replay reviewer” who rules on close plays and calls down his decisions on close calls to the head referee, etc.



PRACTICE SESSION # 8

PASSING AND RECEIVING

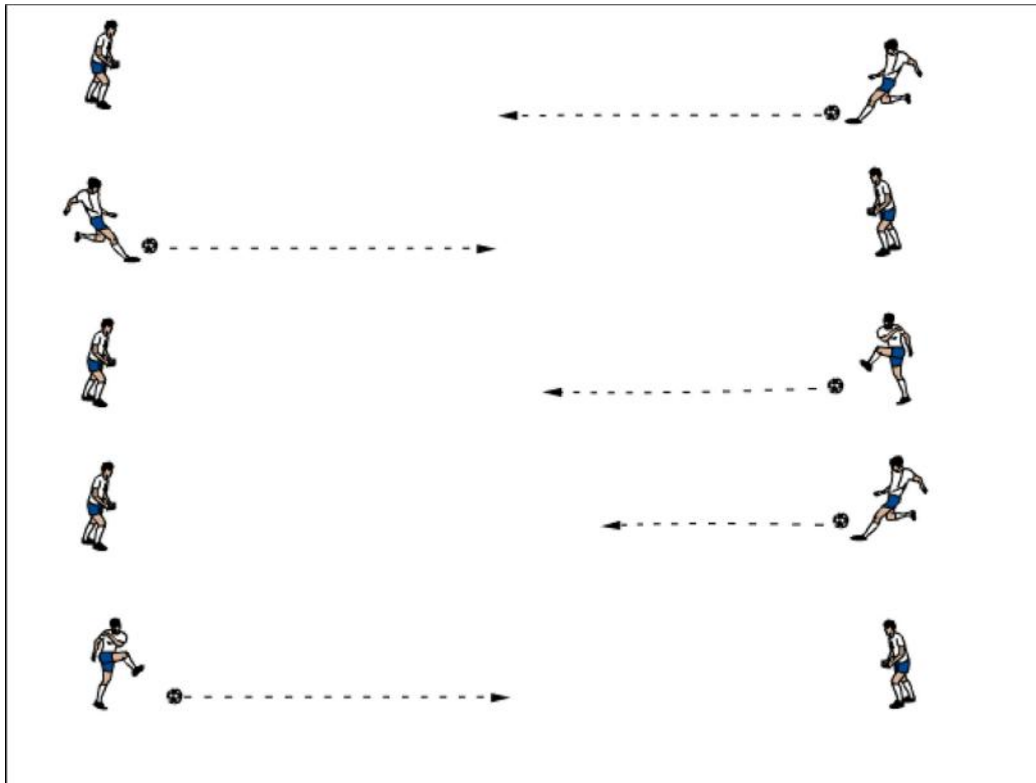
ACTIVITY 1

Divide the players into pairs with each pair having a soccer ball to work with. Players should be about 10 yards away from their partner. In each pair, the player without the ball spreads his feet about two feet apart. The player with the ball tries to pass the ball so it either rolls through his partner's legs or hits his partner's feet. See which player in each pair can successfully complete the most passes in 10 tries.

Repeat this activity several times. The coach can vary this each round. He can require that the players use the instep (laces) one round or use the inside of the foot one round. The coach could also require that some rounds be done right footed and some rounds be done left footed.

The coach could also make this a fun competition by having each pair of players play side by side with the other pairs (see diagram). Have the winner of each round move up the ladder one level and the loser of each round move down the ladder one level, similar to the "Super Bowl vs. Toilet Bowl" dribbling activity played in the previous practice.

In between rounds, the coach should review the technical points of the instep pass and the inside of the foot pass. See the first activity listed in practice session # 4 in this manual.



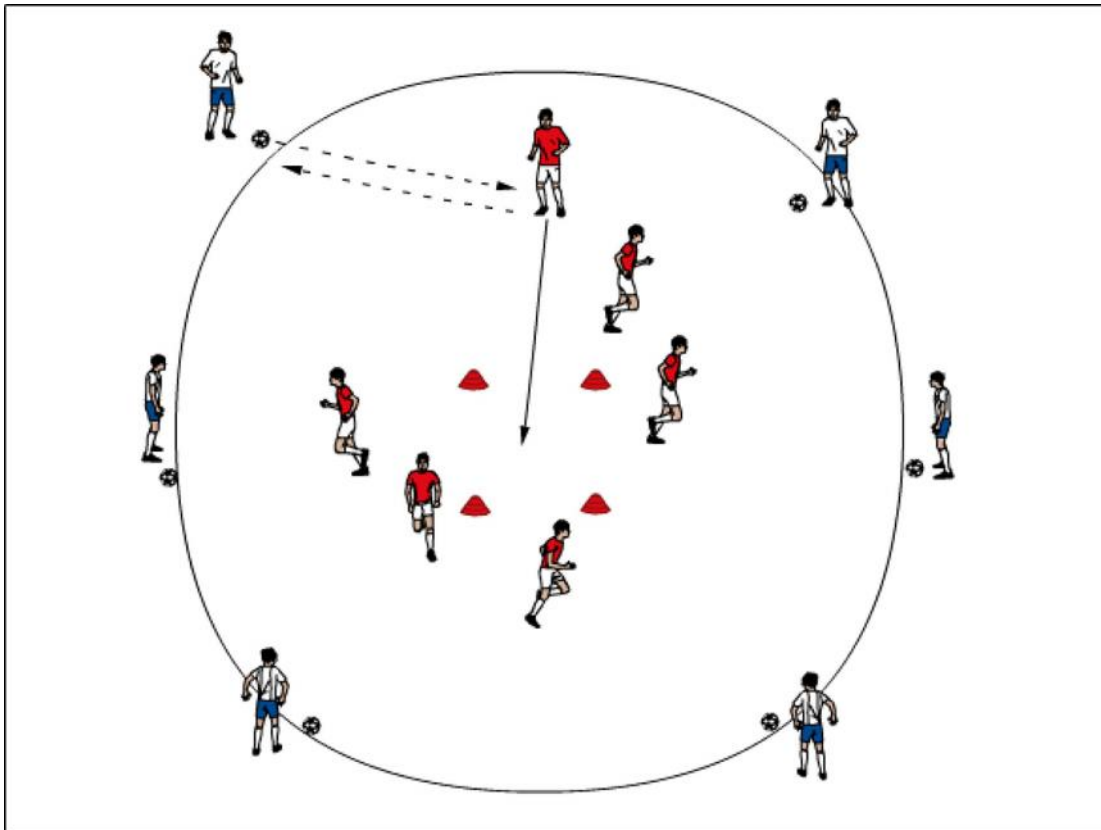
ACTIVITY 2

Have half of the players create a circle about 16 yards in diameter. Each of these players has a ball. Place four cones in the middle of the circle. The cones make a square, about three yards long on each side. The remaining players start inside of the square. These players do not have soccer balls.

Players inside the circle each run toward a player on the edge of the circle. The perimeter players pass the ball to the feet of the oncoming player. These players receive the ball, pass it back to the same perimeter player, run back into the cones in the middle of the circle and then run out, toward a different perimeter player. Repeat this for a minute, then have the players switch roles.

The inside players should be at least five yards away from the serving player when receiving a ball.

Variation - Same setup as before, except the inside players now receive a ground pass, turn with the ball, dribble it away from the perimeter player, through the center square and then pass it to any other perimeter player who is standing without a ball. The inside players then run to a different perimeter player in possession of a ball and receive another pass.



Advanced Variation - Using the same setup as above, ask the outside players to throw the ball in the air to the inside players. The inside players must receive the ball using whatever surface they decide is best for that service, control it with their feet and then pass it back to the perimeter player. The receiving player could use his chest, stomach, thigh or foot. Services should be varied, they should be arcing, line drives, bouncing, etc. With the services varied, the inside players will have to quickly decide which body part should be used to receive the ball, just like in a real game.

ACTIVITY 3

“5 v 1 Keep Away” - Using cones, create two playing areas about 25 yards square. Place about 5 or 6 players in each grid. There should be one ball in use at each grid. One player in each grid serves as a defender. That player holds a yellow pinnie so that the other players in the grid know he is the defender. All other players in the grid are on offense.

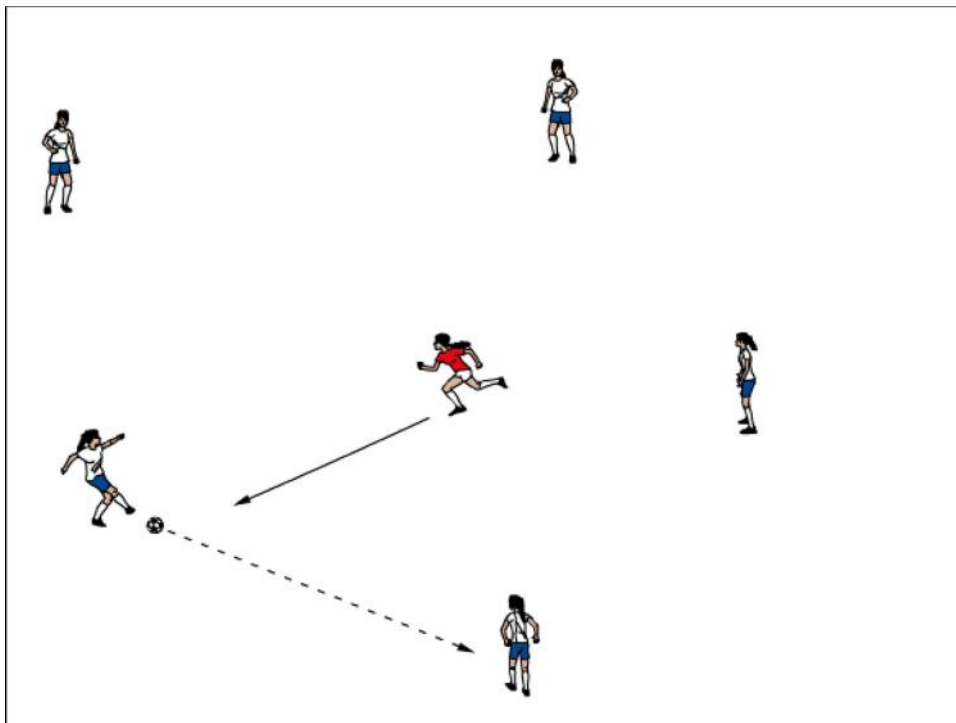
The players on offense play keepaway against the one player on defense (the player holding the pinnie).

When the ball goes out of play, have a different player serve as the defender. There are two ways that the coach can rotate who serves as defender:

1. Give each player a number (1 through 6) and have the players take turns, in order, being the defender.
2. Have the offensive player who touched the ball last before it went out of play become the defender. This is the way that the game is normally played with older players at the travel team level (who usually play the game 4 attackers vs. 2 defenders). This method has a potential problem in that the weakest player in the game could wind up being the defender much more than the other players. That player will likely struggle on defense as well.

After the players have played this activity awhile, the coach can make it more fun and competitive by doing one of two things:

- Time how long it takes for the defender to knock the ball out of the grid.
- Count how many passes the offensive team players is able to make before the defender is able to knock the ball out of the playing area.



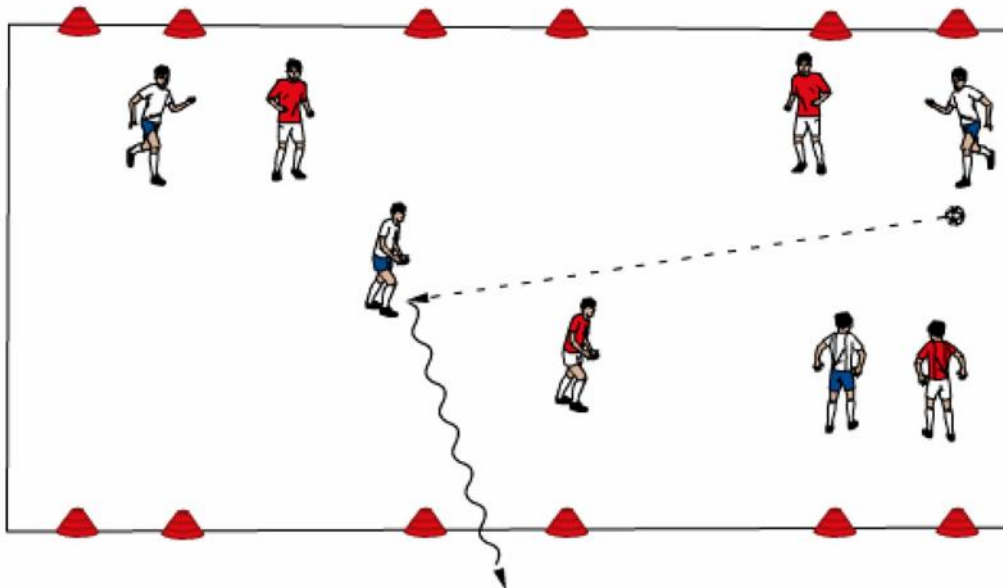
FINAL ACTIVITY

Using cones, create a very wide, but somewhat short field. The field should be much wider than it is long. Using cones, create three small goals, each about six feet wide, on each end line.

Divide the players into two teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. If there are less than 12 players, play 4 vs. 4 or 5 vs. 5 on a field about 35 yards wide and 20 yards long. If there are 12 or more players, create two fields and play two simultaneous games of 3 vs. 3 on fields about 30 yards wide and 15 yards long.

The object of the game is for each team to try and dribble the ball through any of the opponent's three goals. The player dribbling through the goal must maintain possession of the ball on the other side of the goal for the team to score.

Each team should try to pass the ball around, maintaining possession of the ball until a player is able to quickly dribble at a goal that is not heavily guarded. While this is a fun game, teams will be working on passing, receiving and dribbling skills the entire time. Players will soon learn to pass the ball from one side of the field to the other so that they can attack a goal that is not guarded by the opponents.



PRACTICE SESSION # 9

WING PLAY AND SHOOTING

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

COACHING POINTS FOR WING PLAY AND CROSSES

- On crosses from the right wing, the dribble and cross should both be made with the right foot. On crosses from the left wing, the dribble and cross should both be made with the left foot.
- Crosses should travel across the goalmouth, just out of reach of the goalkeeper.
- Wingers should play as close to the sideline as possible so that they will have plenty of room to dribble and work the ball down the wing.
- When crossing the ball, the non-kicking foot (the foot nearest the goal) should be turned in so that it is pointing towards the goal mouth when the cross is made.
- The winger should turn his hips hard when crossing the ball so that he can get around the ball and keep the cross from going over the goal line or to the goalkeeper.
- When possible, the player should make his last dribble down the wing angled towards the goal so that he can more easily turn his body around the ball.
- The crossed ball can be made on the ground or in the air. Crosses should have plenty of power.
- Crosses can be made from just along the goal line (base line crosses) or further up the field, well away from the goal line (early crosses), or anywhere in between.
- All activities should be practiced from both sides of the field. When crossing the ball, always use the foot that is closest to the sideline, swinging the hips around when striking the ball.
- Players running in to receive a crossed ball should not stand next to the goalie since the goalie would intercept any pass played there. Instead, players should try to receive a crossed ball about six or seven yards from the goal line. Ideally, players try to receive the ball while running in. Older players are taught to time their runs so they are moving when the cross comes in.

ACTIVITY 1

Place the players into three lines, about 20 yards from a goal. Place a goalie in the goal. Each player in the far right line has a soccer ball. The players in that line should be only a couple of yards from the sideline.

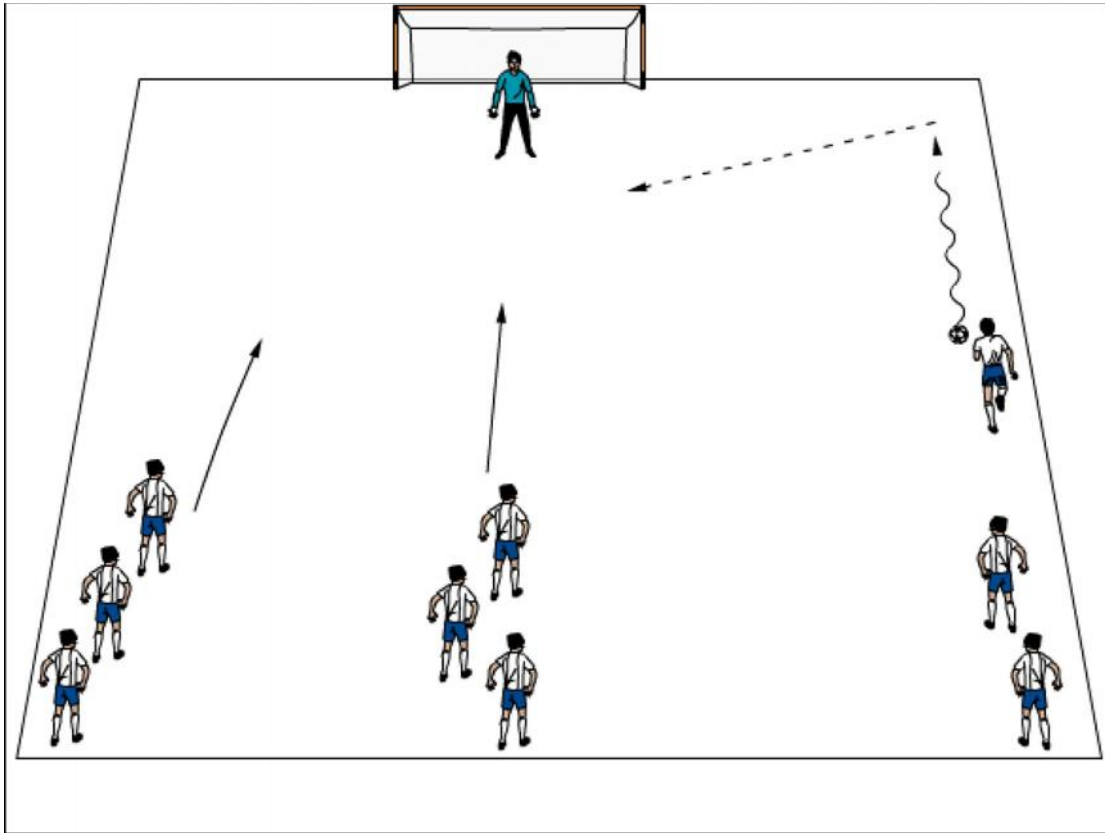
The players in the other two lines are quite far away from that line. One line is in the middle of the field, the other is somewhat close to the opposite sideline.

The player with the ball dribbles down the wing and crosses the ball into the goal mouth. The first player in each of the other two lines both run down the field and try to redirect the cross into the goal.

The player receiving the cross should either one touch the ball into the net or take two quick touches. If the receiving player takes two touches, the first touch must quickly settle the ball so that the player can quickly shoot the ball with the second touch.

After the play is over, the three players go back to the ends of the three lines, each rotating to a different line. The next three players immediately repeat the activity.

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



Crosses should be made along the ground since players this age are not to be heading the ball. The coach should ensure that this activity has some crosses made from the right side of the field (right footed crosses) and some from the left side of the field (left footed crosses).

The coach should observe the technique of the wingers. If the ball is served over the end line or to the goalie, the coach needs to remind the player to turn his non-kicking foot towards the goal and make his last touch be done so that the ball angles in slightly towards the goal.

Be sure the players trying to receive the ball do not get too close to the goalie before the ball is played. Crosses should not be made to the goalie since the goalie has the advantage of being able to pick the ball up with his hands. Instead, tell the players to try to cross the ball so it goes across the goal mouth, several yards away from the goal line and out of reach of the goalie.

This activity could be made competitive by having four lines (one server and three players running in to receive the cross). Add a defender who works with the goalie, trying to intercept the cross and clear it away from the goal area.

ACTIVITY 2

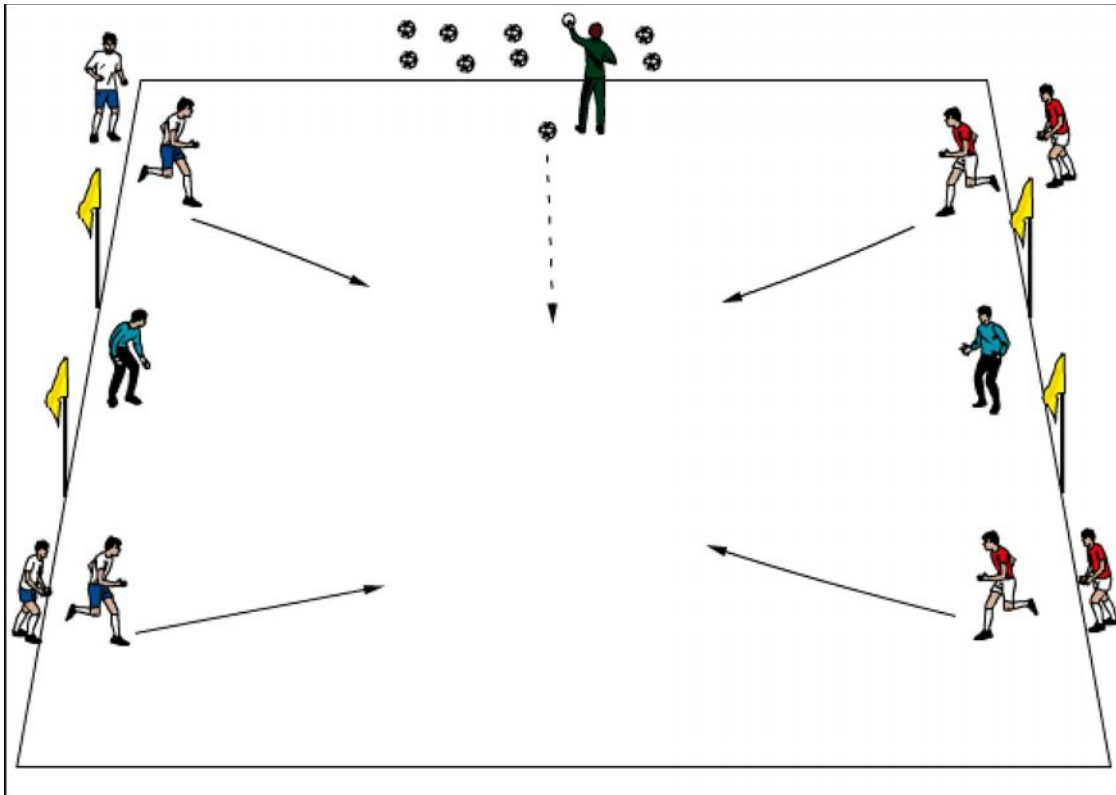
Set up a field 20 yards long with a 12 foot long goal on each end line. Have one or more players in dark shirts standing at each post at one of the goals. Have one or more players in white shirts standing at each post of the other goal. Each team has a goalie defending their goal.

The coach stands on the sideline with a large supply of balls. The coach throws a ball onto the field. The first player at each goalpost comes running onto the field to play 2 v 2.

When the ball goes out of play, or if a goal is scored, play ends and the players go to the end of one of the lines on their team's goal line. The coach serves a new ball for the next set of players to play 2 v 2. If the goalie makes a save, he distributes the ball to a player on his team and play continues.

To add excitement to the game, keep score between the two teams. Kids always play harder and with more enthusiasm whenever score is kept.

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



ACTIVITY 3

Play on a standard field (about 40 by 30 yards) with regular goals (12 feet wide) on each end line. Each team plays with one goalie and three field players.

Each team also has a winger on each sideline. These wingers must stay on their sideline and may only play in their offensive half of the field.

Play a game with the requirement that players in the middle of the field may only try to score when if get the ball from a cross made by one of the wingers.

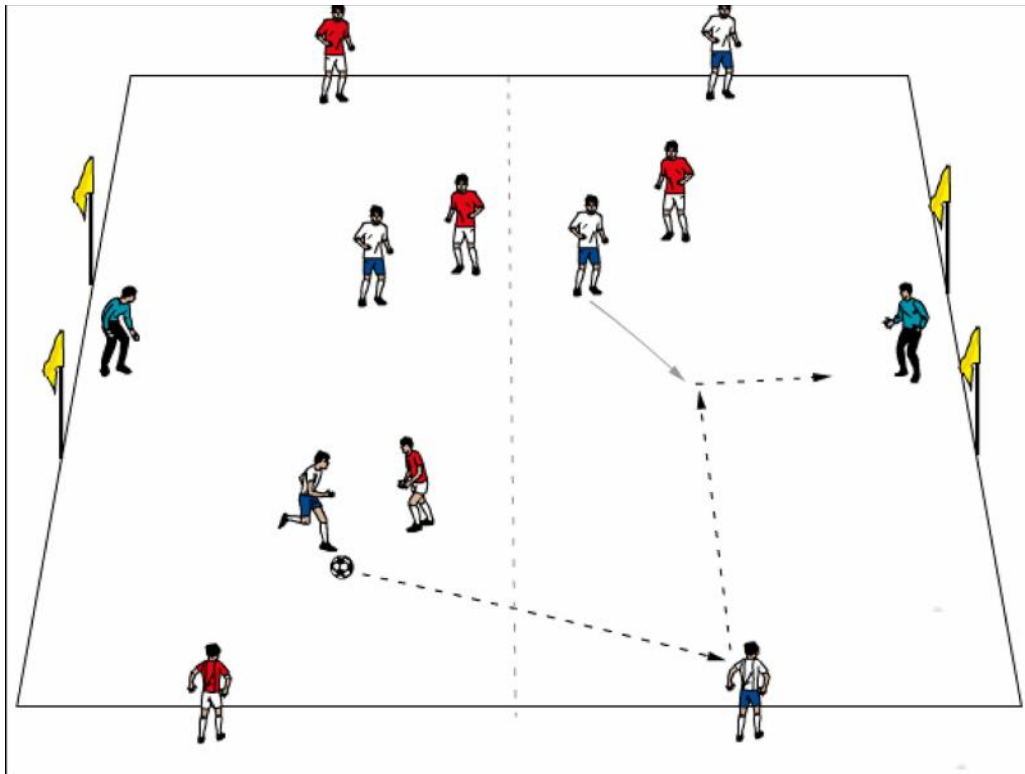
When the field players win the ball from the other team, they must try and play it to either one of their sideline players. The sideline player dribbles the ball down the field (staying within a yard of the sideline) and crosses the ball. The other players on his team should run down the field and try to redirect the cross into the goal. The opposing team's sideline player on that sideline may NOT go across the midfield line to steal the ball from the opposing team's sideline player.

The players in the middle of the field may not steal the ball from the other team's sideline players.

Rotate the players in and out of the winger position so that they all get a chance to be the winger and

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FINAL ACTIVITY

After playing the previous activity for awhile, remove the condition where players may only try to score if they receive a pass from a winger. Use the same setup as before, but now let the infield players play the ball to a sideline player only if they want to. They are no longer required to use the wingers.

PRACTICE SESSION # 10

END OF SEASON FUN COMPETITIONS

With the end of season approaching, the final few practices for each team should involve fun games that the players will enjoy while developing both their soccer skills and their understanding of the game. Below are several fun, competitive games that the players will greatly enjoy since they involve competing against opponents.

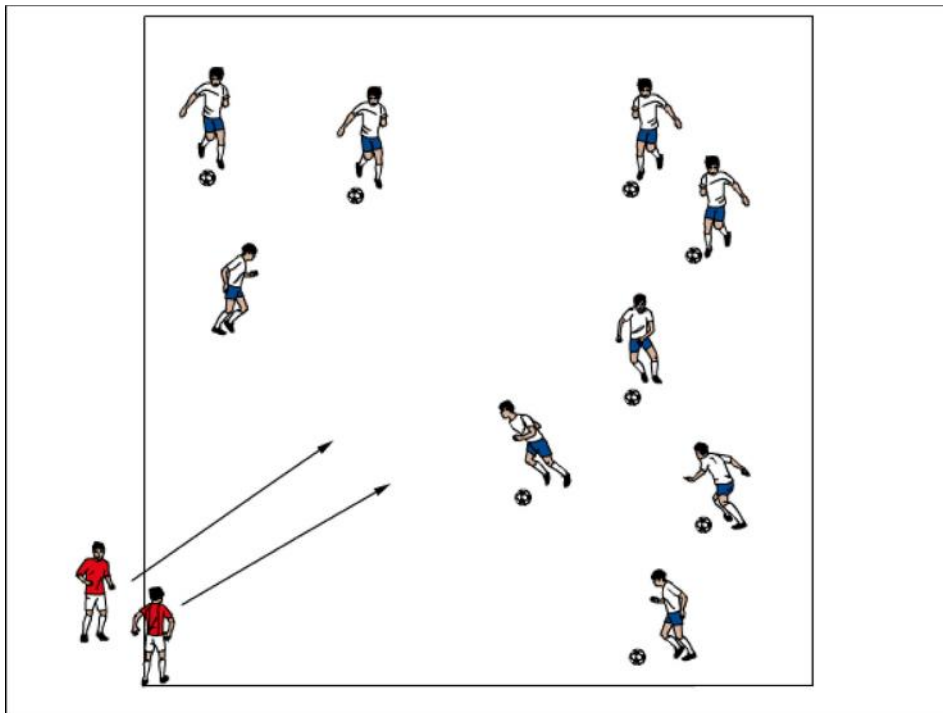
The coach should pick a few of the games below and play them at the last few practices of the season. Alternatively, if the coach found that the team enjoyed a few of the games played in previous practice sessions, he could play those games again.

The point here is that the season should end on a FUN note with all players looking forward to playing again in future soccer seasons. There is nothing more important than instilling a love of the game in each player, especially at the end of the season.

ACTIVITY 1

"Jaws Game." Set up a grid that is roughly 25 yards square. Place all but two of the players inside the grid, each with a ball. The two other players start outside the grid, each without a soccer ball. These two defenders each hold a pinnie in their hand so that the other players know they are the defenders.

On command, the two players holding the pinnies run into the playing area and try to kick the other players' soccer balls out of the grid. The offensive team tries to keep the soccer balls from being kicked out of the grid. When a player has his ball kicked out, he remains in the grid, lending support to the other players, helping to keep the remaining balls inside the grid.



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

Each round, have two different players serve as the defenders. To make the game fun and competitive, time each round and see which pair of players can knock all of the balls out of the playing area the fastest. Challenge each new pair of defenders to beat the best time recorded to that point.

Depending on the skill level and age of the players, the coach could adjust the size of the playing area or the number of defenders to ensure success in the game. Ideally a round should last about two minutes since the defenders will get tired if the round goes much longer.

Encourage the players on the offensive team without a ball to support their teammates by calling for a pass. This will help players not only develop their passing skills and receiving skills, but also help them to understand the concepts of teamwork and teammates. The coach will need to remind the players on the offensive team to spread out when they are attempting to pass the last few balls. Be sure that the players do not bunch up around the balls.

ACTIVITY 2

Assuming 12 players are at practice, set up a World Cup competition. Divide the players into four equal teams of three players. Let each team pick the name of a famous soccer nation such as Brazil or Spain. Set up two fields about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide, with a goal about 12 feet long on each end line. Play a 10 minute game, then switch opponents and play another set of games. Keep track of each team's record throughout the competition.

Alternatively, the games could be played without goals. To score, players must dribble the ball over the opponent's end line, under possession.

Like all games, keep the extra balls just behind the goals so that the players don't waste time chasing balls that go well beyond the goal line.

ACTIVITY 3

This activity will require at least 10 players. The coach uses cones to mark out a large 30 yard square. The players are divided into two teams with each team wearing a different shirt color. Have two players on one team stand on adjacent sidelines. Two players on the other team each stand on the other two (adjacent) sidelines.

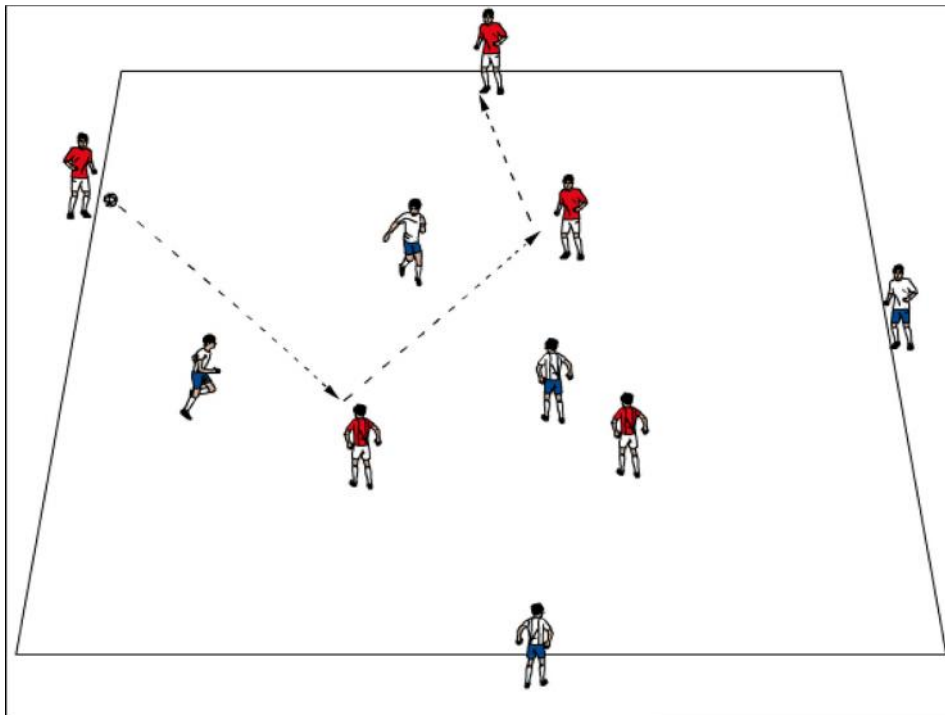
The remaining players all play inside the playing area. This could be 3 vs. 3, 4 vs. 4 or even 5 vs. 5. The teams play a game of keepaway. The players in the middle of the grid may go anywhere inside the grid, trying to keep possession of the ball. When the other team has the ball, they try to regain possession of the ball.

The four players on the sidelines of the playing area should move along their entire sideline, always moving into a position to receive a pass from their teammates in the middle of the field. When a sideline player has the ball, the other team may not take it away from him. That player however must play the ball within four seconds.

Have the players alternate between being sideline players and inside players since the inside players will get tired and need a break periodically.

This activity can be made competitive by seeing which team can be the first to complete 15 total passes. The passes do NOT have to be consecutive, that would be way too difficult for players this age. Keep track of how many passes each team makes and see which team is the first to reach 15. As an alternative game, see which team can be the first team to make four consecutive passes. If the ball goes out of play or the opposing team steals the ball, the count returns to zero.

Variation: This is a MUCH more advanced version of this activity. Have the two sideline players on each team play on opposite (not adjacent) sidelines. See which team can be the first team to play the ball to one sideline player, receive the ball back and play it to their opposite sideline player. If the teams are able to do that without a problem, change the game to see which team is able play the ball to one sideline player, then play it to their opposite sideline player, then play it to back to the first sideline player, without losing possession of the ball.



ACTIVITY 4

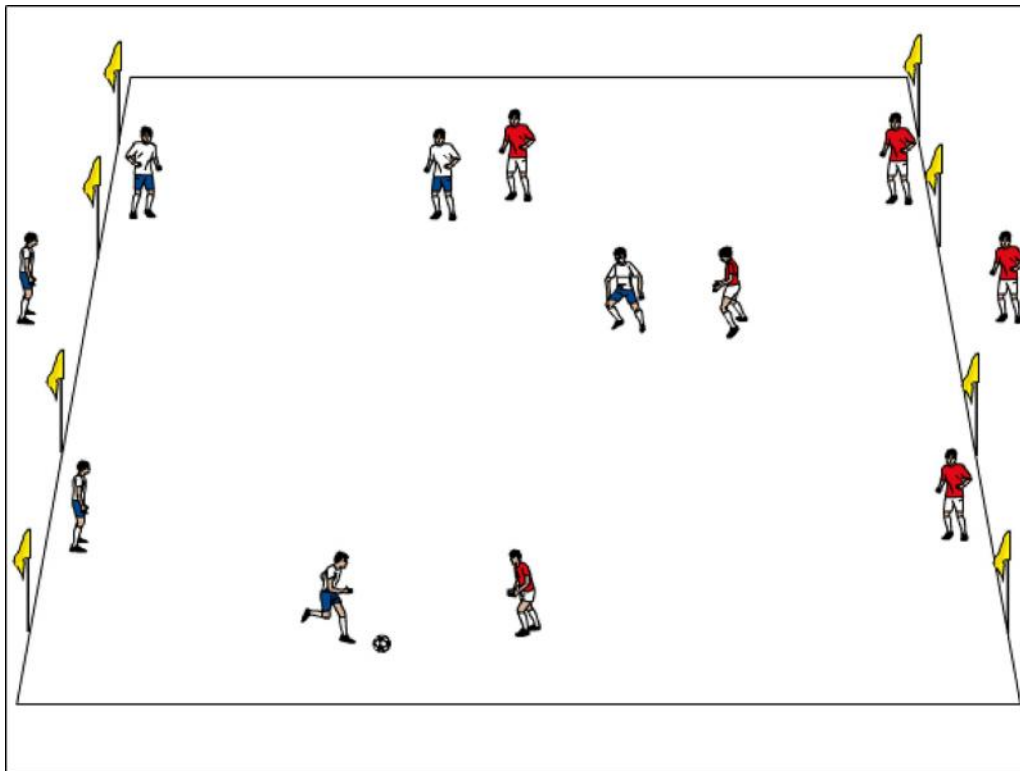
"The Four Goal Game." Set up a field 40 yards long and 30 yards wide. Using cones or bicycle flags, place **TWO** goals on each end line. Each goal should be about 12 feet wide. Each team must defend the two goals on their end line. Each team should have three field players, a goalie in each goal and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

There are four variations to "The Four Goal Game." Each variation however is setup so that players get a lot of chances to take shots.

- Each team uses one goalie to defend their two goals. For this game, make the goals slightly smaller, about 10 feet wide, instead of 12 feet wide. Each goalie must defend both of his team's goals so he will have to run back and forth between the two goals.
- Make the field 25 yards square and place one goal on each of the four sides of the field. Each team has two or three field players and two goalies. Each team defends two adjacent goals and attacks the other two goals.
- Place a goalie in each of the four goals. Each team may score on any of the four goals. When a ball goes in the net, the player attempting the shot gets credit for the goal, even if the shot was deflected by a member of the other team. If a goalie makes a save, he throws the ball up in the air, in the middle of the playing area and play continues.

Be sure to keep score, the players will play harder. Be sure to have a large supply of balls. Place all extra balls just behind the goals and use them when a ball goes far out of bounds.

One objective of each variation of "The Four Goal Game" is for players to take as many shots on goal as possible. Another objective of the games is for players to recognize when one goal area is crowded and then quickly change their attack over to the opponent's other goal.



ACTIVITY 5

This game is actually an individual competition. Set up two fields, each about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide with 12 foot long goals. Divide the players into four teams of three and play a 10 minute game. At the end of the 10 minute game, get the score on each field. Each individual player is given a score equivalent to his team's goal differential (goals scored minus goals allowed).

The coach then randomly divides the players into four different teams and two more 10 minute games are played. Again, each player is given a score equivalent to his team's goal differential. After each round, add each player's goal differential for the round to his overall score. The player with the highest cumulative score at the end of the competition is the winning player for the day.

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

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

This section lists several practice activities that coaches might want to consider using at a practice. If the coach sees something that he thinks might be productive for his team, the coach should try the activity instead of something else. These activities are listed by specific topics, including:

- Dribbling
- Passing And Receiving
- Shooting
- Fun Games

DRIBBLING ACTIVITIES

Dribbling Activity 1

“1v1 To Two Cones” - Place a pair of 6” high cones six yards apart and a second pair 10 yards away from the first pair. If the coach does not have large cones, the coach could use regular cones and place a soccer ball on the top of each cone. 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.

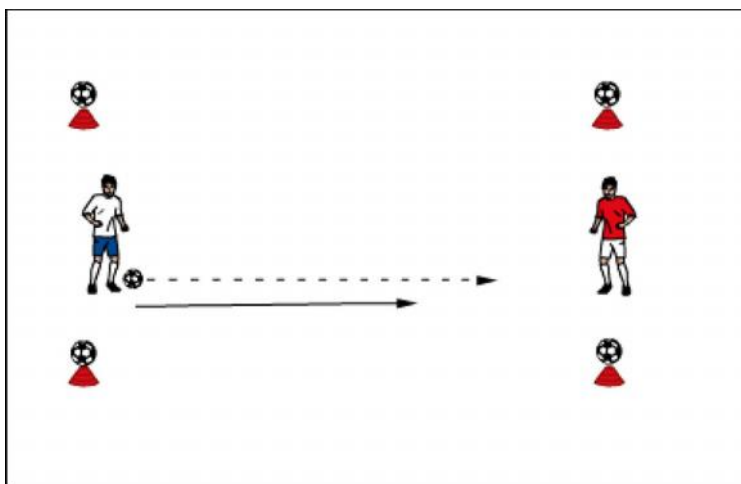
The object of the game is for each player to try to dribble the ball to within two yards of either of his opponent’s two cones and knock down the cone with the ball. If using small cones with a ball on top, the object is to use the game ball to knock the ball off of the cone it is resting on.

Long shots may **NOT** be taken!!! The attacking player must be within two yards of either one of the opponent’s cones when trying to knock over a cone.

The game starts with the player in possession passing to the other player. Once that player receives the pass, the passing player runs up to him and tries to steal the ball back. The game is a 1 v 1 duel with each player trying to knock down either of his opponent’s cones. The game continues until a cone is knocked over. There are no out of bounds for this game, the ball remains in play until a cone is knocked over.

If a player kicks over a cone, that player automatically loses the game.

Be sure to set up several fields. If there are 12 or more players, set up three fields. Rotate opponents so that each player gets to play all of the other players on the team. Ask each player to each track of his won win - loss record.

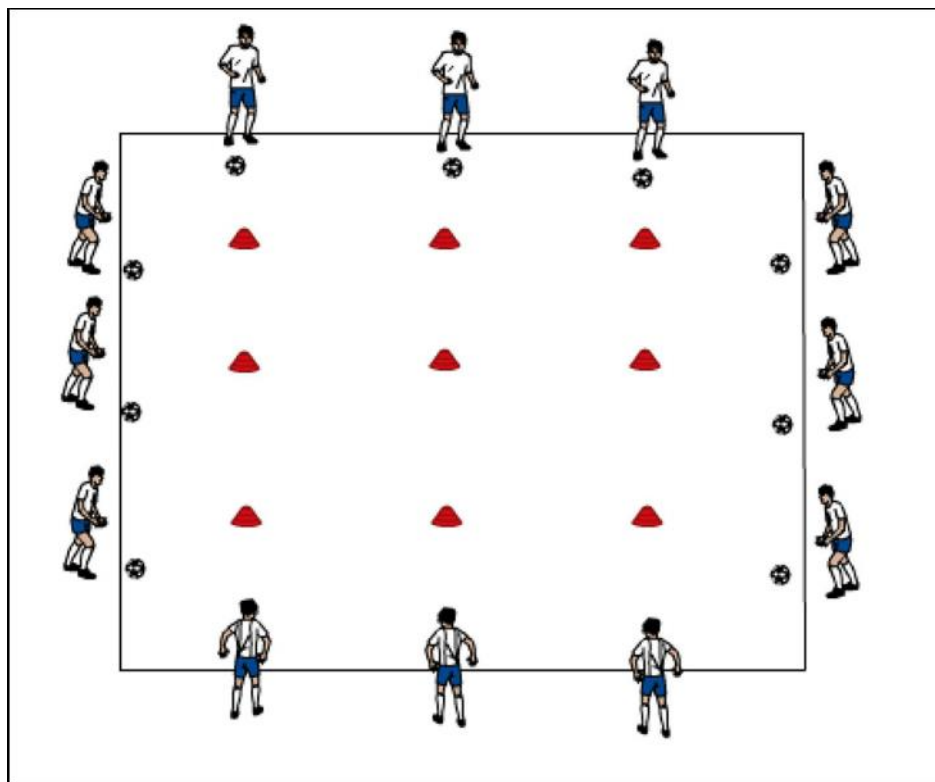


Dribbling Activity 2

Set up a grid 20 yards square. Place three players on each of the four sides of the grid. Each player has a ball. On command, every player dribbles his ball across the grid to the other side of the grid, trying not to run into any of the other players.

Variation: Set up nine cones, placed in three rows of three. Each cone is about four yards from the adjacent cones. See the diagram below. Now, as the players dribble from one side of the grid to the other, they must each dribble a complete circle around each of the three cones placed in his path to the other side of the grid.

Players will need to dribble with their heads up so that they do not run into the other players who are dribbling at the same time. Have the players repeat this several times. After awhile, allow the players to try and kick other players' soccer balls away, as long as they are still in possession of their own ball.



Dribbling Activity 3

Using cones, make a grid that is about 20 yards square. Half of the players are inside the grid, each player working with a partner. Each pair has a soccer ball. The other half of the players do not have soccer balls. They are spread out inside the grid randomly, each with their legs spread far apart. Their legs make the "goals" that the players will try to score on. These players are stationary throughout the game.

Each player plays 1 v 1 against his partner, meaning there will be three simultaneous games of 1 v 1 played inside of the grid. Each player tries to get possession of the ball and dribble the ball through the legs of any of the stationary players. Each time a player does this, he gets a point.

Play continues for one minute, the round does not stop when a goal is scored. When the coach stops play, the player scoring the most goals is the winner. Have the players switch roles (the stationary players each pair up with an opponent) while the players who just played spread out throughout the grid and become the goals.

Dribbling Activity 4

Using cones, create a circle about 12 yards in diameter. Divide the players into four groups. Position each group on the edge of the circle with each group 90 degrees from the adjacent groups. Each player will need to have a ball.

Position four cones together in the middle of the circle, each separated by about one yard. On command, the first player from each of the four groups dribbles toward the cones in the middle. When they reach the cones, they each do a dribbling move (one specified by the coach), faking to the left and then dribbling to the right. They then dribble to the end of the line that is to the right of them. Be sure each group of four starts at the same time, on the coach's command.

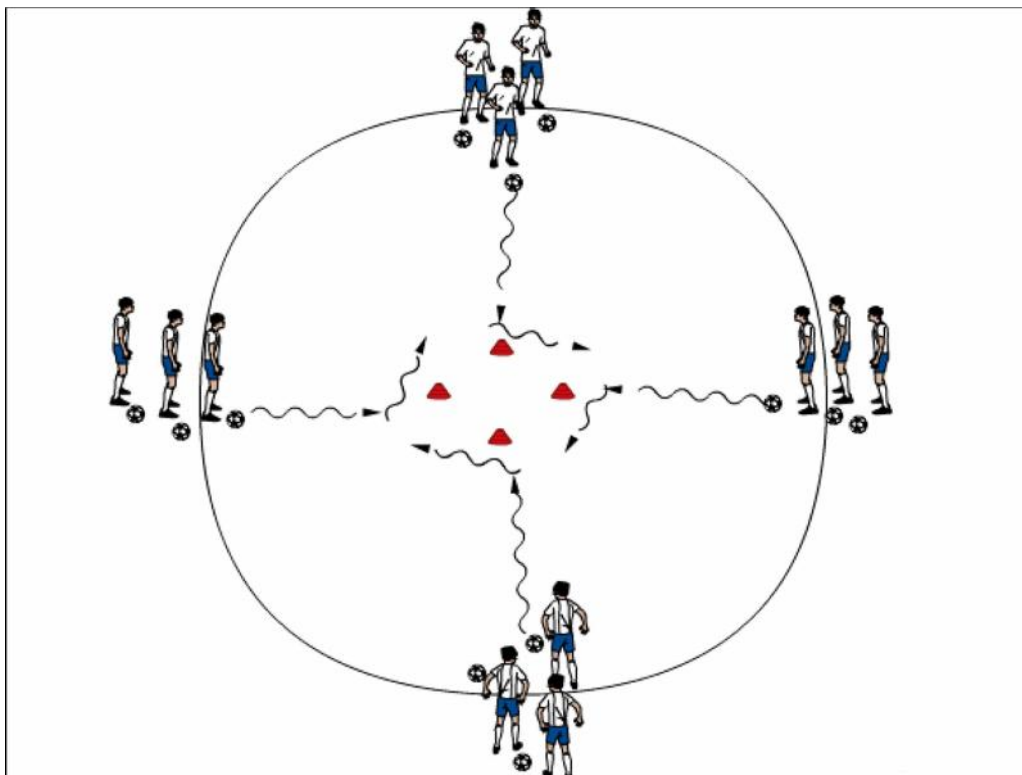
Repeat this sequence until all players have gone once. The players should now all be at the line 90 degrees to the right of the line where they started.

Have the players repeat the same dribbling move four times so that all players return back to the cone where they started. The coach then tells them to try a different dribbling move. Again, the first player in each line dribbles at the middle cones, fakes one way, then dribbles the other way and goes to the end of the line which is 90 degrees from where they started.

Repeat this activity for several different dribbling moves. Dribbling moves the coach can ask the players to perform include:

- Inside of the foot cut
- Outside of the foot cut
- In And Out (Matthews) Move
- Pull Back Move
- Gorilla Move

The coach should have the players try a dribbling move with one foot, rotating lines in one direction and then later have the players try the same dribbling move with the other foot, rotating lines in the opposite direction.



Dribbling Activity 5

“Super Bowl vs. Toilet Bowl” - This is an excellent dribbling activity which can be done as a simple way to work on dribbling moves or be done as a fun competition between players.

For every two players, there is a set of three cones, spaced about five yards apart from each other. The two players start at the middle cone but are facing opposite directions. On command, the players dribble out to the cone they are facing. When they get to the cone, they perform a dribbling move specified by the coach. The players then return back to their original cone and step on the ball.

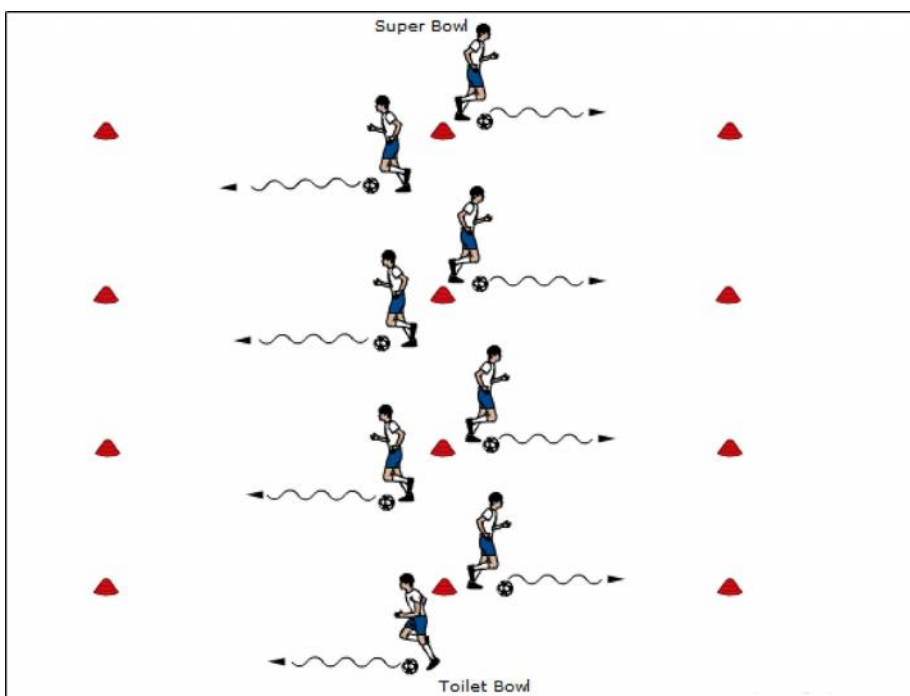
The coach should repeat this activity several times, specifying a different move each time. The coach should review the various dribbling moves taught in practice session # 1. The coach can also specify which foot the move is to be done with.

Variation: Have each player dribble to the cone at one end of the line, then turn and dribble past the middle cone, all the way out to the far cone. The player then dribbles back to the middle cone and steps on the ball.

After awhile, make this into a competition by having the players race against their partner. Whichever player is the first to return to the starting cone and step on his ball is the winner of that round. The coach should designate the set of cones at one end of the activity as “The Super Bowl” and the set of cones at the opposite end of the activity as “The Toilet Bowl.” At the end of each round, all players who won that round move one set of cones towards “The Super Bowl” while the players who lost that round rotate one set of cones towards “The Toilet Bowl.” The winning player at the cones closest to “The Super Bowl” stays at the same set of cones, as does the losing player at the cones closest to “The Toilet Bowl.”

When doing this activity as a competition, it is important that the players do the designated moves properly each time and also go the specified distance. Players who fail to do the move properly or who do not dribble the required distance lose the round and rotate one set of cones closer to “The Toilet Bowl.” In the event of a tie, have the players play “rock-paper-scissors” to determine who moves towards the Super Bowl and who moves towards the Toilet Bowl.

Repeat this activity several times, with the coach specifying either a different move or a different length race each round. Finally, at the end of the activity, have the two players who are at “The Super Bowl” play one last time with the winner of that race being declared Super Bowl champion.



Dribbling Activity 6

“Dribble Through The Mine Field” - Have the players create a circle about 24 yards in diameter. Each player should be with a partner, one with a ball and one without a ball. Scatter 16 or more cones around inside the circle, but be sure each cone is at least a yard from all other cones.

Play starts with the players with a ball each dribbling into the middle of the circle. Each player dribbles in and out of the cones in the middle of the circle, trying not to hit a cone. After 30 seconds, the coach yells “switch” at which time the players dribble out of the mine field and pass to their partner at the edge of the circle. Once these players receive the ball from their teammate, they go into the mine field for 30 seconds. Repeat this activity several times.

Dribbling Activity 7

Set up two playing fields, each about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide. Setup two games of 3 v 3. Each team tries to score by having a player dribble the ball, under possession, over the opposing team’s end line and then stepping on the ball.

Set the condition that players may not pass the ball. When a player gets the ball, he must attempt to dribble the ball the length of the field and score. Since there will be no passing in the game, the player’s teammates should drop back behind the player with the ball and be ready to defend any opponent that steals the ball.

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

Variation: Play to two small goals on each end line. Players may shoot on either goal to score but must be within five yards of the goal line when shooting.

The above two versions of this game are VERY difficult. If the game proves too difficult, the coach can modify the game a bit to make it a little bit less difficult. The two slightly less difficult versions of the game are:

- Allow the players to pass the ball backwards or square (sideways), but not forward.
- Allow the players to pass the ball in their defensive half of the field, but not their offensive half of the field. Passes may not go across the midfield line. Once a player has the ball in his offensive half of the field, he may not pass and may not take the ball back into his defensive half of the field. Coaches need to encourage (and demand) that players attempt to beat opponents with creative dribbling skills.

PASSING AND RECEIVING ACTIVITIES

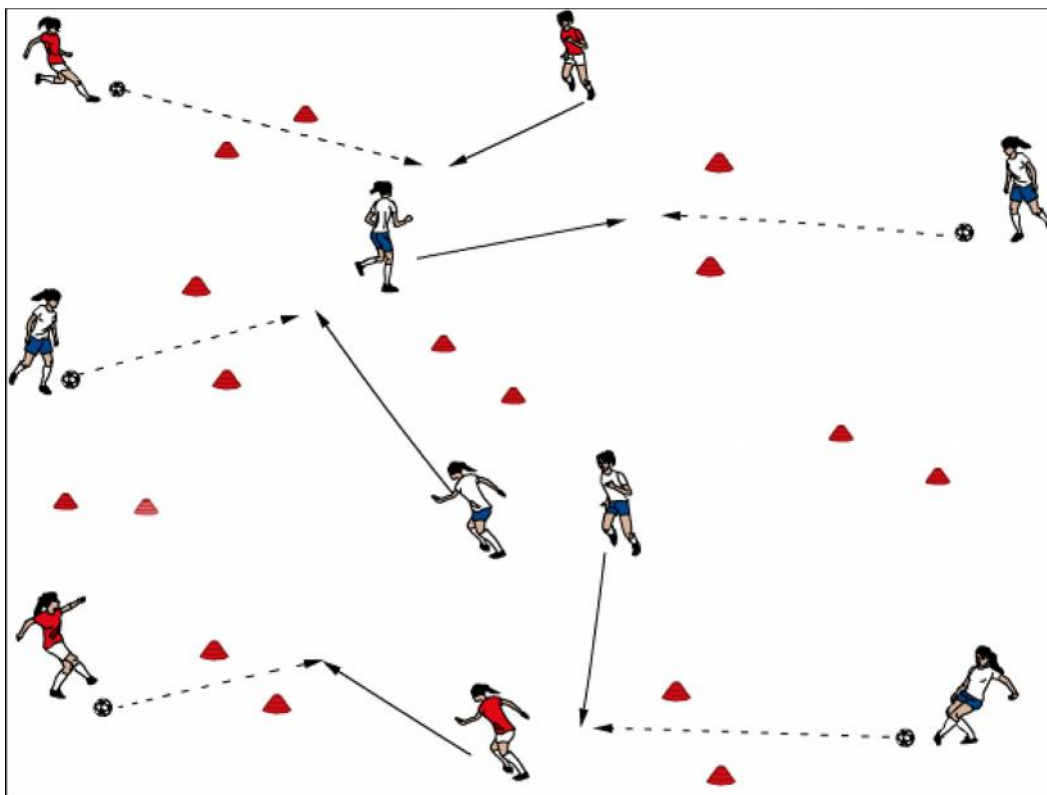
Passing And Receiving Activity 1

Using cones, place eight gates randomly along the ground. Each gate should be about three yards wide. Divide the players into pairs with each pair having a soccer ball. Each pair of players may start anywhere in the playing area. There are no field boundary areas for this activity.

When the coach starts the activity, each pair of players go to any one of the gates. One player dribbles the ball to one side of a gate while his partner runs to the other side of that gate. The player with the ball then passes the ball through the gate, to his partner. That player receives the ball then quickly dribbles to a different gate. His partner runs to the opposite side of the same gate. Again, the player with the ball passes it through the gate, to his partner. Continue this for a minute with each pair counting the number of passes they made. At the end of the minute, the coach should quickly ask each pair how many passes they were able to make.

After each round, have the players switch partners and play another round. After a few rounds, the coach should require the players to try this using only their weak foot (usually the left foot) to pass the ball and to receive the ball.

Variation: Require each pair of players to make three passes through a gate before they move to a different gate. It is important to always require them to make an odd number of passes so that the players alternate dribbling the ball to the next gate.



Passing And Receiving Activity 2

Using cones, create a playing area shaped in a triangle with each side about 10 yards long. Divide the players into groups of four. Two of the players start just outside of one corner of the triangle with one of those players having a ball. The remaining two players are positioned just outside of the other two corners of the triangle.

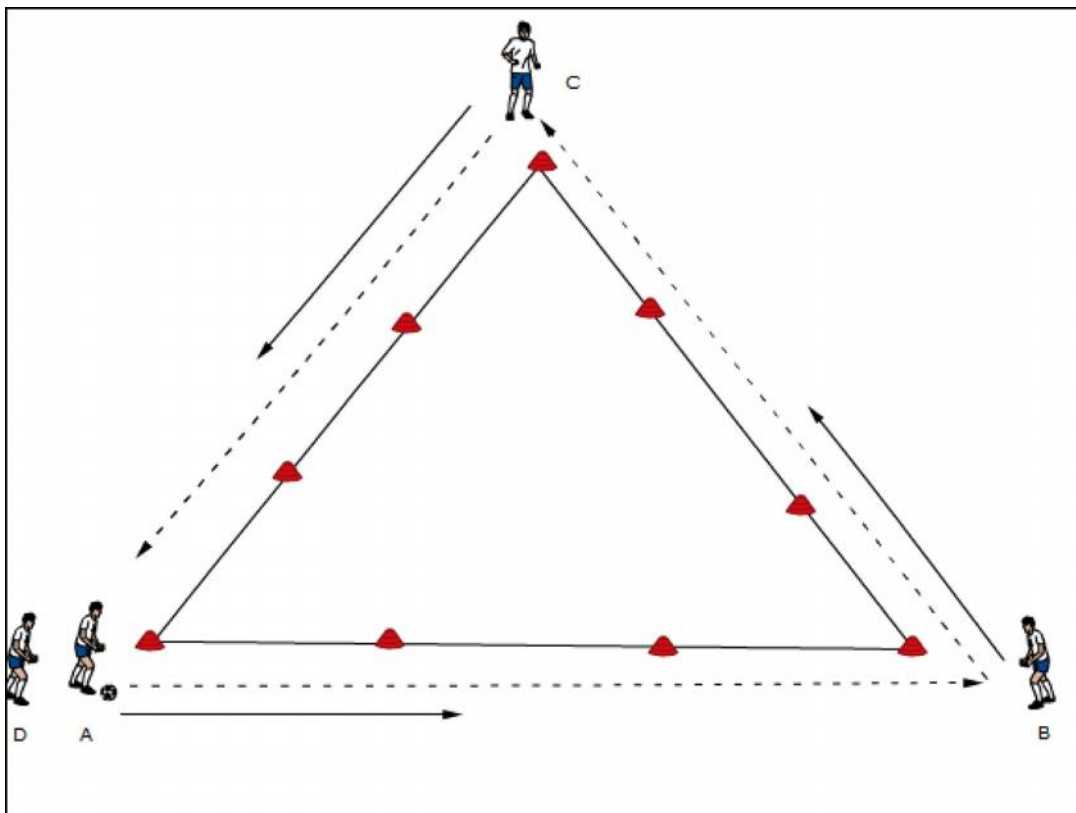
The activity starts with the player with the ball passing to the player standing just outside of one of the other corners of the triangle. After the player passes the ball, he runs to the corner of the triangle he just passed to. The receiving player receives the ball, passes to the player at the third corner of the triangle, then runs to that corner of the triangle.

In the diagram below, player A passes to B and runs to where B is standing. Player B receives the ball, passes to player C and runs to where player C is standing. Player C receives the ball, passes to player D and runs to where player D is standing. This sequence continues until the coach stops the activity.

Ask the player to receive the ball with a “**positive first touch.**” This means that when the ball is received, it travels a yard or two in the direction that the player wants to pass to. In the diagram, when player A passes to player B, player B’s first touch should make the ball to travel about a yard or two in the direction of player C.

Note: When the players are passing the ball in a counter-clockwise direction, they should use their right foot. When playing in a clockwise direction, they should use their left foot. The players should always use the foot that is furthest from the center of the triangle.

Variation: Use five players, have them set up in a square instead of a triangle.



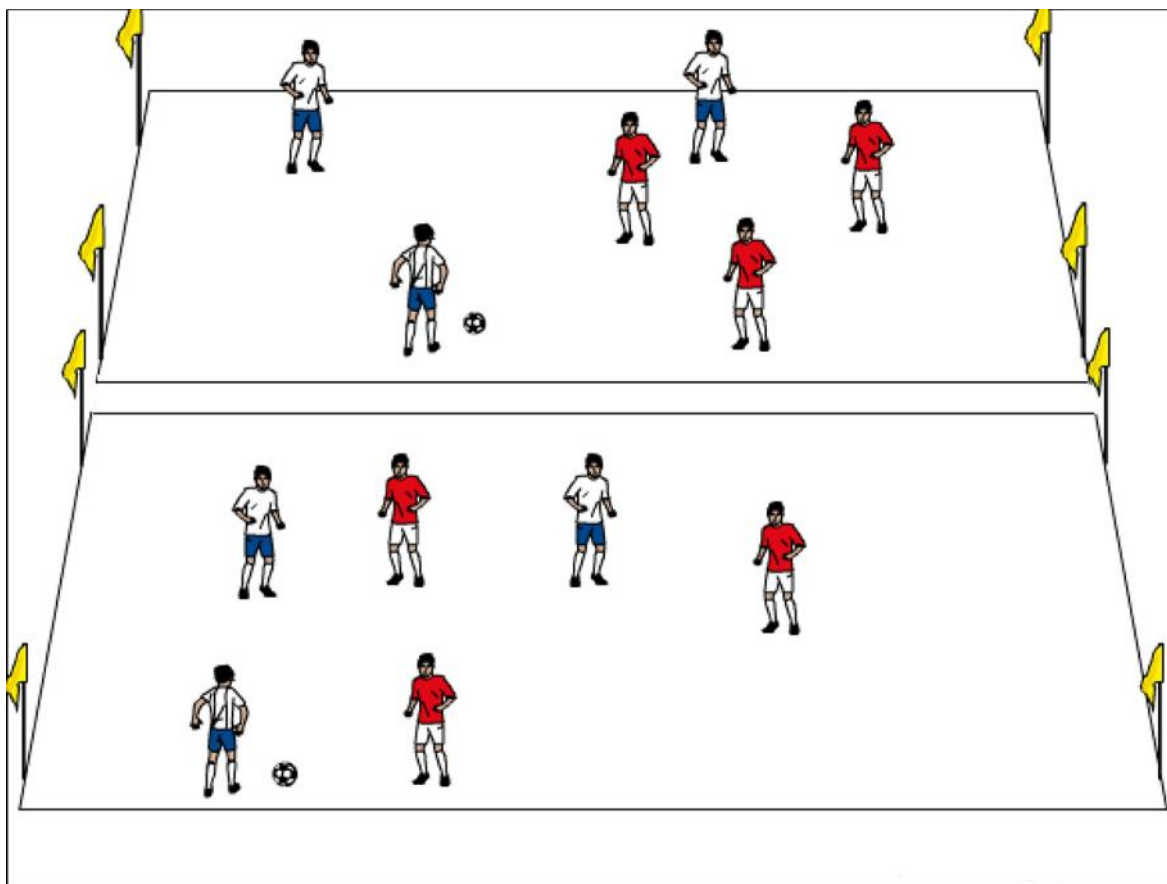
Passing And Receiving Activity 3

Set up two fields, each about 30 yards long and 20 yards wide. Place a very wide on each end line, perhaps 24 feet wide (the size of an adult goal). Each field plays 3 v 3, there are no goalies.

Set the requirement that teams may not attempt a shot on goal until all three players on the team have possessed the ball without an opponent possessing the ball. Players may not take a shot until all three players on the team have possessed the ball. This rule will force the players to focus on looking up to find teammates to pass with. Since most of the game will be spent trying to pass the ball, there will not be a lot of shooting so there is no need to use goalies.

A team's pass count gets reset to zero whenever they lose possession the ball goes out of bounds. The pass count does NOT reset to zero simply because the other team deflected the ball.

Variation: Set up the game so that each team only needs to make one pass before scoring. Once a team has scored, they must attempt to make two consecutive passes before scoring. When they have done that, require them to make three consecutive passes before scoring. Continue requiring them to make one additional pass each time they score. At first it will be easy to score since the goals are so big. With each goal and the pass count being raised, goals will become more and more difficult for each team to score.



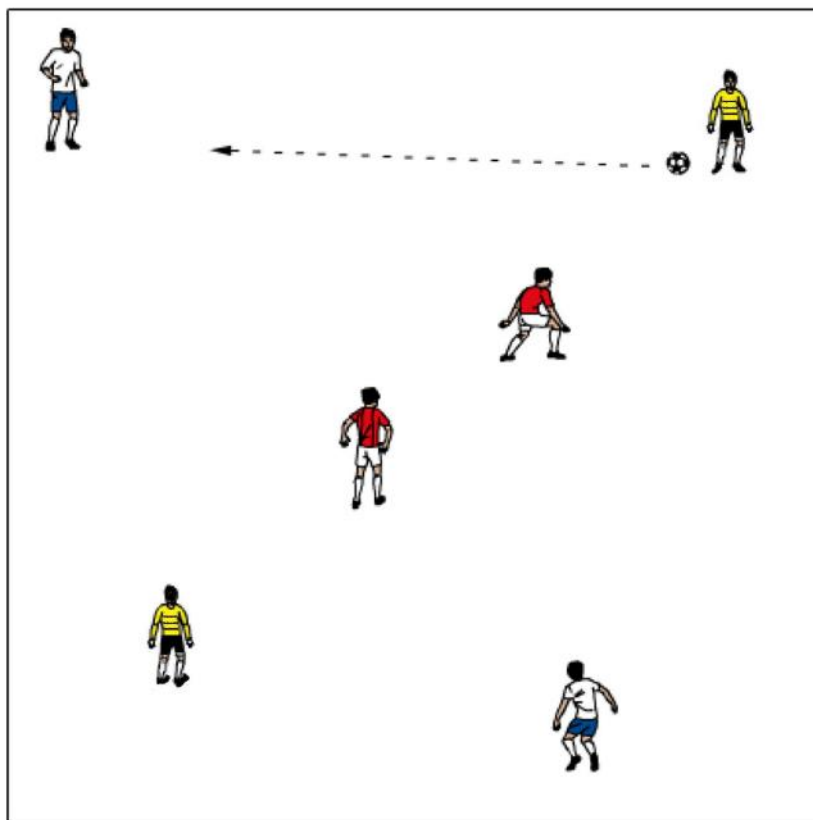
Passing And Receiving Activity 4

Place six players in a 30 yard square grid. Two players wear red shirts, two wear white shirts and the other two wear yellow shirts. Two of the teams combine to play keepaway against the other team. In the diagram below, yellow and white are playing 4 v 2 keepaway against the red teams. The teams play keepaway for about two minutes. The coach then changes which team is playing by themselves and which teams combine into a team of four. See which combined team is able to complete the most amount of passes in two minutes.

Variation: See how many passes two teams can make before either the ball goes out of bounds or the defending team gains possession of the ball. When the round is over, the coach has a different team serve as the defending team. Keep track of which teams are able to complete the most passes in a single round, then challenge the teams to top that mark in subsequent rounds.

Variation: If this setup is too difficult for the players, allow only one defender to play in the game. His partner stays off the field, making the activity a 4 v 1 game instead of 4 v 2. The coach might want to initially play the game 4 v 1 to give the players a better chance at making passes. The coach could have each team play two rounds of 4 v 1. The first round against one of the defenders, the second round against the other defender. Add up the number of passes in those two rounds to determine the total score for that round.

Be sure to make the playing area plenty big so that the players will have a greater chance of making consecutive passes. Remember that a larger playing area will be to the advantage of the team of four.

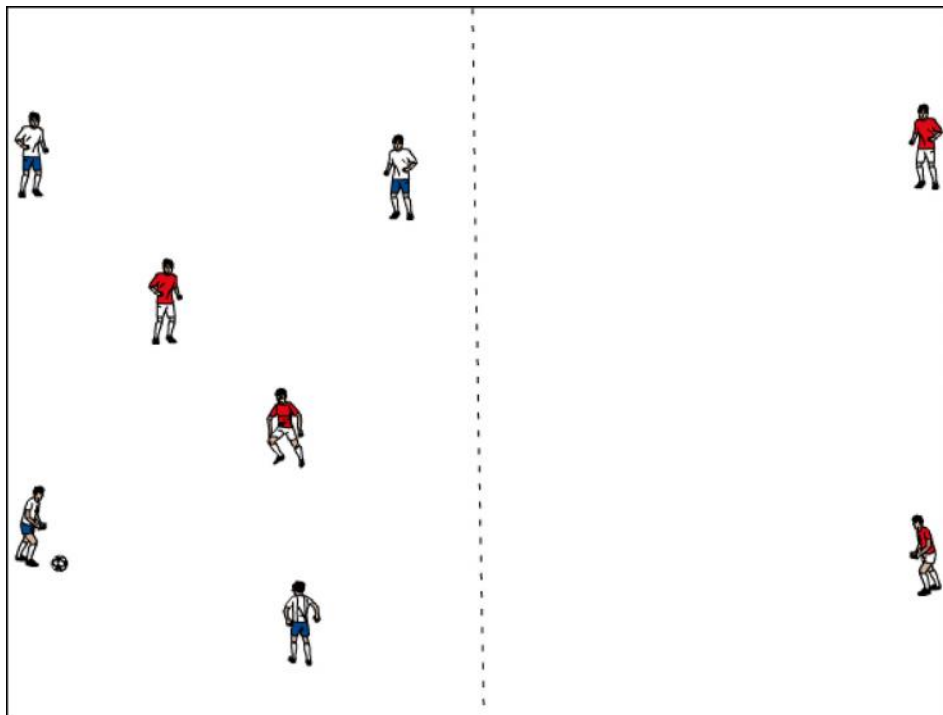


Passing And Receiving Activity 5

This is an advanced activity. Set up a field 40 yards long and 30 yards wide with a midfield line. Play 4 v 4 keepaway with the one team trying to keep possession of the ball in one half of the field and the other team trying to keep possession in the other half of the field.

Each team has two players who may go anywhere on the field and two players who must stay in their half of the field. This will give each team a 4 vs. 2 advantage in their half of the field. The two players who may go anywhere in the field will have a lot of running to do since they must quickly switch from playing offense on one side of the field and defense on the other side of the field. Since this game is quite demanding for the players who have to play in both halves of the field, the coach should rotate the players between being "offense only" and being the "midfielders" who must run up and down the field.

Variation: This game can also be played 3 v 3 with either one or two players allowed in the other team's attacking half of the field (making the game 3 v 1 or 3 v 2). Adjust the size of the playing area to meet the players' abilities. Younger and less skilled players will need to play in a larger area. Older players and more experienced players should be put in a smaller playing area where the defenders can apply more pressure. This will force the players to think the game faster.



SHOOTING ACTIVITIES

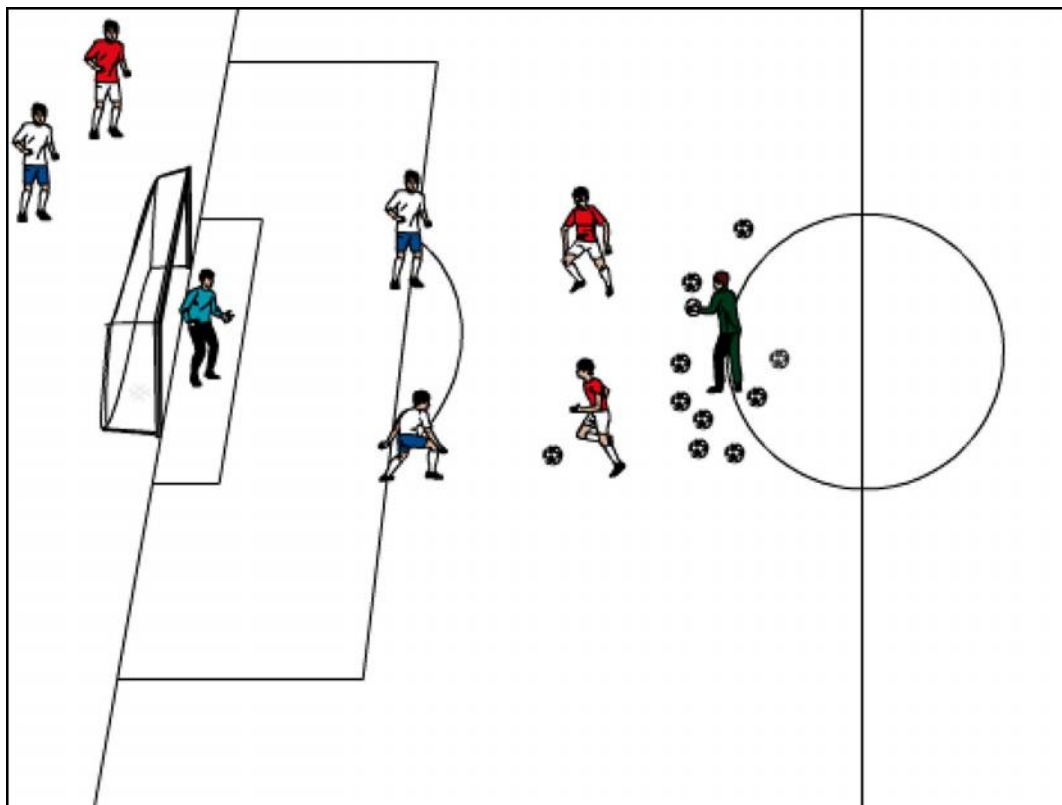
Shooting Activity 1

Setup two fields, each with a goal on one end line. Have at least six players at each field. On each field, have two players in dark shirts play against two players in white shirts. A fifth player serves as goalie while the remaining players stand behind the goal, retrieving shots. Each team tries to score on the same goal while preventing the other team from scoring on the same goal. With both teams trying to score on the same goal, there should be a lot of shots.

The coach stands about 25 yards from the ball. He starts play by rolling a ball into play. The players battle for the ball and try to score.

When a ball goes out of play, the coach puts another ball into play right away. If the keeper makes a save, he returns it to the coach who quickly puts a new ball into play. The game is continuous for one minute.

Rotate the players so they are playing with and against the other players. Again, be sure that there are two games going on at the same time so that only a few players are resting. Be sure to have a large supply of balls for this activity.



Shooting Activity 2

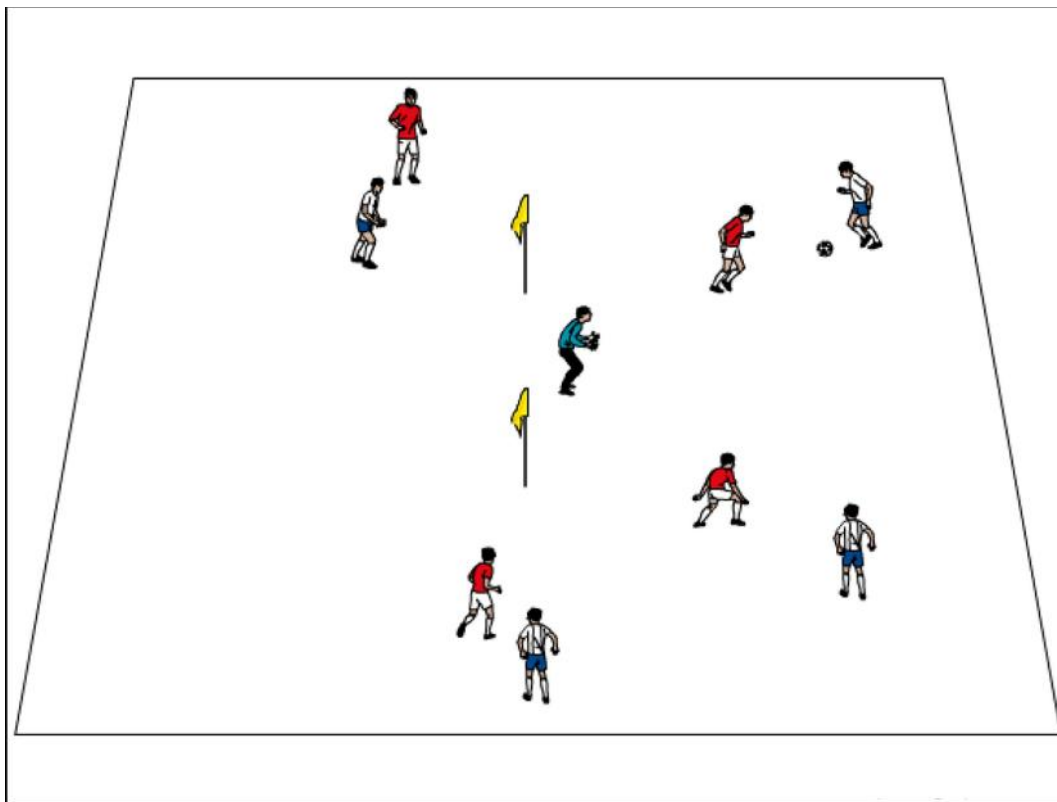
Create a field about 20-30 yards long. Place a standard size goal on each end line. Have a goalie guard each of the goals. Play a regular game of 4 vs. 4 with one major rule change, that being that both teams may score on either goal. Playing with this rule, all players will have plenty of chance to take shots on the goals.

If one of the goalies makes a save, he throws the ball into the middle of the field. Both teams compete for the ball and play continues.

Shooting Activity 3

Using bicycle flags or corner flags, set up a 12 foot long goal in the middle of the field with no net. The goal is guarded by a goalie. Create two teams of four or five players each. The ball is in play on both sides of the goal. Both teams may score by shooting at the goal from either direction.

Field players may NOT run through the goal (only the goalie may do this). When a shot goes wide of the goal, both teams still try to get the ball and take another shot.

**Shooting Activity 4**

Same setup as the previous activity, except that one team may only score from one direction of the goal and the other team may only score from the opposite direction. Now each team will try to dribble or pass the ball from their defensive half of the playing area into their offensive half. Again, do not let the field players run through the middle of the goal.

Shooting Activity 5

Set up three corner flags (or bicycle flags) in a triangle, each 12 feet apart from the other two flags. This will create three different goals. Play a game of 3 v 3 or 4 v 4. Both teams may score on any one of the three goals.

This game can use one goalie for each goal, or one goalie who has to constantly move and guard all three of the goals. Do not allow the field players to run through the goals. If a goalie makes a save, he should just throw the ball out, away from the goal, but not to any specific player since goalies are not playing for either of the teams.

FUN COMPETITIVE GAMES

Fun Competitive Game 1

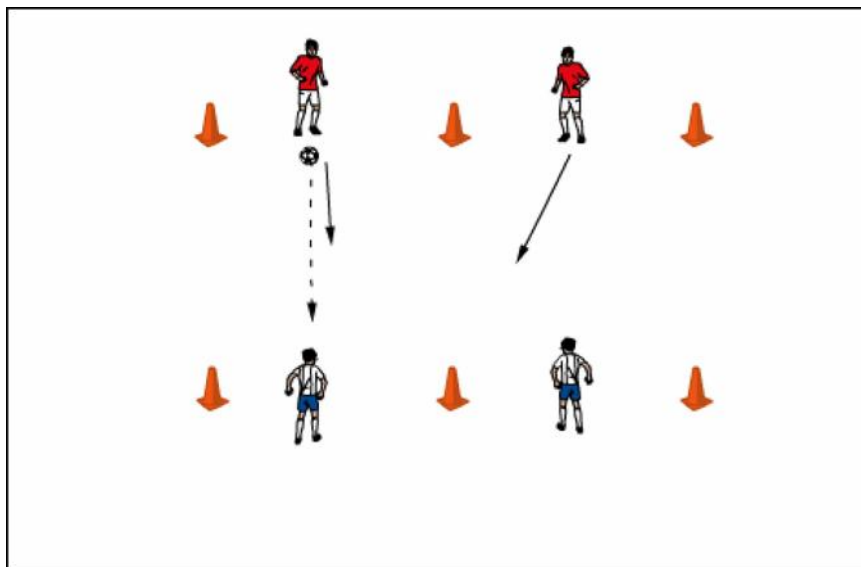
Place three road cones in a line, each five yards apart. Place another set of three cones in a line about 10 yards from the first set. Two players stand inside one of the sets of cones and play against two other players who stand inside of the opposite set of cones.

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

The game starts with one team passing the ball to the other team and immediately running at them to steal the ball back. The game continues until one of the teams strikes any one of the opponent's three cones. Be sure to have two games going on at once to keep all players active.

There are no out of bounds for this game, the ball is always in play until a goal is scored. Optimally, players should be playing one game, resting one game and then playing again. Rotate the teams around so that each player gets to play with and against all the other players on the team at least once. Have each player keep track of his wins and losses during the competition.

Note: If the coach does not have access to cones that are 6" high, he may instead use small cones, each with a soccer ball placed on top of the cone.



Fun Competitive Game 2

“Score And Change Teams” Each player will need both a white shirt and a dark shirt. For this game, there needs to be an odd number of players. Start the game with one player having one more player than the other team. Set up a an appropriate sized field with a goal on each end line. This game can be played with or without goalies.

Play a normal game until one team scores a goal. When a player scores, that player immediately changes shirt colors and plays for the other team. Play quickly resumes. Each time a goal is scored, the player scoring the goal switches teams. If there are nine players in the game, the game will usually alternate being played 5 vs. 4 and 4 vs. 5. On occasion however, the team with fewer players will score and the game will become 6 vs. 3. Be sure that all players are able to quickly switch from white shirt to dark shirt and back.

Fun Competitive Game 3

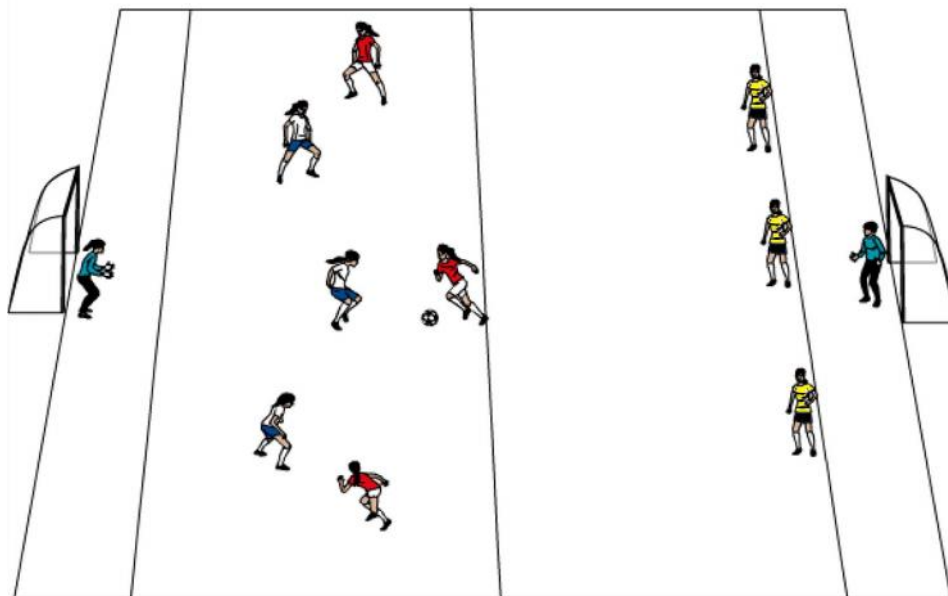
"4 v 4 v 4." Set up a regular field 40 yards long and 30 yards wide with a midfield line and a 12 foot long goal on each end line. Divide the players into three teams of four.

The red team starts with the ball at the midfield line, attacking the goal defended by the white team. The yellow team is positioned at the edge of the other goalie box. If the white team wins the ball and is able to carry it over the midfield line, they attack the goal being defended by the red team. The players on the red team must wait inside the opposite goalie box until the ball is carried over the midfield line. The red team may then move out the goalie box and try to win the ball.

The players on red team may not cross over the midfield line to win the ball back. Once team the white team crosses the midfield line, the players on the red team move to the edge of the goalie box at the goal they were attacking.

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

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



Fun Competitive Game 4

"Protect The Lead." Play a normal scrimmage with one rule change. When a team scores, they are not allowed to score again for the next five minutes. Their job is to try and protect the lead by possessing the ball and preventing the other team from scoring. The team that is down by a goal tries to tie up the score before the end of the five minutes.

Since the team that just scored may not score another goal during this time, the other team should have their goalie go up the field and join the other field players in trying to score. If the team does get a tying goal, the teams resume normal play until one of the teams scores another goal. At that point, the team that scored tries to protect the lead. This game teaches the players how a team's style of play can change, based on the score and the time remaining in the game.

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

Fun Competitive Game 5

“One And Done.” Divide the players into three equal teams with each wearing a different shirt color. Have two of the teams play a regular game against each other. The third team is off the field, retrieving stray soccer balls. When a team allows a goal, they must immediately run off the field. They are replaced by the team that was off the field. Continue replacing the team that allows a goal with the team that is currently off the field.

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

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

GAME TACTICS FOR 5 V 5 SOCCER

This section discusses game tactics for age groups playing 5 vs. 5 soccer (four field players and a goalie). For these young age groups, coaches need to focus on skill development and not worry too much about game tactics. Players do need to have an understanding of basic game tactics in order to execute the skills that they are being taught. These tactics should be touched upon, but not given too much time during the season.

SYSTEMS OF PLAY

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

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

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

TACTICS IN THE OFFENSIVE THIRD OF THE FIELD

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

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

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

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

Field players should consider playing the ball back to the goalie whenever they are facing away from their opponent's goal, under pressure, and cannot go forward. If the goalie does receive a pass, he should receive the ball with his feet (remember that he may not pick up a pass with his hands) and attempt to "switch the point of attack" by playing the ball to a teammate on the opposite side of the field.

TACTICS IN THE MIDDLE THIRD OF THE FIELD

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

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

When a midfield player passes the ball upfield to the forward, both midfielders must immediately run up and support their teammate, offering a passing option to the forward. All field players, except the furthest player back on defense, should be encouraged to dribble past opponents when they are in a 1 v 1 situation.

TACTICS IN THE DEFENSIVE THIRD OF THE FIELD

Players in the defensive third should take a "safety first" approach. Players should not dribble the ball inside of their penalty area unless they are trying to dribble the ball out to the sidelines, before taking it upfield. Players should try to pass the ball out of the defensive third rather than dribbling the ball. If they must dribble, it should be done towards the sideline, then up the field. Again, players should NEVER simply boom the ball down the field. They should instead either dribble the ball if there is open space, or pass the ball to a teammate positioned further up the field.

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

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

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

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

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

THE TRANSITION GAME

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

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

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

The important principals of counter-attacking are:

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

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

The important principals of counter-defending are:

- pressure the player with the ball
- delay the opponent's attack, prevent them from going forward
- get back on defense as fast as possible

GOALKEEPER TACTICS

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

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

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

TACTICS ON RESTARTS

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

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

DEFENSIVE CORNER KICKS: The goalie should stand just in front of the goal line, in the middle of the goal. One of the field players should stand tight against the near post, ready to redirect away any ball that is kicked along the goal line. The player guarding the near post should be positioned on the inside part of the post so that if an opponent other than the player taking the corner kick redirects the ball towards the near goal post, the defender will be able to kick it away. The other field players should be positioned about 3 - 5 yards in front of the goal, ready to get the corner kick and clear it away from the goalmouth. When possible, the defenders should tightly mark an opponent, being sure to be "goal side" (between the opponent and the goal) of that man.

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

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

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

SUMMARY OF GAME TACTICS

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

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

BEYOND THE 7 - 9 YEAR OLD INTRAMURAL DIVISIONS

We hope that the practices and activities in this manual will be of benefit to coaches of our 7 - 9 year old intramural players. Many of the coaches in our 7 - 9 year old programs will wind up coaching in our older age groups. Below is a brief overview of those divisions as well as the philosophy of coaching teams in older age groups.

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 8 vs. 8. 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 7 - 9 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 skill 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 a particular technique).
- Allow 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 skills.
- 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 built up 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 during practices.
- Older, more experienced players need to deal with increased pressure from an opponent. Coaches of older players will be able to use most of the activities in this manual with only small modifications.

- The following are items that the coach can modify in activities 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 are able to 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.

No matter how young or how old the players are, coaches 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
- Del-Val League Coach Of The Year, 2004
- Central League High School Coach Of The Year, 2018, 2012, 1997

Several of his former players have gone on to play at the professional levels. One of his former players played for the USA in the 2006 World Cup as well as the 2000 Olympics. Another player was a starter for the USA in the 2015 Under 20 World Cup. Several former players have played in Major League Soccer (MLS). Many of his former players played college. Several of his players from many years ago are now coaching soccer at various levels, including MLS, college, high school and in Lower Merion Soccer Club.