



# YOUTH SOCCER COACHING

**National Soccer Coaches Association Of America Annual Convention**

Cincinnati, Ohio, January, 1998

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**Lectures From Karl Dewazian On Youth Soccer Coaching**

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This document comes from several coaching clinics at the annual NSCAA Soccer Convention. The clinics focus on coaching 5 - 8 year old soccer players. This document has been prepared for all LMSC coaches who will be coaching children in this age range.

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This youth soccer coaching document is a collection of notes taken at the annual National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) Convention. The first part of this document is from the NSCAA State Diploma Coaching Course which is geared towards coaches of 5-8 year old soccer players. It is the entry-level course in the NSCAA curriculum. The course is of benefit to all youth coaches regardless of their soccer background. The second part of this manual is from three different lectures by Karl Dewazian, author of numerous books on youth soccer coaching and Co-Chair of the United States Youth Soccer Association Coaching Committee.

The NSCAA State Diploma Coaching Course tries to steer coaches away from drills and lectures. Instead, they show how coaches should serve as “facilitators,” trying to create an environment where the players are able to not only master their skills, but also become “problem solvers.” Unlike some other sports, soccer is a game of constantly making decisions. Players need to play in different types of “Small Sided Games” where they are able to not only develop their technical skills, but also work out the various game oriented problems that they are confronted with.

The recent trend in youth coaching is to play lots of Small Sided Games. The reason that games should be “small sided” is so that each player is constantly around the ball and involved in the action. They are able to make many more touches on the ball (technical development) and make many more decisions (tactical development). A player in a 3 versus 3 game or a 5 versus 5 game will make many more touches on the ball than a player in a full sided 11 versus 11 game.

To best develop the players’ technical skills, the first 15-20 minutes of each practice should be devoted to having each player work with his or her own soccer ball. The objective of this part of practice is to **maximize the number of touches on the ball** that each player gets. The more soccer balls in use at once, the more touches on the ball each player will make.

**Repetition is the key to technical development.** The more touches on the ball that a player makes, the faster his or her technical development will be.

The most important thing for coaches to remember is that **children must be having FUN**. If the players are not having fun, they will not want to continue playing soccer. The coach must display a lot of enthusiasm. If the coach is not having fun, the players will quickly sense that. Practices and games must always be fun for both the coach and the players.

Throughout the NSCAA State Diploma course, the instructors put a group of seven year old players through a series of fun games and activities. Each session started out with the players working with their own soccer ball. Each of the sessions progressed to having the players play in small sided games where skill development is combined with problem solving.

Each session that the NSCAA instructors put the players through contained a lot more activities and games than any coach would want to try in a single practice. Coaches should try to organize on a few different activities and games each time the team gets together. Each practice should focus on one particular theme, whether it be dribbling, passing, shooting or whatever.

Similar to the NSCAA Course, Dewazian preached over and over about how coaches must ensure that the players are always having FUN. Dewazian stressed the need to avoid lecturing the players. Youth players have a very short attention span. After a short time, players will stop listening to what the coach has to say. The game itself should be the primary teacher. The role of the coach is to enable his or her players to develop in this type of environment.

Every practice should end in a small sided game. At that time, the coach should sit back and observe whether the practice session had an affect on the players. The coach must ask himself: “Were the players able to take the skills they just worked on and apply them in a game situation?” The most important reason for finishing up each practice with a small sided game is that the kids find it to be **FUN**. That is the reason they came to practice in the first place. If they have fun, they will look forward to going to the next practice.

Dewazian concluded his third and final lecture with this line: "The outcome of our children is infinitely more important than the outcome of any game we will ever coach."

# NSCAA STATE DIPLOMA COURSE

## SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION

George Perry - NSCAA Associate Director Of Coaching

This course is the most basic of the coaching courses offered by the NSCAA Soccer Academy. The target age is 5-8 year olds. But is this the players' chronological age or their experience age? Knowing this is always a key to youth coaching.

### Player Needs

FUN!!!  
Movement  
FUN!!!  
Touches On The Ball  
FUN!!!  
Success

### Coach Needs

ENTHUSIASM!!!  
Leadership  
ENTHUSIASM!!!  
Observation  
ENTHUSIASM!!!  
Correction Methodology

Key elements to training or instruction sessions:

- Practice session organization - equipment, space
- Coaching position (be in a position to view all of the action)
- Quality stops in action (water breaks, rest, fun time ...)

Coaches must promote:

- Respect for players, coaches, officials, spectators
- Fair play and honest competition

Coaches need to:

- Have a vision - long term and short term
- Challenge both the individuals and the team
- Communicate (with players and with parents)
- Develop player relations

Distractions - If you lose one player to a distraction, you should bring him back into the fold. If you several players, go with them ... observe the bunny or whatever has caught their attention.

It's not just the player's chronological age that matters, we must know their soccer background and experience before we can properly deal with them. It also helps to know about who they are away from soccer, what their family situation is, etc.

We do not "coach the kids" as much as "organize activities" for them to discover things and solve problems.

The environment should be a "World Of Discovery," not a chalkboard of diagrams. The whole concept of coaching youth players should be "PROBLEM SOLVING." Give them things to work on and solve on their own, don't force feed the stuff to them.

**IT MUST BE FUN!!!!** (for the players AND the coaches).

The coach **MUST** be having fun in order for the kids to have fun. If the coach is not having fun, the players will notice. They can sense that. If everyone is having fun, the players will not want to leave the practice session, they will want to keep coming back.

One of our biggest goals is to get the players to **WANT** to play with their soccer ball at home, away from practice. It is important for them to experience success. That makes them **WANT** to play soccer, they won't want to leave your practice session to go back home.

Movement is essential for young players. Limit the amount of static stuff in practice sessions.

Children will go 100 miles per hour, then 0 miles per hour, then back to 100. The trick is to know when the changes occur and how to deal with them.

At the highest levels of play, many players are considered to be "role players", i.e., Alexi Lalas who was purely a marking back. We don't want to impose these limitations on young players too early. Youth players should be able to play several positions. Players should not become "goalie specialists" or whatever until at least 13-14 years of age. The important thing is to develop a confidence with a soccer ball in ALL players.

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

It is OK to have goaltenders in youth games, as long they are able to play the position safely. A good test is to see if a youngster is able to catch a ball with his hands at head level or higher.

Technique: the pure mechanics of [striking, dribbling, receiving ...] a ball.

Skill: the application of technique into a game situation (what they do under pressure).

Players must learn to WANT to play with the ball. The more touches on the ball a player makes, the more fun that the player will have and the faster his or her technical skills will develop.

When a coach needs to talk with the players, he must minimize the distractions. Have the players face away from distractions (the sun, another game, parents, etc.) Keep the talk VERY short.

It is nice for a coach to give positive feedback to a kid, but there is nothing better for them then getting the positive feedback from their peers.

## **Leadership**

We all have our own qualities, both strong and weak. Sometimes, it is best to figure out what we do well and just work the heck out of that coaching technique. Delegate the other stuff to someone else. Share the responsibilities of coaching with other adults if you feel confident about them.

## **Observation**

Take some time to look at your organization of the kids. Sometimes we just let the kids play at the start of a practice to get rid of their excess energy first. They DO NOT want to be part of some organized session and listen to the coach talk. Maybe we should just let them start practice with a scrimmage.

Be sure to take time to observe them before jumping in to "critique."

## **Terminology**

"Trial and Error" should be "Trial and Success"

"Sudden Death" should be "Sudden Victory"

Observe your practice session. If it is not working, figure out how to adjust it. 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) and they will look forward to going to the next practice session.

Ask yourself: "How can I help this practice session help them to be successful?"

Passive defenders (a player standing still in a drill, looking like a defender but not actually moving):

Many people think that having the players serve as passive defenders is not realistic. That's why cones were invented. The coach could use himself, another parent or an older sibling to control the defensive pressure but he should not use the actual players. It is never a good idea to ever ask a kid to play at 50% effort.

### **Correction Methodology** (how to make corrections at practice)

- Don't just criticize. Suggest how they could do it better.
- Focus on someone who can perform the skill well. Let that player demonstrate the skill. This is 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. Perhaps you ask a player: "Have you ever thought about doing it this way?"
- Don't reinforce bad things. When talking about something done incorrectly, preface it with a positive remark and finish with a positive remark.

It is important to adjust the parameters in practice. Know the limitations of the individuals as well as the group in general. Don't be afraid to change something if adjustments need to be made in anything that you do in practice.

It's good to challenge them with a homework assignment, i.e., work on a particular move or technique.

Question: Do we group the stronger players together or integrate them into the mainstream? Both methods have their moments, there is a time and a place for both methodologies.

Sometimes we might want to use the better players as "leaders" or "coaches." Ask the better players to help the less talented players. The end result is that all players will increase their level of play. Remember that we are there to "guide" the players and let them "discover" things on their own.

As coaches, we are responsible for the development of ALL players.

If a player is playing "up" in age (playing with a group of older players) all the time, he will never develop proper leadership skills. He may be a strong player, but he might not advance socially.

### **Setting Up A Practice Session**

- Need the correct equipment.
- ALL players need to have their own soccer ball.
- At least half of each practice should be spent with each player working with his / her own soccer ball.
- Players should get 500-600 touches per practice. Most of these touches will be in the first 20 minutes of practice.
- Challenge players with numbers, i.e., "how many can you do?" Have them compete against themselves, not against others.

### **Coaching Position During Practices**

Don't position yourself too close to the action, you might get run over or get in the players' way. Don't stand so far away that you are not really a part of the practice. Be in a position to observe everything.

### **Game To Get Players To Look Up And Pass**

Play 3v3+1 with the coach serving as a neutral player (\*). The players know that if they pass to the coach, they might get the ball back. They will be more confident to pass the ball.

*\* a neutral player is a player who plays for the team in possession of the ball. A neutral player must wear a distinctive color. When the red team has the ball, he plays with the red team. When the blue team wins the ball, he immediately begins playing with the blue team.*

"How can we affect a training session?"

When the coach stops play, he must be sure to keep his comments brief and to the point.

But what if we have more than one group? Get a parent or other adult to supervise the other games.

If you are using stations, let the players bring their water bottle to each station. It's different at a 3 hour soccer camp. There, you want to keep the water bottles away from the playing field so they can get a decent amount of "down" time. You can't be all soccer at a camp.

In a 60-75 minute session however, you want to keep them active as much of the time as possible.

A big responsibility for the youth coach (as far as the parents are concerned): send the kids home tired so they won't have too much energy at home and they will be ready to go to bed.

## **Behavior Problems**

Little kids rarely "tactically" violate the laws of the game. Usually, it's a matter of clumsiness.

If constant fouling does happen by a child, it is most likely a BEHAVIORAL problem.

How To Deal With Behavior Problems

- be consistent
- be fair

When giving a child a "time-out," be sure the child knows why he must sit out. Before the player may come back in, he must be able to tell the coach why he had the time-out. If the child cannot tell the coach why, explain it to him and send him back for another minute of time-out. Repeat as necessary until the player can tell you WHY he was given the time-out.

It's nice if you can set up an environment where the players enforce the rules themselves - peer pressure.

## **Managing A Team**

- It is OK to have other parents help, but be sure they trust you and can work with you.
- Be sure the parents know your short term goals and your long term goals.

## **Rules For Children**

- When I talk - you listen.
- When I recognize you to talk - I will listen.

# NSCAA STATE DIPLOMA COURSE

## SESSION 2: DRIBBLING GAMES

Doug Williamson - NSCAA Coaching Staff

Always finish off a practice with a small sided game, that's what the kids came to practice for.

Avoid the "drill" concept of practicing (one or two players participating while all other players stand and wait). Keep all the players active and involved at all possible times.

To learn technique, we need repetition (lots of touches on the ball, done correctly, over and over and over).

Try to maximize the number of touches on the ball with the various surfaces of the foot (inside of foot, outside of foot, instep and sole).

Coaches need to provide the players with plenty of opportunity for success, creativity and freedom within the overall structure of the practice session.

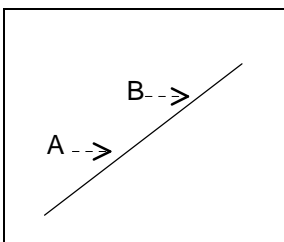
### Three Important Concepts In Learning:

- feelings are most important - be sure all players are having a good time.
- allow players to make mistakes. This is necessary for them to eventually become successful.
- acknowledge improvement (let the players know when you see it).

It is the coach's job to help each individual make progress from whatever the individual's current level is.

The coach should be a "facilitator" of learning.

Integrate the slanted line concept of learning (each child goes over the bar at his or her own comfort level, yet is encouraged to take risks and challenges). Challenge player A to go over at one height, challenge player B to go over at another height. Each activity must match the ability of the individual players (there will often be a different level for each child).



Growth is provided by:

- an expansion of opportunities
- equalizing challenges (all challenged to grow at their own pace, from their own level)
- interaction of all players on the team with one another

**START OF THE PRACTICE SESSION:** This practice will focus on dribbling games. Use cones to mark out a large grid (playing area) about 35 yards square for a group of 12 players. Each child dribbles his or her own ball around inside the grid.

### **BODY PART DRIBBLE**

When the coach calls out a body part, the players stop their ball with that part of their body (left foot, right foot, knee, hand, elbow, head, etc.)

Each time, ask the players if they are allowed to stop the ball with that part of their body in a game. If the answer is "yes", then ask them if it would be a good idea to do that in a game (i.e., for "knee", the first answer would be yes, the second answer would be no).

This activity can be modified to include other verbal commands:

- turn right, turn left
- step on the ball
- red light, yellow light

When dribbling:

- be on the balls of the feet, not the heels
- lower your center of gravity
- keep your head up
- keep the ball within "playing distance" (defined as one giant step)

Most touches should be with the instep (shoelaces) but they should be encouraged to use all surfaces:

- instep (shoe laces)
- inside of foot
- outside of foot
- sole of foot

Next, have the players dribble around in the grid, teach them a couple of simple moves:

- cut the ball across the body with the inside of the foot or instep.
- turn the ball away with the outside of the foot.
- step over the ball with the right foot, spin around on that foot and dribble away with the left.

There are a large number of different dribbling moves that players can work on. The coach should only have the players work on moves which they are capable of doing.

### **MATH DRIBBLE**

All players dribble their ball inside the grid. When the coach calls out a math problem, the players must quickly figure out the answer, then organize (with their ball) into little groups of that size. Thus, if the coach yells "five minus one", the players must get into groups of four. Once they do this, have them resume dribbling inside the grid.

### **SHADOW DRIBBLE**

In pairs, each player with a ball. One player is the leader, the other player is the follower. The leader dribbles around in the grid while the follower tries to stay behind him. Each time the front player tries a move, the back player must try the same move.

If the front player loses the player following him, he must immediately slow down and allow the following player to catch up, then continue.

Question to the players: What do you need to do to stay with your partner? Answer: Keep looking up.

Be sure to switch the leader and the follower regularly.

When "chopping a ball" (quickly cutting the ball across your body, then taking it in a different direction), use the shoelaces so you don't get too off balance. Players must swing from the hips to change direction effectively.

Coaching Point: When you make a move, increase your speed (accelerate) and try to lose the man following you (but then let him catch up).

**EVERYBODY'S IT (TAG GAME)**

Place all players inside the grid, divided them into groups of 2 or 3. Have the players dribble around inside the grid. The "it" player tries to tag one of his partner while maintaining possession of his ball. When the other player is tagged, or his ball goes out of the grid, he becomes "it."

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

**KNEE TAG**

Each player has a ball. You get one point each time you are able to tag another player on one of his knees. Players must be in possession of their ball to get a point. Players must subtract a point if their ball goes out of the grid. Ask the players to play on the honor system.

After awhile, give the players a hint: tell them to bend down low at the knees to tag someone else. Try to drag the ball with the sole (bottom) of the foot to tag someone and maintain possession.

Coaching Point: The first time they play, ask them how many knees they tagged. After that, ask them "How many MORE did you get than last time?"

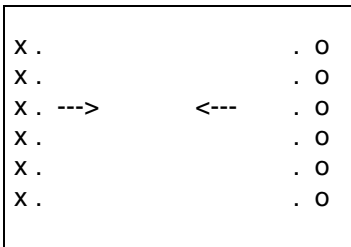
**END ZONE TAG**

Divide players into two teams (red and blue). Put each team on one end line of the grid, each player with a ball. On command, the blue team players try to dribble across the grid to the red team's side while the red team players try to dribble across the grid to the blue team's side.

The players on each team try to tag as many players of the opposite color as possible before getting to the other end of the grid. Players do not have to go directly to the opposite end of the grid. They can dribble around inside the grid for awhile, trying to tag players.

After each round, have a designated "captain" for each team add up the number of tags his team made. Determine which team made more tags.

The punishment for the losing team: all players must put their hands up over their head and clap loud. The number of claps is the number of points the team lost by.



## **HOSPITAL TAG**

Each player inside a large grid with a ball. Each individual player tries to tag the other players. When a player gets tagged, he must place one of his hands on the spot where he got tagged. If he gets tagged a second time, he must hold that spot with his other hand. When he gets tagged a third time, he must go to the hospital (anywhere outside the grid) and do a skill activity (five ball touches, two juggles, etc.) in order to get "cured" and return to the game.

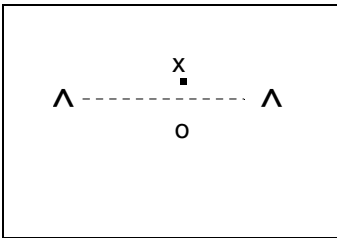
It is important to keep the grid fairly tight in this game, otherwise there won't be many tags.

## **KNOCKOUT**

Place all the players inside the grid, dribbling around, trying to kick other players' balls out of grid while maintaining possession of their own ball. If a player's ball is kicked away, he must immediately chase it, trying to get it before it stops rolling. If the ball stops rolling, or the ball goes out of bounds, the player must do a skill oriented activity before returning to the game.

## **1v1 TO CONES** (this might be a little too advanced).

For each pair of players, setup a pair of cones about 10 yards apart. One player stands on one side of the imaginary line between the cones with a soccer ball. The other player stands just on the other side of the line without a ball. The player with the ball tries to dribble the ball under control and hit either cone.



The player without the ball tries to place his foot in front of the cone that his opponent is trying to hit. The defending player may not step over the line, except to put one foot in front of a cone. At no time may the defender try to kick the ball away. Play for 45 seconds, see how many goals A can score in that time. Then have player B be the attacker.

Again, have the losing player do claps for the winning player.

Advanced concepts to teach (if appropriate)

- Shielding: playing "sideways" to the defender with the ball on the far foot, well away from the defender, trying to prevent the opponent from getting to the ball. Be sure to keep the head up.
- Change Of Pace: play under controlled speed but accelerate after making a move when trying to beat the defender.

## **FINISH THE PRACTICE WITH A 4V4 (PLUS KEEPERS) SCRIMMAGE**

Require the players to take at least four touches with the ball before they may pass. The exception to the four touch rule is if the player shoots. This restriction will give them confidence with the ball and get them away from the habit of just "booming" the ball down the field when they get it.

Have the assistant coach (quickly) work substitutes in (on the fly, without having to waste time by stopping the game).

Don't waste time giving the players positions (except goalie), they don't follow them anyway at the younger ages.

Be sure to place all extra balls inside of the two goals. That way, when one ball goes out of play, the goalie can QUICKLY get a different ball out of the net and QUICKLY put it into play.

Remember that we ALWAYS want the last 1/3 of practice to be a SMALL SIDED GAME, with or without restrictions.

Be sure the players go home with a smile. We want them to look forward to the next practice.

# **NSCAA STATE DIPLOMA COURSE**

## **SESSION 3: STRIKING THE BALL**

Doug Williamson - NSCAA Coaching Staff

Proper Technique To Strike A Ball:

- ankle locked
- follow through and "present" surface to target
- swing leg from the hip
- when shooting, land on the KICKING foot (advanced)

**INSTEP KICK**

- toe down
- snap at the knee
- strike ball with shoelaces

**INSIDE OF FOOT**

- toes up and out to lock ankle (toes higher than heel)
- strike from middle to heel of shoe
- strike the top half of the ball

**OUTSIDE OF FOOT**

- toes down and in to lock ankle (toes lower than heel)
- strike the top half of the ball
- balance (non-kicking) foot placed a bit wide

Below is a collection of games that can be played at practice. The coach should pick out a few games that he feels would be appropriate for the level of his players. While these games are fun and productive, the coach must remember that it is most important to spend the last third of practice with a scrimmage (or two small scrimmages).

### **BULLDOG**

Place all players in a 30 x 30 yard grid. Three players are designated as bulldogs, they each have a ball. All other players start without a ball. The bulldogs each try to kick their ball at one of the players (below the waist) who doesn't have a ball. When a player is hit with a ball, he has to go outside the grid and get a soccer ball. He then becomes a bulldog. Any player that goes outside the grid becomes a bulldog.

Play continues until there is only one player left who is not a bulldog.

The size of the grid is important. If it is too big, the players will have difficulty hitting anyone. Be sure to keep the grid small for this game.

After each round, while the players are resting, review some of the various points of striking a ball.

You might want to use walls or have parents on the perimeters, helping to keep balls in the playing area.

### **MARBLES**

Players in pairs, each with a ball. The first player knocks his ball in any direction along the ground. While that ball is still moving, the second player tries to hit the moving ball with his ball. Challenge them to do this using the different surfaces of the foot. Be sure they try this both left footed and right footed.

### **SOCCER GOLF**

Set up various objects throughout the field. Players in groups of 2 or 3, each with a ball. Players take turns striking their ball, trying to hit a designated target. The player in each group who hits the designated target with the fewest shots wins that round.

### **INVISIBLE SIAMESE SOCCER**

Two pairs of partners, each pair with a ball in a large grid. The remaining players are in pairs without a ball, holding hands. The pairs of players without a ball run around and try to avoid getting hit with a ball played by the pairs that do have a ball. The last pair to get hit wins the round.

### **TEAM KNOCKOUT**

Divide players into two teams. One team tries to knock all the soccer balls out of the large grid while the other team tries to keep all the balls in. Players on that team must continuously run outside the grid to kick the balls back into the grid. Play for a set amount of time, blow the whistle and count how many soccer balls are in the grid at that particular time. Coaches should adjust the number of players trying to kick balls out of the grid to ensure that the game has a good flow to it.

### **SHARKS**

Two (or three) players are designated as sharks and stand at the edge of the grid. The remaining players stand inside the grid, each with a ball. On command, the sharks run into the grid and try to kick out the soccer balls as fast as possible. The team on the inside may dribble the balls or pass the balls around, trying to keep them inside the grid. Play stops when the sharks knock out the last ball. The coach, who times each round with a watch, announces the time it took that group of sharks to knock all the balls out. Put in a new group of sharks, see if they can beat the fastest time.

### **DEFROST TAG**

Divide the group into two teams, all inside a large grid. The yellow team starts out with each player having a ball, the blue team players do not have a ball. On command, the yellow team players try to kick their ball and hit any blue team player below the waste. If a blue team player gets hit, he is "frozen" and must stand still, arms folded and legs apart. He can get "unfrozen" by having a teammate run over to him and crawl between his legs. The unfrozen player may then rejoin the activity. Play for one minute, then stop the game and count the number of frozen players. Teams then change rolls.

Variation: Have all players in the game with a soccer ball. If a player on the blue team gets hit, he must pick up his ball and stand with his legs apart. The player can get "unfrozen" by having a teammate dribble up to him and tap his ball between the frozen player's legs.

During all of these games, the coach should review a few technical points while the kids are resting.

When teaching techniques to strike a ball, the INSTEP (laces) kick should be the first one taught. The "outside of the foot" is most the most difficult and should be not be discussed until the players can properly perform the instep and inside of the foot techniques.

When the players get tired, have them stand in front of a soccer goal that has a net, each player with a ball. Have the players work on punting the ball from their hands into the net, keeping the ball low. Players should do this simultaneously, then run into the goal, get their ball back and repeat.

The problem that we have today is that too many players are only using the side of their foot. They need to learn to strike the ball using their laces early on.

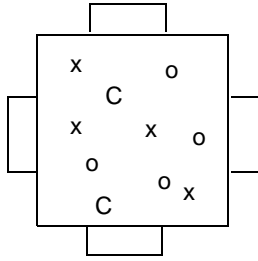
Emphasize keeping the butt out and leaning over to keep the ball low.

Challenge them to have the ball strike the lower half of the goal.

They should use their laces to strike the ball. Land on the kicking foot.

Variation: in pairs, one player now rolls the ball ahead to his partner who strikes the ball into the goal.

Kids will learn from visual signals more than audio signals.



### **HEADS UP**

Place all players inside a large grid (about 30 x 30 yards), surrounded by four goals. Each player has a ball and is wearing either a yellow shirt or a blue shirt. Each coach is also in the grid, holding a yellow shirt in one hand and a blue shirt in the other. If one of the coaches raises a yellow shirt, the yellow players quickly take a shot at the nearest goal, retrieve their ball and return to the grid. This applies for the blue team when one of the coaches raises a blue shirt.

This requires players to keep their heads up when dribbling.

### **HANDBALL**

Set up a small field with two goals. Teams are allowed to catch and throw the ball but may not run with it (limit of three steps). If the ball hits the ground, the other team picks up the ball and play continues. When a player gets the ball, he has three seconds to play it. To score, a player must volley the ball from his hands into the net, past the opponent's goalie.

Variation: To score a goal, a player must roll the ball to the feet of a teammate. That player must one time the ball into the goal to score.

### **SCRIMMAGE!!!**

Be sure that the last third of practice is spent scrimmaging. Teams can play a standard game or a game with additional restrictions and conditions designed to encourage a certain aspect of play. If the coach wants to focus on shooting, have the goals fairly close together (maybe 20 yards away). During the scrimmage, let the kids play. Observe what they do. The coach should ask himself if the work done in practice had an affect on their play. The coach should also try to determine what aspect of soccer should be worked on during the next practice.

**When teaching technique: the more repetition the players get, the more they have gained.**

As coaches, we don't need to be teaching every minute. It is best to let the players work on their skills, then pull aside any individual who needs a technical adjustment. This should be done while the rest of the players are busy doing their skills work.

# NSCAA STATE DIPLOMA COURSE

## **SESSION 4: SMALL SIDED GAMES**

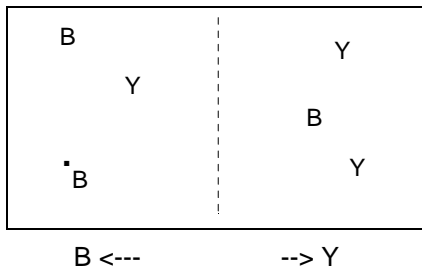
George Perry - NSCAA Associate Director Of Coaching

Note: The material that is being covered in each session of this NSCAA course should be applied over MANY practices. There is way too much stuff covered in each session to fit into one practice. Usually, it is best to only do a couple of the activities per practice. Be sure to spend at least the last third of each practice playing a small sided game. This is when the players try to apply their skill to the game itself. It is also the time when they have the most fun and will go home with a smile on their face.

“Small sided games, as the name implies, deal with a small number of players. For the purpose of the State Diploma Course, we usually mean no more than four field players on a side. The numbers however, do not have to be equal. It is often helpful to manipulate the numbers in order to increase the chances of seeing some aspect repeat itself more often. Eventually, after all of the manipulation of players, size of the space and various other conditions, we just want to see the players play.”

### **POSSESSION GAME**

Setup a grid about 30x20 yards with a midfield line. Two blue players and one yellow player are on one side of the midfield line, two yellow players and one blue player are on the other side. Nobody may cross the midfield line.



The two players on the one side play keepaway from the one player. When the defender wins the ball, he tries to play the ball across the midfield line to his teammates who try to play keepaway against the lone defender on that side.

This game is 2v1 which means there will be a lot of dribbling. We could make it 3v1 on each side. This would shift the focus of the play to passing.

Variation: Play 3v1 on each side, but allow one player in the offensive area to go over the line and play defense. This would make the game 3v2.

The number of players we use determines how many options the player with the ball has:

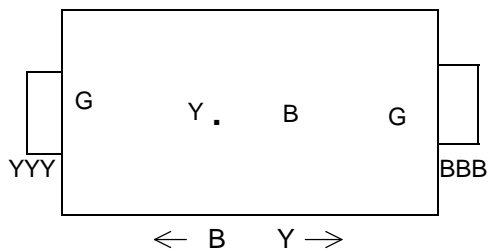
<u>game</u>	<u># of options</u>	<u>options for player with the ball</u>
2v1	2	dribble or pass to his teammate
3v1	3	dribble, pass to one teammate, pass to other teammate

It is important in games that when the defender wins the ball, he doesn't have to just return it to the attacking team. He needs an incentive to play hard and win the ball.

Small sided games can be played by having the defending team play to either a target player or to one or more small target goals.

**TRANSITION GAME**

Y1 plays 1v1 to goal against B1. If Y1 scores or shoots the ball over the goal line, B1 goes off the field. B2 IMMEDIATELY dribbles his ball onto the field trying to score. Y1 must IMMEDIATELY make the transition from offense to defense.



B2 should be trained to NOT wait for Y1 to be ready. If B1 scores or shoots the ball over the goal line, Y2 would IMMEDIATELY dribble onto the field and play against B1.

If the goalie makes a save, he quickly plays the ball to the player who is helping to defend his goal.

Players must learn that even after they play the ball, their job is not done.

This game can also be played 2v2. Each team has one player at each goal post, ready to come on and play. The 2v2 game requires a minimum of 8 field players (the 1v1 game requires a minimum of 4 field players).

The game could also be played with a neutral player who stays on the field at all times, helping the player in possession of the ball to score. The neutral player may not score.

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

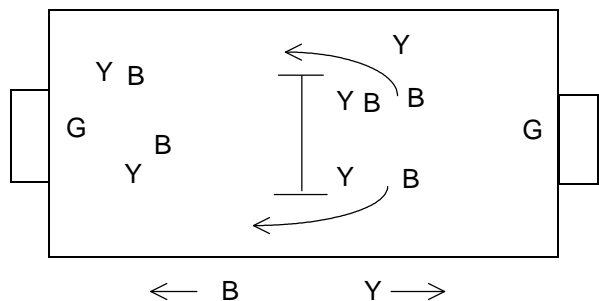
It is important to establish the mentality of how early we can finish.

Keep in mind that kids (and adults too) think of big sized goals as something fun to play to. Large goals give the players a lot of incentive to work hard.

Goals should be wide but not high (eliminate those high shots that a youth goalie couldn't possibly stop). Encourage the players to try and "pass the ball to the back of the net."

**5 VERSUS 5 WITH A MIDFIELD BARRIER**

On a 50x40 yard field, play 5v5 with a barrier in the middle of the field. The players have to play the ball around the barrier. The players may not run through the barrier. This introduces them to the concept of wing play.



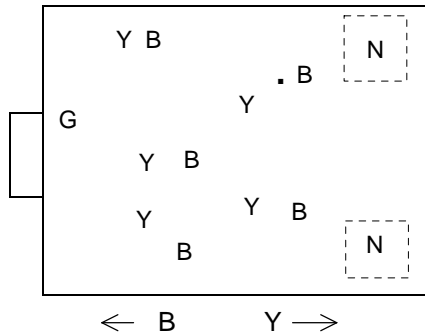
For this game, a flat portable Coerver (two sided) goal has been placed along the midfield line which the players must play around.

To eliminate the beehive effect, require that half the players on each team only be allowed to go around the goal on one side while the other half of the players are only allowed to go around the goal on the opposite side.

If a player simply "booms" the ball down the field without a purpose, he is required to "attempt a hand stand" as punishment.

### 5 VERSUS 5 TO A MIDFIELD GRID

On a 40x40 yard field, mark a 10x10 yard grid with cones at each flank area. Play a game of 5 versus 5. A coach or other player stands in each grid. The blue team tries to score on the regular goal while the yellow team tries to defend that goal. If the yellow team wins the ball, they try to play the ball to the person in either of the side grids. If the yellow team is able to pass to a person in one of the grids, they get a point. The blue team gets the ball back immediately and play continues.

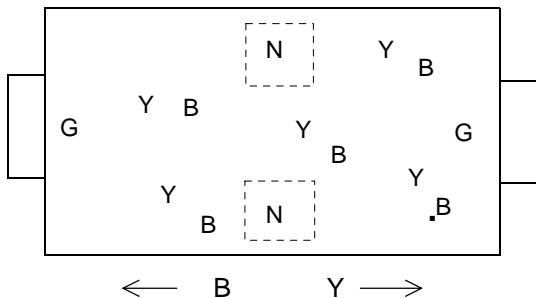


**Variation 1:** If the yellow team plays the ball to one of the flank players, they immediately get the ball back and try to attack the regular goal. The blue team must then defend the regular goal and try to win the ball back so they can play it to one of the flank players.

**Variation 2:** Setup a pair of cones about 10 yards apart where the grids were. The team defending the goal must try to dribble the ball under control through either set of cones. If successful, that team immediately becomes the attacking team and goes to goal.

### 5 VERSUS 5 THROUGH A MIDFIELD GRID

On a 50 x 40 yard field, play 5v5 with each team attacking one goal and defending the other. As before, setup a 10 x 10 yard grid on each flank, in the middle of the field.



There are several ways to play this game:

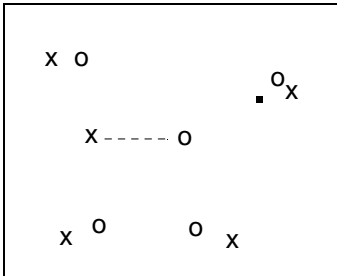
- Each team has a player in each side grid. Each team gets a point for passing the ball to their flank player OR for scoring on the opponent's goal. Players in the grid may not defend against one another.
- Each team **MUST** play the ball to one of the flank players before attempting a shot on goal.
- Each team must play the ball to one of the flank players, receive the ball back, then play the ball to the other flank player before attempting to score.

Another variation is to use a neutral player inside the field (not out on the flanks) who may run around anywhere in the playing area. The team in possession must play the ball to the neutral player before they can go to goal. This neutral player must receive the ball, then play it back to a member of the same team. The team in possession may then go to goal. Each time the defending team steals the ball, they must play the ball through the neutral player before attempting to score.

Still require any player who aimlessly "booms the ball" downfield to "attempt" to do a handstand or fun punishment.

### **MOVING GOAL GAME**

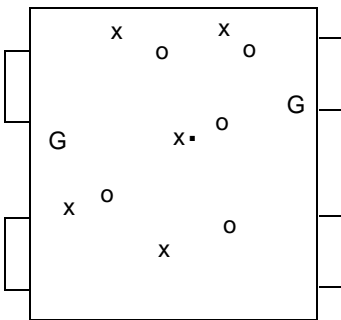
Have one yellow player and one blue player each hold the end of a long object (such as a piece of rope, the coach's sweat pants or a broom handle). They walk around the playing area with the object held tight.



The remaining players play 4 versus 4, trying to score on the makeshift goal. The players holding the goal are constantly moving around, trying to manipulate the angle of the goal to make it either easier for their team to score (when their team has possession) or make it more difficult for the opponents to score (when the opponents have possession).

### **FOUR GOAL GAME**

On a wide field, play a regular game, except that each team has two goals to score on and two goals to defend. Each team has one goalie who must defend BOTH of his team's goals. Goalies may use their hands anywhere along the goal line.



This game teaches the players to switch the ball to the opposite side of the field if the side they are on is too crowded. The players will start to learn how to play horizontal instead of vertical.

### **SOME OTHER RESTRICTIONS THAT MAY BE USED IN SMALL SIDED GAMES**

- All players must be in the offensive half of the team before their team may score.
- All players must touch the ball during that possession before attempting to score.
- When a player releases the ball, he must immediately run at least five steps to support his teammate who now has the ball.

Never force a kid to play goalie if he is truly terrified of the position.

**Be sure to remember rule number 1: Be sure all activities are FUN and the players are having a good time.**

# **NSCAA STATE DIPLOMA COURSE**

## **SESSION 5: CLOSING REMARKS**

George Perry - NSCAA Associate Director Of Coaching

This course has demonstrated just a few of the many different small sided games that kids can play. The important thing to remember is that kids enjoy playing games. Be sure to always finish off EVERY practice with a small sided game of some kind. The end of practice game should look a lot like a regular soccer game, though the coach can add restrictions or conditions to ensure that a specific aspect of the game occurs more often.

The reason for these games being "small sided" is to maximize the number of touches on the ball. If there is an assistant coach or other adult available, set up two games to be played at the same time. This will maximize the number of players that are playing, minimize the number of inactive players and maximize the number of touches on the ball that each player gets.

This course has introduced a small collection of activities and games for children ages 5-8 to play in practice. The role of the coach should be to put the children in a fun filled and productive environment in which they will feel free to try things and "discover" ways of accomplishing things.

The first 15-20 minutes of practice should be devoted to skill development. We want to have each child make as many "ball touches" as possible during that time. Each player should be working with his or her own soccer ball during that time.

Instead of putting players through boring drills, coaches should challenge the players by having them play in different small sided games. These games can be 1 player against another, 2 v 2, 3 v 3 or whatever. The numbers do not have to be even. Some challenging games can be played 2 v 1, 4 v 2, etc. The important thing for the coach is to ensure that the players will experience success while playing in the small sided games.

**With success comes confidence, self esteem and a love of the game of soccer.**

When the players gain success in practice, the coach should modify the activity to make it more challenging. It should not be so challenging that the players no longer experience success.

Minimize the lectures, players have a very short attention span. If you talk to them about something for more than 15 seconds, you will lose them. Be short and to the point. Do not feel that you need to say something and then justify why you said it.

Above all else, the coach needs to always make sure that each player (and each one of the coaches) is having

# **FUN**

# HOW TO RUN A YOUTH PRACTICE SESSION

Karl Dewazian - California Youth Soccer Coaching Director. USYSA Coaching Committee Co-Chair

## **What should we teach the players at the different levels?**

U-6 through U-10	Love to play soccer without adult supervision
U-10 through U-14	Perfect the technique (without technique there can be no tactics)
U-14 and up	Tactics (and more technique)

Players will need to love the game in order for them to be willing to put up with all the boring technical work.

The first three years (introduction to the sport) is the foundation. 75% of the players who drop out, do so between the ages of 10-14.

## **The Three Stages Of Human Development**

1. Dependent      USA soccer has never really gotten beyond this stage. Youth players are too dependent on "adult" supervision. We always ask the players to "listen" to us. In the USA, we make soccer way too much of a coach's game. We don't allow players to develop their thinking process.
2. Independent      Responsibilities ("I" - independent)
3. Interdependent      "WE" - as a team

## **Functions Of Attacking Players**

1. *Look* - When the ball is approaching a player, he should look left and right." (as opposed to the ball watchers).
2. *Move* - Where the ball moves determines where you move (including the goalkeeper).
3. *Ball Under Control* - We should not "trap" the ball, we don't want it dead at our feet. Instead, we want our first touch to "direct" the ball where we want it to go. We want to start everything we do with a serve (moving ball). For younger players, the service is on the ground, for older players, it's in the air. We don't want them shooting stationary balls. We only allow activities to start with a stationary ball if there is a defender between the ball and the goal. The coach should use parents to help serve balls so there are several groups active at once (as few inactive players as possible). Start activities at different angles (different parts of the field). Let the players try to solve the various problems (let them try to figure it out for themselves).
4. *Keep the Ball Under Control Against The Opposition* - Use a game like environment in practices. Develop a terminology for the players, give names to different moves and ideas. Help them to talk (verbalize) about what they are doing.
5. *Release the Ball Under Control.*
  - PUSH      push the ball a little bit ahead of you
  - PEEK      peek at the goal, see where to shoot, then put the head back down to see the ball
  - PLACE      place the ball where the net is

Start every action in an activity with a service for the player to control (direct it, don't just trap it).

End every action with a shot on goal (or other target).

Don't comment on the play until it is over, let the players make the decisions (right or wrong). Leave them alone while they are playing the ball.

### Why Kids Don't Keep Trying To Shoot

- During the game, coaches will yell "Sub" after a shot
- Players hear "pass the ball"
- Players hear "don't take risks"

We must teach the parents BEFORE the season starts to NOT yell instructions to the players when the player has the ball.

### Functions Of Defending Players

1. *Look*
2. *Move*
3. *Get into a defensive stance:*
  - crouched down, bent at the knees.
  - the front foot should go out to the ball when the time is right.
  - deflect the ball (force loss of control). In the USA, way too many kids go at the ball with their BACK leg, this is wrong.
  - Once in the defensive stance, keep moving, don't stop. Shuffle with the ball.

### Stages Of An Effective (Active) Practice Session

1. **Theme** (name it) - Briefly tell players what the practice will focus on.
2. **Warmup** - Never have players run laps, there should be nothing that is unrelated to the game (how many times did Mark Spitz run around the pool?)  
Ask the players what they want to play for a warmup.  
Don't give any attention to a kid who isn't involved in the activity. Pay attention to those who are involved and having fun. Make the others say "I WANT to be involved."
3. **Stretching** - NEVER bounce, it's always static stretching. It is **not** really necessary until about 12 years of age.
4. **Technical Development** - There should be lots of variety each practice. Players get bored easily. As coaches, we must OBSERVE. Don't talk so much. Keep the theme of the practice going until they can do it "very well."  
If they are improving, increase the defensive pressure in the practice.  
Remember that while you are teaching, they aren't playing. Players should each work with their own ball, get as many touches on the ball as possible.  
Minimize the lectures, keep comments brief and to the point.
5. **Small Sided Games** - Let the players play while you work with those players who need individual help. During that time, be sure the other players are busy playing, not waiting for you. The last 1/3 or more of practice should be spent playing small sided games.
6. **Review** - After some time doing all this, quickly bring the players together. Briefly go over some of the coaching points that you were trying to make. Finish up with a free game with even numbers. Minimize or eliminate the coaching, let them play.
7. **Cool down and stretch again** (older players only).

If the ball stops and the player stops, then the learning has stopped.

If the ball is moving and the player is moving, then learning is taking place.

### **Small Sided Games - Let The Game Teach The Players**

- Play 1v1 to two small goals in a 10x10 grid.
- Play 2v1 in a 20x10 grid.
- Play 4v3 in a 40x30 grid

Always adjust the size of the playing area (grid) to fit the players according to their age, size and skill level. In general, allow about 10 yards per player. Adjust as needed. If anything, start everything with the grid too big, then make the grid smaller as the players get the hang of the activity.

Players up through U-12 should not be doing even numbered activities in practice. They aren't talented enough yet. Uneven numbers should give the team with more players a good chance to experience **SUCCESS**.

### **A Typical Progression To Ensure Success:**

- 4v0 playing two touch with no opponents
- 4v1 add one opponent. Now they have opposition, but should still experience success
- 4v2 add more opposition (if the players are ready for it)
- 4v2 the team of four is limited to two touch, the team of two plays with unlimited touches
- 4v3 all players with an unlimited number of touches

# TEACHING YOUTH SOCCER TACTICS

Karl Dewazian - California Youth Soccer Coaching Director. USYSA Coaching Committee Co-Chair  
Alan Maher - Author and former youth coach in Holland

The biggest limitation to a team's tactical ability is the lack of technique.

Players must be able to look up, read the game and find their teammates while under pressure.

## Typical American Stereotypes

goalies	tall kids
fullbacks	fat kids, the "wall of china"
halfbacks	hyperactive
forwards	our own son or daughter plus the neighbor's child

Too often we tell our defenders: "if the ball comes down the field, kick it." This philosophy will NOT develop technical or tactical skill. We really should not call them "defenders." They should never just kick the ball away.

The goalkeeper should keep the mentality that he is a field player working near the goal line.

Tactics are all about options.

## TOTAL SOCCER

When we have the ball, all of our players are in the attack.

"Backs" should be called "attacking backs" when we have the ball and "defending backs" when the opposition has the ball. Their job is to slow down the opponents, stay between the ball and the goal and wait for help. Otherwise the opponent will go 1v1 with the goalie.

"Halfbacks" - where is their other half? They should be called midfielders. Their job is to look back and forward, look for teammates. Take risks and chances when appropriate. Midfielders should be attacking and defending.

"Forwards" - look forward to goal. When we have the ball, they are "attacking forwards", looking to score goals. They must be willing to take risks. When the ball is lost, they become "defending forwards", pressuring the opposition defenders (often the weakest players on their team). We try to win the ball back with high pressure.

Coaches must tell children what their responsibilities are.

When we have the ball:

- |                    |              |  |
|--------------------|--------------|--|
| • defensive third: | red light    | don't be fancy with the ball, play the ball safe and smart.        |
| • middle third:    | yellow light | exercise some caution with the ball but don't be too conservative. |
| • offensive third: | green light  | attack, go for goal. Be a risk taker.                              |

When the opponents have the ball:

- |                    |              |   |
|--------------------|--------------|---|
| • defensive third: | red light    | be cautious, safety first. Delay opposition without overcommitting. |
| • middle third:    | yellow light | exercise some caution.  |
| • offensive third: | green light  | immediate chase, high pressure.                                     |

## **BASIC SMALL GROUP TACTICS FOR YOUTHS**

### **Wall Pass**

First Attacker goes "APE"

- A Attack (dribble at the defender and commit him to ball)
- P Pass (accuracy with proper pace to second attacker)
- E Explode (run around the opposite side of defender to get return pass)

Second Attacker offers SOS

- S Sprint to get "side-on" (wide and to the side) to the defender.
- O One touch ball into the space behind defender.
- S Support, move on to continue helping first attacker.

### **Tactics (selection of available options)**

- Keep possession of the ball.
- The relationship of technique to tactics: in the players' early years, technique must be the focus. Later, as the players get older and the technique is there, tactics can be taught.

To teach tactical concepts to younger players, we must introduce NEUTRAL PLAYERS. This gives numerical superiority to the team in possession. This will allow the players to experience success while still playing under pressure.

Some coaches do not permit the neutral player to be marked man to man, some do.

Some coaches do not permit the neutral player to score, some do.

It is up to the coach what role he wants the neutral player to have.

The coach must be able to determine and adjust for the proper amount of pressure (while still ensuring success).

### **Two Player Combination Patterns**

- dribble and square pass to partner, repeat and continue
- dribble, pass and overlap partner
- receive pass, shield and square pass
- take over
- fake take over
- pass and fake overlap
- wall pass
- target player up front laying ball off
- double pass

Have two columns of players, they go up and down the length of field in pairs working these options. Keep ALL the players active, NOT just one group pair working a time!!!!

### **Three Player Combination Patterns**

Players should not be in a straight line. Have two up, one back or one up, two back.

The object of three player combinations is to get ball to the third player who is upfield.

If one player cannot run, someone else must be able to run.

There must be several options with each three man combination.

### **Four Players Combinations**

Used to teach principals of attack

- support (one or more teammates within playing distance of the player with the ball)
- width (get players wide to spread out the opponent's defense horizontally)
- depth (get one or more players far upfield to stretch the opponent's defense vertically)

Usually shaped in a diamond. The outside players are often "windows".

Look for thru balls and crosses.

### **Tactical Considerations**

- establish a short-short-long passing pattern
- always look to get 3rd attackers involved (spread out the opponent's defense)
- players should be able to recognize triangles in combination play
- the entire team must move up field and attack as a single unit
- three players should NEVER be in a straight line
- stagger the "central spine" of the team's formation
- keep control of the ball
- encourage players to look for passes that bypass a line of attack, specifically defenders passing directly upfield to attackers.
- coach to make tactical adjustments, not technical adjustments
- use the spine players to switch the point of attack (one side of the field to the other)
- discourage dribbling in the defensive third of the field
- avoid having too much defensive pressure in practices, the players must first experience success (play without any opposition first). Gradually add pressure, but only when they are ready for it
- keep the games and activities small, not too complex

Always observe which foot and which surface a player receives the ball with. Make the first touch be productive (played in a positive direction).

### **Tactical Progression In Practices**

1. Make it work without pressure (paint a picture).
2. Make it more difficult, force them to play better.
3. Introduce opposition.

### **The Three Types Of Tactics**

Individual Tactics: 1v1 attacking or 1v1 defending

Small Group Tactics: 2v1 or higher (3v1, 3v2...)

Team Tactics: 6v6 up to 11v11 (youth teams should not worry about this)

# **SUBLIMINAL TRAINING: TRAINING YOUNG PLAYERS TO LISTEN**

Karl Dewazian - California Youth Soccer Coaching Director. USYSA Coaching Committee Co-Chair

The way that we speak about something is important:

GOOD: Here is something that is real simple and you can do in a few minutes.  
BAD: This is going to be real difficult.

If you take the second approach, you've convinced the kids that they can't do the task at hand. They will already have a negative approach to it.

When we talk to players, it should be for 12 seconds, never more than 30 seconds. They lose interest and fade out. They cannot assimilate what was said.

## Television

Adult Commercials: 30 seconds sexy with rock & roll music  
Youth Commercials: 15 seconds action, bright lights, rap music

Make your point quickly then start the action.

Need to use buzzwords that the players are familiar with.

American coaches wrongly make their point, then feel they have to explain their point.

Unless you PHYSICALLY show the players what to do, they will be clueless. Have a demonstration.

As coaches, we spend way too much time organizing.

A better way to coach:

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

Coaches must be sure that they have properly defined what the word "Freeze" means and that the players know what to do when the coach yells it. The players must IMMEDIATELY stop in their tracks so the coach can have them re-create what just happened (something good or bad).

If you don't work on something in practice, how can we expect it to happen in a game? Don't introduce new ideas before a game (or at halftime) that they haven't already worked on in practice.

Coaches must be very enthusiastic when goals are scored. Goals don't happen often so we must be enthusiastic when they do occur.

Karl to the girls in the practice session: "OK, let's come in. Last one in has to kiss me on the lips."

NEVER put players into lines during practice activities. This is the WORST thing you can do.

Dependent soccer: "Coach, tell me what to do. I won't do anything until I get your instructions."

Players too often do nothing until they receive instructions. They need to become more independent.

1v1 is a very economical activity. 1v1 will include:

- skill work (technique)
- decision making (tactics)
- plenty of physical exercise
- FUN (psychological)

The kids come to play soccer yet some coaches make them run laps. This is wrong!

Get the players to play independent of the coach. While they are playing, the coach can pull players aside and make individual corrections. We should not be yelling and screaming instructions while the kids are playing.

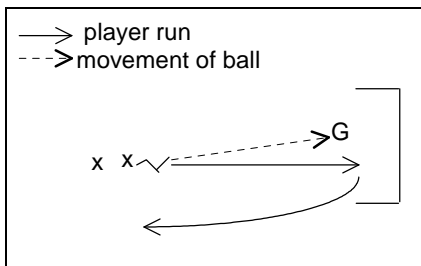
Let the kids solve their own problems. This helps them to be better soccer players and better people.

Always keep score in competitions, make things competitive. Kids by nature love to compete. They wouldn't be playing soccer if they didn't like to compete. Be sure all players know what the score is in all activities.

If the players don't work hard, keep cumulative scores for the week in practice on individual drills. The top 8 (or 11 for older ages) players in the standings become your starters that week.

When working on a 1v1 dribbling move with a player, say "teach me" to him and make him explain the move.

When working on shooting: after a shot is taken, the player must run up and touch the goal line, then jog outside and around to the side, still facing the goal. This keeps the player staying focused on the goal mouth and makes him aware of going for rebounds.



When Shooting:

- PUSH      push the ball a little bit ahead of you
- PEEK      peek at the goal, see where to shoot, then put the head back down to see the ball
- PLACE      place the ball into the back of the net

Karl Dewazian: "The outcome of our children is infinitely more important than the outcome of any game we will ever coach."