



HTRSA

Hamilton Twp Recreation Soccer Association

**Training Session
Activities for
the
HTRSA
Division 6 (U8)
Players**

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U8: Under 8

(as published by US Youth Soccer)

Some general characteristics of the U-8 player include:

- Attention span is a bit longer than the U-6 player, but still not at the “team at all costs” intensity, not extended.
- Inclined more towards group activities.
- Still very sensitive (dislike failure in front of peers); ridicule from the coach in front of the group is very destructive.
- Beginning to develop some physical coordination.
- Still into running, jumping, climbing, and rolling.
- More into imitation of the big guys (identifying with sports heroes in important)
- Still lack a sense of pace; will run very hard most of the time and chase the ball until they drop.

Implications for training the U-8 player include:

- Training sessions should not exceed 1 hour.
- Give brief directions; repeat when necessary.
- Many activities of short duration.
- A mixture of individual and partner activities. Add more target and maze-type games to the practice.
- Emphasize familiarity and confidence with the ball (every child must have access to a ball throughout every training session)

INTRODUCTION

Organization of player development by age and stage



Children do not learn in the same way as adults, especially when the learning process involves both intellectual *and* physical activity.

Age conditions the way a person perceives and interacts with the world and with others.

In any learning process, age is the key component in selecting appropriate content and methodology. Soccer is no different. For this reason we must not train 6 year old players the same way as 13 years old players. Training sessions must be adapted to the age of the players. Taking into consideration the characteristics of human and player development, we have structured the curriculum into four age groups. The first two age groups are:

1. INITIAL STAGE – 5 TO 8 YEARS OLD

At this age children do not have the same capacity as adults to analyze the environment. They explore and have an egocentric conception of the world. Children are still gathering the experience necessary to interact with their surroundings and with others. Also, empathy and the capacity to consider the thoughts and feelings of others is very low. In order to help children build their own experience, many exercises will be individual (e.g. each player will have a ball). The tactical component of the game will be reduced to small-sided games with basic explanations about space distribution. Training sessions will be treated more as physical education than specifically as soccer training.

2. BASIC STAGE – 9 TO 12 YEARS OLD

At this stage, the structure (but not the content) of the training sessions will be similar to that of older players. The main component of the training session will be technical. It is sensible at this age to develop technique and basic tactical understanding. Children's capacity to solve problems increases significantly. Therefore players will begin working on basic and dynamic tactical scenarios. At this stage, players are pre-pubescent and have important physical limitations in terms of strength and endurance.

3. INTERMEDIATE STAGE – 13 AND 14 YEARS OLD

Players at this age develop a good understanding of the game. However, these players are limited by their physical size and the significant changes, which arise with puberty. Safety should be the number one priority for the coach. The coach must be cautious to avoid overtraining should focus more on tactical and technical elements of the game and less on the physical aspects. Tactical training plays an important role at this age.

4. ADVANCED STAGE – 15 TO 18 YEARS OLD

Players at this age have completed most of their physical and mental development. All components of training can be combined and organized with the purpose of developing the highest potential of the player. The strength of the muscles helps to develop technique at high speed and this speed helps the player to react faster to tactical situations. This stage is crucial for combining all the components of soccer in order to increase the players' soccer knowledge.

These are some of the facts in terms of human development adapted to soccer. In this document these facts are used to develop the most appropriate training methodology for each age group.

PRINCIPLES OF AGE APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

Training characteristics based on human development

STAGES	AGE GROUPS	CHARACTERISTICS
INITIAL	U6	Very young players from 5 to 8 years of age love to play. Therefore, all practices should be based on fun games.
	U7	Players must spend the maximum time possible in contact with the ball and experiment by themselves. For the first time the player has to build a relationship with other players. Give different responsibilities to the players in order to develop a sense of team.
	U8	Basic motor skills like walking, running or jumping have to be combined with ball handling and ball control.
BASIC	U9	The pubescent players from age 9 to 12 years have a special ability to learn. Therefore, this is the right age to work on specific soccer techniques and skills. Developing good technique is essential at this age.
	U10	1v1 and 2v1 attacking and defending situations are important to develop individual skills as well as the passing techniques to develop the necessary team game.
	U11	Use small-sided games to develop basic attacking and defensive principles. Other important aspects of tactical training are possession, combination play, transition and finishing in the final third, as well as zonal defending. Players will rotate in two or three different positions to avoid early specialization.
	U12	Speed, coordination, balance and agility are the main physical aspects to improve at this stage.
INTERMEDIATE	U13	At this stage, training sessions are orientated more toward tactics and the player will practice in bigger spaces. Players must practice all different types of techniques at this stage.
	U14	Strength and endurance should be part of the fitness training. Coaching methods have to consider and preserve players' health since they will be experiencing many changes due to puberty at this stage. Warm-ups and cool downs are essential as is dynamic flexibility. Players must develop discipline at this stage by following the instructions of the coach both during and outside training sessions.

COACH'S CHECKLIST!

The following is a list of what is recommended for good soccer practices:

- A Ball for Every Player.** This is a MUST. Ask each player to bring a ball to practice with their name on it. Make it a team rule! Also, buy a hand pump to keep the balls inflated!

 - Cones or Small Soccer "Disk" Cones.** Disk cones are ideal for marking areas for small sided games. You need roughly 25 disk cones for your team. Disk cones look like an upside down bowl and come in fluorescent yellow and orange. They are about \$18 for a set of 25 at www.usyouthsoccershop.com but are available elsewhere. Consider buying a strap to keep your disk cones on. It's worth it!

 - A Way To Identify "Teams".** You can buy practice vests (also called "bibs", "vests" or "pinneys") for about \$5 each at www.usyouthsoccershop.com. Another cheap way is to cut the sleeves & bottoms off old t-shirts & use the tops as practice vests; you can dye them in different colors to make enough for several teams. Another way is to buy a 3-pack of men's "Athletic T-shirts" (about \$6.00) in the XLarge size. Cut off the top about 3 inches below the bottom of the sleeve. If you need different colors, dye them.

 - Shin guards & Water.** Every player should wear shin guards & bring a plastic water bottle with their name on it. Consider taking extra water because some players/parents always forget.

 - A Whistle.** A cheap one will do. This will be hugely helpful in getting attention.

 - A Stopwatch/Timer.** You can get by without this, but it makes it a lot easier to run timed games.

 - An Equipment Bag.** To keep your gear in. If you coach in the Fall, Dick's usually supplies each HTRSA rec team with one. You should put some Band-Aids or a small medical kit (about \$5) in it. One of the instant ice packs is good to have as well.

 - Assistants.** The more the better. Ask parents to help, even if it is just to pick up balls.
- Do You Need a Goal or a Lined Field?** Nope! If you have cones you can create your own area. However, a goal or a net backstop is handy if you are practicing shooting.
- A Great Attitude!** If the players see the coach having a good attitude, that will rub off. Remember to keep it FUN!



Tips for Good Soccer Practices

1. Kids love playing games and keeping score. **In practice, try to use more Practice Games and less drills.** If it's not fun, it's not a good Practice Game. Everyone should stay active and participate. **AVOID LINES!** Run games by keeping time (e.g., so they last 1, 3, or 5 minutes) or by keeping score (e.g., first to 3, 12, etc.) This is especially true for the younger age groups.
2. **You MUST have at least one ball per player.** This is absolutely critical. Players should bring a ball with their name on it to every practice. Ask players to bring extra balls or buy some.
3. Take the time to plan your practice so when you get to the field you are prepared. Figure out what skill you are teaching, what games you will be playing and how you want to set up your cones. You should only need 15 minutes to plan your practice.
4. **Maximize "touches" on the ball.** At least 100 touches on the ball per practice for each player. Do this by doing dribbling and ball juggling games.
5. Teach proper technique and use games that practice skills or simulate play or "match conditions". Practice Games are much better than drills because they involve competition and pressure (which drills don't) and better prepare players to perform under pressure in "match" conditions and at "game speed". It is one thing to perform an activity without pressure, but it is very different to perform the same activity at "game speed" and under pressure. Players improve more quickly and become better players when they practice at game speed in match-related conditions.
6. Praise hustle, improvement and a good attitude. Measure each player's performance by his or her personal improvement and effort, and not by comparing them to someone else. Try to motivate in a positive way that builds self-esteem.
7. A good Practice Game must be easy and quick to set up by **one coach** and should be simple to explain and manage. If you are spending too much time on set up or instruction, simplify it. You should be able to play the game in a small area and without special equipment, except for cones or "disk cones". This is important so you can achieve more in your practices and not waste time. Think about the benefit of being able to achieve 20% or 30% more in each practice.
8. Limit or don't use practice games that eliminate or "knock-out" players. For Recreational players, we believe in positive motivation and we don't believe in punishing a child who has tried their best but lost a practice game. Practice Games shouldn't make the losers leave the game or run laps. Don't use knock-out or elimination games that leave the players who need the most practice on the sideline. From a practical perspective, punishing players slows down practice and elimination games don't produce as many touches on the ball.
9. Avoid general scrimmaging for more than 10 minutes per hour. In general scrimmages players don't get enough touches on the ball, the weaker players tend to get the fewest touches and bad habits can be reinforced because players tend to do the same things they have always done. If you scrimmage, do so without a goalkeeper and encourage players to work the ball close to the goal before shooting.
10. Remember to AVOID the 3 "L"s (**Lines, Laps, & Lectures**) & STRESS the two "F"s: (**Fun and Fundamentals**) and adopt this philosophy: **"Keep it simple, keep them active, keep it fun & at least 100 touches per player per practice"!**



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Dribbling Moves from NY Red Bull Academy!



For video clips of these go to: <http://www.redbullsacademy.com/training/skills.aspx>

Try these for your players at your training sessions! These are (for the most part) listed from easy to difficult!

The ROLL

As the player approaches a defender, they drag ('roll') the ball across the front of the body using the SOLE/BOTTOM of their RIGHT foot and then takes the ball past the defender with the inside of the LEFT foot.

The ROLL STEP

The player drags ('rolls') the ball across the front of the body using the SOLE/BOTTOM of their RIGHT foot and then steps over the top of the ball with the LEFT foot and carries on in the same direction.

The FEINT (Outside cut)

As you approach the defender, lean to the left, dropping the left shoulder and planting the LEFT foot outside the line of the ball, and take the ball away with the outside of the RIGHT foot in the opposite direction.

The DOUBLE FEINT

As you approach the defender, lean to the left, drop the left shoulder and plant the LEFT foot outside the line of the ball, move the RIGHT foot BEHIND the ball planting on the other side dropping the right shoulder and take the ball away with the outside of the LEFT foot in the opposite direction.

The INSIDE/OUTSIDE - Part 1

Move the ball with the INSIDE of the RIGHT foot to the left side, plant the right foot quickly and then take the ball away in the opposite direction with the outside of the right foot.

The INSIDE/OUTSIDE -Part 2

Touch/move the ball with the INSIDE of the right foot to the left side and then quickly take the ball away in the opposite direction with the outside of the right foot **without planting** the right foot.

The SCISSORS (Reverse Step-Over)

Player moves their RIGHT foot in a clockwise direction OVER the ball planting their foot to the right of the ball, dropping the right shoulder as the right foot plants, and then takes the ball past the defender with the outside of the LEFT foot.



The DOUBLE SCISSORS (Reverse Step-Over x2)

Player moves their RIGHT foot in a clockwise direction OVER the ball planting their foot to the right of the ball, then quickly brings the LEFT foot OVER the ball in a counter-clockwise direction finishing and planting to the left of the ball and then takes the ball past the defender with the outside of the RIGHT foot.

The INSIDE SCISSORS

Move the ball with the INSIDE of the RIGHT foot to the left side, step over the front of the ball with the RIGHT foot and plant and then take the ball past the defender with the outside of the LEFT foot.

The STEP OVER

As the attacker approaches the defender they place their RIGHT foot over the ball and plant it and take the ball away with the OUTSIDE of the RIGHT foot in the opposite direction.

The PUSH AND RUN

Approach the defender quickly and push the ball around the defender with the outside of the foot. The player quickly bursts around the other side of the defender and re-connects with the ball.

The CHOP

Take the ball towards the right side of the defender, and use the INSIDE of the RIGHT foot on the outside of the ball to chop the ball back BEHIND the opposite leg. At point of contact BOTH FEET should be OFF THE GROUND! Continue in the direction of the ball.

For video clips of these go to: <http://www.redbullsacademy.com/training/skills.aspx>





Turning Moves from NY Red Bull Academy!



For video clips of these go to: <http://www.redbullsacademy.com/training/skills.aspx>

Try these for your players at your training sessions! These are (for the most part) listed from easy to difficult!

The OUTSIDE CUT

Contact is made with the OUTSIDE of the foot while the non-kicking foot comes past the ball and plants allowing the player to pivot. Next touch is made with the nearest surface of the nearest foot while shielding the ball

The INSIDE CUT

Contact is made with the INSIDE of the foot taking the ball ACROSS the body into space. At the point of contact the knees bend to create a platform from which to accelerate!

The STOP TURN

Stop the ball with the SOLE/BOTTOM of the foot. Step PAST THE BALL and plant with the foot that stopped the ball. The knees bend to create a platform from which to accelerate. The next touch is made with the nearest surface of the nearest foot taking the ball in the opposite direction.

The U TURN

The non-kicking foot plants as the kicking foot reaches for the ball. Drag the ball BACK in the opposite direction shielding the ball as you turn. The next touch is made with the nearest surface of the nearest foot.

The CRYUFF TURN

Fake to strike the ball by planting the non-kicking foot in front of the ball. Use the inside of the opposite foot to move the ball BEHIND the non-kicking foot shielding the ball as you turn.

The STEP OVER

Pretend to play the ball with the INSIDE of the foot but move the foot around the front of the ball instead. Plant that foot and pivot back in the opposite direction. Take the ball away using the same foot.

The SLAP CUT

The ball is moved across the front of the body with the sole/bottom of the foot. The player IMMEDIATELY cuts the ball back with the OUTSIDE of the SAME FOOT creating space to pass or shoot.



Monday, Oct. 21, 2013

How coaches' mouths lose games

By Mike Voitalla

I suspected this many times as a coach and spectator, but it comes through even more clearly when I referee: Coaches can destroy their teams with the way they shout from the sidelines.

When you're reffing, you see up-close the children's faces after they get screamed at. It's a sad sight.

In my most recent example, a 10-year-old team had so much bad luck I had to restrain myself from consoling the kids (not part of the ref's job description). While going down 1-0, they hit the post three times and all the while they're getting reprimanded by screams from their coaches. (I'm using the plural because this team -- like many I've seen -- had *two* coaches doing minute-by-minute sideline screaming.)

In this game in which they dominated but got very unlucky, they collapsed and went down 4-1 by halftime -- despite being the more talented team. The game also marked the fifth time this year, in games from U-14 to U-9, that I saw a goal scored because a key defender was distracted -- looking to the sidelines -- by the coach's instructions.

And it wasn't just the coaches. Screams came from the parents' sidelines. I heard them all so the players' must have as well. And I wish I was making this up, but these are real examples:

"We need a new defense!"

"If you're not going to pass, then at least take a shot!"

The latter after a 10-year-old took the ball in his own half, smoothly faked out three players, but before shooting had the ball poked away. His efforts may not have produced a goal, but the dribbling was fabulous and he won a corner kick.

There's no doubt in my mind that the coaches' screaming creates an environment that emboldens parents to yell -- and even creates discord among the players. The coach constantly "instructs" and berates the players, the parents follow suit, and the players start believing that when something goes wrong the suitable reaction is to place blame.

It's hard for me to believe that the boy who yelled at a teammate, "What are you doing!?" wasn't inspired because the *exact* phrase had come from the sidelines earlier in the game.

When we coach, we have a very strong desire to help our kids succeed. With good intentions, we want to aid or correct right away. But most people -- big or small -- who get hammered right after they make a mistake experience a giant loss in confidence. Not productive during a competition.

My recommendations for youth coaches:

* Referee some games -- to get an up-close look -- and watch how the children react to getting screamed at. Decide for yourself if it brings out the best in them.

* Do not prowl the sidelines. Watch from a chair. Nervous energy makes one want to stand and pace, but the children notice how unnerved you are and it doesn't instill confidence. (*Further Reading: [Claudio Reyna: 'Coaches should sit down'](#)*)

* When you spot the mistake or bad decision -- and that urge hits to address it with a scream from the sidelines -- instead of yelling, jot it down in a notebook as something you'll bring up in an unemotional way at halftime or at a future practice.

* If you have a really hard time suppressing the desire to articulate your frustration, chat with your assistant coach.

* Consider the probability that what's going wrong in the game might be your fault.

(Mike [Woitalla](#), the executive editor of Soccer America, is co-author, with Tim Mulqueen, of [The Complete Soccer Goalkeeper](#) and co-author with Claudio Reyna of [More Than Goals: The Journey from Backyard Games to World Cup Competition](#). [Woitalla's youth soccer articles are archived at YouthSoccerFun.com.](#))



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3 Points/Captain's Island Game

SETUP:

Setup an enclosed "island" area with cones. All players are on the "island" with a soccer ball.

THE GAME:

All players start with 3 points. On "AND...BEGIN!" all players begin dribbling on the island.

All players MUST STAY on the island and keep the ball close to them.

Coach (the "Captain") can bark out commands: "LEFT FOOT ONLY!", "OUTSIDE FOOT ONLY!", "LACES ONLY!", "DRIBBLE FAST!", etc.

On "SWITCH" the player must leave their ball and dribble another.

When Captain yells "STOP", player must use the BOTTOM of the foot to STOP THE BALL DEAD and spread their arms out: ...OR...

When Captain yells "CAPTAIN ON DECK!" players must use the sole of their foot to STOP THE BALL DEAD and make eye contact with the coach, salute and say "Aye-Aye, Captain!" and then...spread their arms out:

If a player does not stop the ball, they lose a point.

If a player does not stay on the island, they lose a point.

If a player can touch another player, they lose a point.

Don't be the first one to ZERO!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Keeping the ball close while dribbling and dribbling in traffic and dribbling to an open space.



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Catch That Fish!

SETUP:

Play the length of short sided Field! Players in 2 teams (use practice vests). One is Attacking and one is Defending.

All players on one End Line. Coach has all the soccer balls.

Attacking Fish (Player A) is trying to score in far goal...and Defending Fish (Player B) is trying to prevent that.

THE GAME:

As coach's signal Attacker (Player A) begins dribbling down the field toward the goal. At coach's command of "Catch That Fish!" (in 2 seconds?, 5 seconds?) Defender (Player B) runs to catch them and prevent the goal being scored. Defender may kick the ball out of bounds or try to steal the ball and dribble it back.

WHAT THIS TEACHES/COACHING POINTS:

For the ATTACKER: Dribbling under pressure is TOUGH but part of the game! Dribble fast to the goal, keep the defender from stealing the ball and try to shoot from a distance.

For the DEFENSE: Don't run by the attacker and into the GOAL! Run to the BALL and try to steal it!



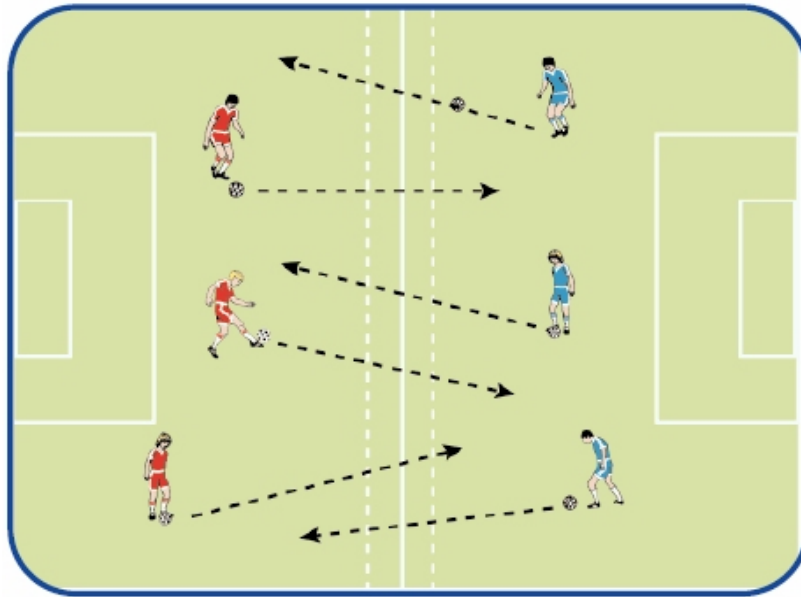
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Clean Up Your Yard

SETUP: A small field area marked by cones. All soccer balls are spread out evenly throughout the areas. *If coaching U8 players, create a middle zone with cones.

2 teams, all players line up on their end line.



THE GAME: When coach says "AND...BEGIN!" teams come off their endline and DRIBBLE/PASS/KICK the balls that are in their "yard" over to the other team's "yard". Players CANNOT go into the other team's yard.

Key: Players should try to kick the ball to where the other team's players aren't!

Game goes for 2 to 3 minutes. The team with the least number of soccer balls in their "yard" wins!

Rule for U8 teams: Players cannot go into the middle zone!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Dribbling and kicking the ball to a spot. Retrieving the ball, working as a team!



Cone Goal Pass

SETUP:

Group the players in pairs and each pair has one soccer ball.

Two cones about **1 to 3 yards apart** between **each pair** of players. The younger the age, the more space you should have between the cones!

THE GAME:

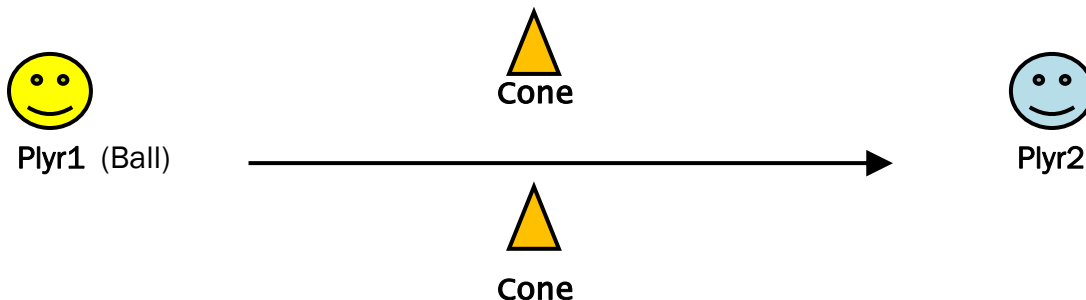
Go over the correct Inside of the Foot PASSING technique.

Players strike and pass their ball back and forth to each other between their cone goal ...**OR**...

NOTE! – You *MAY* want to play by having Player 1 on their knees rolling the ball to Player 2 to traps it and then passes back. This will give the player a more concentrated time with the ball and means less soccer balls flying everywhere! Switch after 90 seconds.

Feel free to practice both inside of the foot and instep (“LACES”) kicks.

Variation#1: After (if!) players get the hang of it, add some competition by seeing who can ‘score’ the most “goals” in 1 minute!



WHAT THIS TEACHES:

This teaches the Inside of the Foot pass and Instep Kick which is critical for players to learn and aiming through a target (goal).

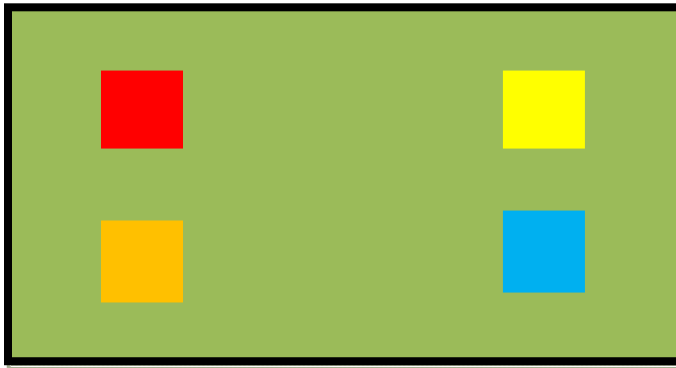
****Warning!** BE PATIENT WITH THE PLAYERS AS THIS WILL LOOK VERY UGLY with soccer balls going everywhere! But it is necessary to spend time on this for their development! Gently correct any improper technique.



Crazy Drivers

SETUP: All players have a ball.

Have different items and / or different colored cones, objects (Ball Bag, Goals, Parents! etc.) around the area/field. (The best: *If you have different color cones, make 6x6 yard square/triangle areas of like color cones).



THE GAME:

Tell the players they are taking their soccer ball for a "drive" and you the coach are going to tell them how to drive! *Have players say "beep-beep" if they get too close to another player (Car).* Work for 3 minutes then rest.

Players start dribbling. Coach commands driving speed: "FAST!", "SLOW", "CRUISE", "STOP!" as well as "INSIDE FOOT", "OUTSIDE FOOT", "LACES!".

If coach yells "SWITCH!" players must leave their ball and go to another. If coach yells "U TURN!" players must do a U Turn. (Really, you can pick ANY sort of skill here!)

When Coach yells "Dribble to the Red cone/square," all players dribble to the Red cone/square.

When Coach yells "Dribble to Coach Jim", all players dribble to the coach, etc. Coach can also split it up for example "girls dribble to red cone, boys dribble to the yellow cone!"

VARIATION#1: Divide players into 2 teams...then you can call out: "Team1, dribble to red cone/square... Team2, dribble to yellow cone/square" etc.

VARIATION#2: Call out shapes for example: "dribble outside the small squares"... "inside the small red square"...and "Team1 dribble outside the small squares, Team2 dribble inside the red square..."

WHAT THIS TEACHES: How to dribble in traffic and dribbling to a specific point!



Dribble & Cut Through the Minefield

SETUP:

Spread out cones randomly around an area. Every player has a ball.

THE GAME:

Have players dribble their ball through and at the cones. At every cone they should do either an inside or outside cut to change direction and get around the cone. The idea is to get them to **CHANGE DIRECTION** at the cone! **DO NOT TOUCH THE CONE!**

Players can walk through the course. **NOT A Race!**

VARIATION #1 - spread out cones randomly and have players dribble to any cone and do a change of direction move not just a touch around it!

Change of direction moves being:

- Outside cut,
- Inside cut,
- Hook/U Turn,
- Stop Turn,
- Reverse Step-Over, etc.

...then go to another cone and repeat!

When Coach says "Switch!" players leave their ball and go to another.

Coach can call out moves to do! Make it FUN!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

This is for the player to work on their skill with the ball while moving in traffic like game day.



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Dribble Across the Field Race

SETUP:

Use your assistant coach or recruit a parent!

Use a small side field (30x20 yard area).

The players are divided into 2 teams. One team is spread out on one end-line and the other group is spread out on the opposite end-line. Every player has a ball. One coach stands with one group and the other coach (or parent) stands with the other group.

THE GAME:

When the coach says "GO!" players must dribble their ball across the field (Keep those heads up as players will be dribbling toward each other!), keeping the ball close and dribble to the coach/parent on that side and slap them on the hand.

The first team that completes this wins!

Coach may move across the end-line so the players cannot just look at the ball they are dribbling but must look up to find where the coach is!

Variation#1: Have the players dribble using ONLY the SOLE* (turned like an "L") of their foot to move the ball, or others techniques (Outside foot, Laces, Inside-Outside combo, etc.)

Variation#2: If you have pop-up goals, have them shoot the ball into the net and then run to the coach!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Players work on their dribbling skills BUT also get used to dribbling in traffic and keeping their heads up.

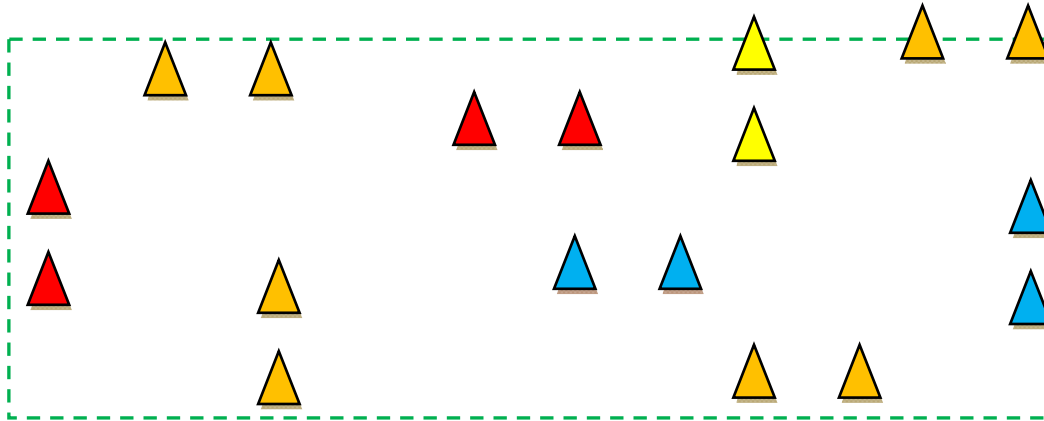
*Why use the SOLE of their foot (turned like an "L") to move the ball?
Because it simulates them turning their foot to make that all-important inside of the foot pass!



Dribbling Thru the Gates

SETUP: Pairs of cones no more than 3 yards apart scattered randomly throughout an area ...probably a 20x40 yard area. The island area does NOT need to be marked off.

Every player has a soccer ball at their feet (although for U6 you can play a round WITHOUT soccer balls to give them confidence).



THE GAME:

When coach says, "AND...BEGIN!" players dribble the ball thru as many cone "gates" as they can. Players should NOT go through the same gate without going through another. Game goes for 60 to 90 seconds and the players keep score!

**For Under 6 age players: Parents should help the players count how many times they pass through the gates as the ability to dribble through gates and count is difficult at this age. Each player gets a chance to repeat the exercise to try and beat their own score. It is appropriate for younger players to compete against themselves, not other players.

VARIATION: For a round the Coach orders players to use only the OUTSIDE/INSIDE of their feet ...BOTTOM of their feet (turned like an "L") ...or orders players to SWITCH balls during the game! Play again and see if players can better their score.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

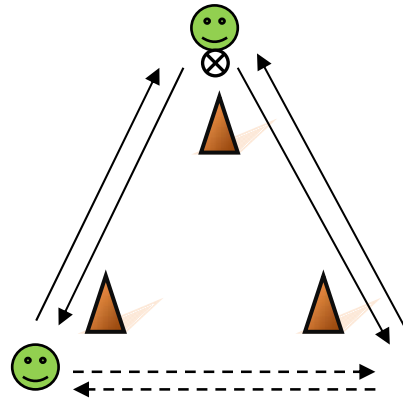
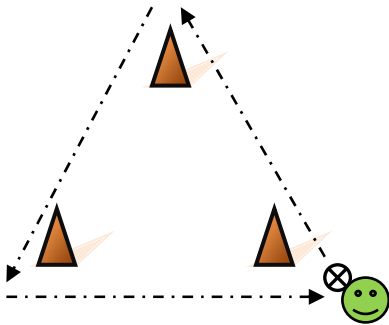
Players will have to keep their head up in traffic! They are learning to dribble to a specific target at a pace that suits them.

Why use the BOTTOM of their foot (turned like an "L") to move the ball? Because it simulates them turning their foot to make that all-important inside of the foot pass...an important skill to learn.



Everton Triangle

SETUP: Sets of 3 cones 5 to 7 yards apart in a TRIANGLE configuration. Two players each with a ball at a triangle.



Path of DRIBBLE = ----->

Path of RUN = ----->

Path of PASS = ----->

BALL = ⊗

THE GAME:

GAME#1: DRIBBLE TRIANGLE – One player dribbles and other player is the counter. First player dribbles their ball around the triangle keeping it under control- how many times can they go around in 60 seconds? Switch players and rest. Then have players go around the triangle the opposite way.

Variation: Player dribbles a COMPLETE CIRCLE around each cone before going to the next one.

GAME#2: PASS and MOVE – 1 player with the ball is the server and stays put at cone 1. The second player moves laterally from cone 2 to cone 3. Receives pass from the server on the outside of the triangle, returns the pass and moves to the other cone and repeats. Go for 60 seconds and switch. You can also do this as GOALKEEPERS! A great exercise!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Getting the player comfortable moving, controlling, passing, and receiving the ball. Movement off the ball is worked on in Game#2 as well. Dribbling is NOT kick and chase!



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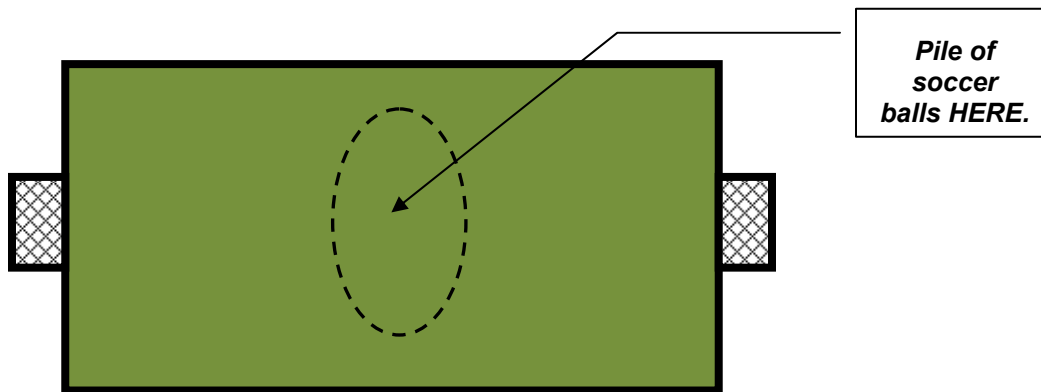
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Feed Your Hungry Monster

SETUP:

A rectangular area **with 2 goals/pop-up goals** on different sides of the area.

All soccer balls (many more than players!) are inside the area in a pile (dotted area below). Players are grouped in teams behind their goal.



THE GAME:

On "GO" players must retrieve the "meatballs" (soccer balls) **one at a time** from the center pile, dribble it back to their goal 'monster' and feed to their monster (kick it in the net!).

Do this until ALL BALLS in the center are gone.

The Team that has fed the most meatballs to their monster (the most soccer balls in their goal) wins!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Hey! Kids love to score goals! Shooting, dribbling under timed pressure.

This game self-adjusts for skill as a skilled kid may do 3 balls in the net while a slower kid may do 1.

See how they run around the ball to get the ball?! Correct them to use a "HOOK/PULL-BACK TURN" instead.



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Fetch the Frogs!

SETUP:

One coach with many soccer balls at his feet. Players are nearby.

THE GAME:

The coach stands in the middle of the training site and collects all of the balls. The coach then explains that players are "Frog Catchers" and must bring the "Frogs" (soccer balls) back to the pond where the coach is.

Frogs are clever and can jump high (coach bounces ball) and move really fast (coach rolls the ball)! Keep your eye on your frog!

The coach puts various conditions on how they retrieve the ball (an example for U6: with one hand; one hand with the ball touching the forehead; both hands and the ball touching their belly button; both hands and the ball touching the top of their head, etc.).

Once the children show comfort with the exercise, they are asked to retrieve the ball with their feet.

The coach kicks and/or throws the balls in different directions 10 to 15 yards away. Each kick/throw is accompanied with a player's name. That player should chase down that frog and quickly retrieve it back to coach.

When they deliver that ball back to you, toss it again! Go for 60-120 seconds.

*Stress that Dribbling is NOT KICK & CHASE! It is controlled movement of the ball!
Touch the ball with every step!*

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

It develops dribbling skills and tracking the ball taking it from point A to point B.

The Game also self-adjusts to a player's skill as a skilled kid may return 5 during the exercise and a novice may return 2.



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Hit the Coach!**

SETUP:

All players are on one side of an enclosed 'island' area marked by cones. Coach CANNOT leave the island area!

Each player has a ball. Coach stands in the area 5 steps away.

The stopwatch is set at two minutes!

THE GAME:

- On "Go", the Coach runs slowly away while players dribble to chase him & try to hit him with the ball (below the knees!) by shooting/passing at him.
- They (the group) gets 1 point each time they hit him
- If you have more than 10 kids recruit parents to help & split into 2 games, so it is less crowded
- Stay in a small area & have fun with this game and play for about 2 minutes. How many times can they hit the coach?!

GO CRAZY! Before starting, tell the players that if they as a group hit you 3 or 5 times (total) you will make the sound of their favorite animal, like a dog or a cow, etc. but if they don't...THEY must imitate an animal! When you are hit X amount of times, stop & let them choose a sound. Then start all over!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Dribbling in traffic and shooting/passing at a moving target! Just like during the game! Plus, it shows that the coach can have fun too! 😊



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Hot Potato!

SETUP:

Every player has a soccer ball and starts with the ball in front of their feet.

The coach is in the middle with a stopwatch.

THE GAME:

Explain to the players that the ball is a HOT POTATO and the only way to cool it down is by touching/tapping it on top with their foot! Coach demonstrates the skill.

Coach blows the whistle and the players touch the top of the ball with the bottom of their foot/toes alternating their feet if possible.

Start stationary and then see if they can tap alternating feet while going around the ball.

How many touches can each player get in 30 seconds?!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

We are helping develop the player's fine motor skills!

This teaches and reinforces control of the ball. Keep knees bent & tap ball with the front of the foot (this gives better control than the back of the foot).



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Keep Away (1 vs. 2)

SETUP:

Use both halves of a small soccer field and run two games at once.

THE GAME:

Coach picks 3 players. Ball is placed in area.

Players want to try and keep the ball as long as possible from the other 2 players.

Players **MUST STAY** in the area. If the ball goes out, the turn ends.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Shielding the ball and keeping it and taking the ball away from an opponent.



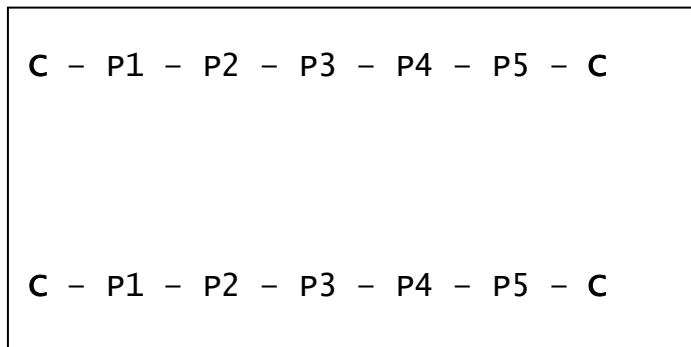
Numbers vs. Numbers

SETUP:

Split the team in half and set up a rectangular area marked with 4 cones. Two opposite ends of this area should be able to fit one half of the team with arms spread apart on the line.

Half of the team stands across the "line" between the cones and the other half stands on the "line" opposite them as shown below: (if possible, have one team wear the same color practice 'vests').

C = Cone P = Player



Every player on each line receives a number i.e. 1, 2, 3, etc and they are to remember that number!

THE GAME:

Coach will kick a soccer ball into the area and call a number or numbers OR player names. (for example: "2s and 5s and Adam!"). Players called with those numbers/names are to enter the field and try to control the ball and get it past the other team's line for a goal.

The other players whose numbers were NOT called must STAY ON THE LINE and try to prevent the ball from passing them. NO HANDS! If ball goes out of the sideline, play is done.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Attacking, defending a goal, controlling the ball...putting it all together.



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'Outta Here!

SETUP:

Create a small 2v2 field approximately 15X20 yards with two small goals on each endline. Split the group into two even teams and line them up on the same sideline with the coach in the middle with a pile of soccer balls. It would help if one group wore alternate jerseys.

THE GAME:

The coach will play a ball into the area and call out a player(s) names. Those players must then sprint onto the field and play. The game should continue until a goal is scored or the ball goes out of bounds.

If a goal is scored the scoring team/player stays on while the defending team comes off.

If ball goes out of bounds coach shouts "Get Outta-Here!" and all players must leave the field and sprint back to their team's line!

Variation#1: *If doing 1v1, have more than one 1v1 going at the same time (yes, the same field!)*

Variation#2: *Call out more players to create a 3v2 or 3v3.*

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

- Encourages players to take on their opponent.
- Encourages players to shoot when they have a chance of a goal.
- That yes...there is a SIDELINE/Out of BOUNDS!
- It's a game...just like Saturday!



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Pac Man

(from the USYouth Soccer Coaching Manual)

SETUP:

Two players each with a soccer ball and all other players without a soccer ball on a 20x20 yard "Island Area" marked by cones.

THE GAME:

The two players with the ball are the "Pac Men". The Pac Men dribble their soccer balls and attempt to hit the other players **BELOW THE KNEE** with a pass. Players try to avoid being hit by running, jumping, and dodging.

Once a player is hit they retrieve a ball and join the Pac Men. The game continues until all players have been hit.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

This activity encourages dribbling and passing to a moving target, decision making, changing direction, endurance, and allows all ability levels to play equally.

If players are hit early, they will have more opportunity to dribble. If they manage to avoid getting hit until near the end, their challenge increases greatly.



Pass & Chase, Turn & Shoot!

SETUP:

Use a regular size soccer goal. Two lines of players with 2 cones on each side of the GOAL. Cone A in each line is just outside the penalty box area with second (Cone B) about 12-15 yrd behind it. Two groups of players with balls line up behind cone B in each line. At Cone A is a Player 1 without a ball with their back to the goal. Goalkeeper in the goal.

All extra soccer balls are nearby. Lots!

▲ = Cone ⊗ = Ball

☺ = Player/Passer

☹ = Player/Shooter

Path of DRIBBLE/TURN = - - - - ->

Path of RUN = - - - - ->

Path of PASS = ———>

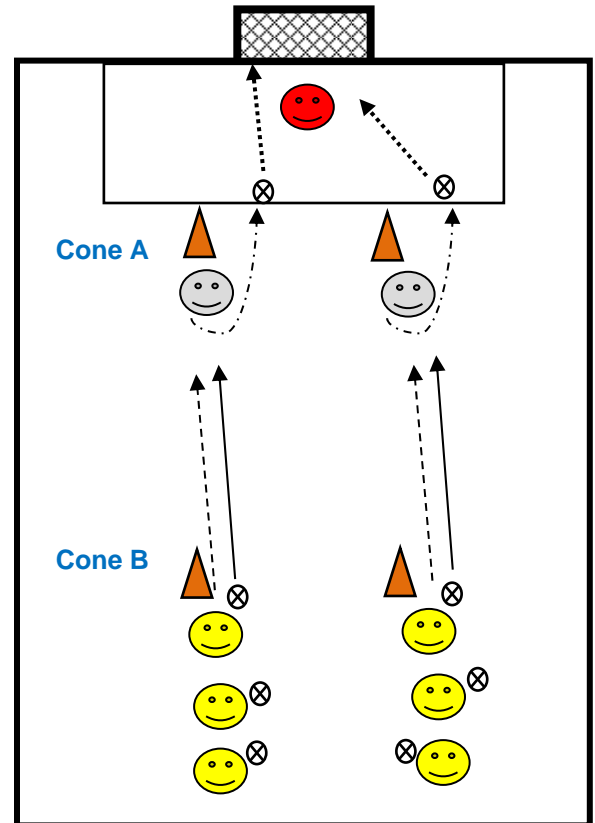
THE GAME:

Player 2 in the line at Cone B passes to Player 1 who has their back to the goal at Cone A. Player 1 gets a good first touch on the ball and turns (2 touches max) and shoots on goal then gets in line at Cone B. Meanwhile Player 2 runs to Cone A (* OR see variation description) and takes the place where Player 1 was. And so it continues. Put a goalkeeper in the goal and alternate lines (one lines goes then another). Do until all balls are gone. Have players get the balls after the game. Switch sides.

PROGRESSION/VARIATION: Turn the passer to a chasing defender after the pass! They should run and try to get the ball away from Player 1 before they shoot, which will force a quicker shot from the shooter!! After they chase then they are the shooter.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Getting comfortable turning the ball and shooting. Look UP before you SHOOT! Shoot at the NET! NOT the Goalkeeper!! Variation gets players to turn & shoot under pressure.





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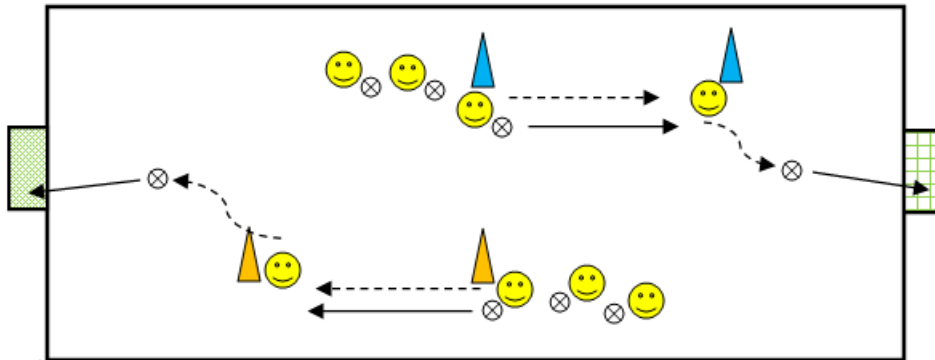
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Pass, Turn, and SHOOT Lines!

SETUP:

Two lines each with 2 cones facing GOAL. Cone A in each line is just above penalty box area with second Cone B about 12-15 yards behind.

Cone A has one player (Player 1) without ball and Cone B has many players with soccer balls.



THE GAME:

Player 1 has his back to goal and receives a pass from Player 2 at Cone B.

Player 1 traps the ball and turns/pullbacks the ball past/around his cone.

Player 1 after turning SHOOTS on goal then gets in line at Cone B. DO NOT dribble ball into goal!

Meanwhile Player 2 runs to Cone A and takes the place where Player 1 was.

And so it goes. Have this running at BOTH goals OR have two lines at the same goal.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

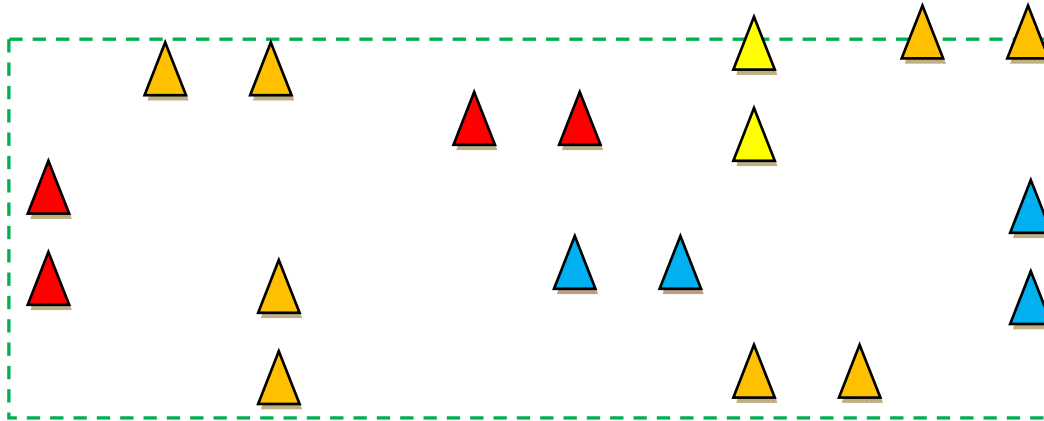
Passing...turning the ball under control and shooting! Players should look up before getting off a shot.



Passing Thru the Gates

SETUP: Pairs of cones 'gates' no more than 3 yards apart scattered randomly throughout an island area probably a 20x20 yard area. ('Gates' could be 3x3 yard squares too). The island area does NOT need to be marked off.

Players in pairs and each pair has a soccer ball.



THE GAME: When coach says, "AND...BEGIN!" all player pairs attempt to play as many passes to each other as possible through the cone 'gates'. Players cannot play a ball through the same gate on consecutive passes. Hence they must DRIBBLE to another gate!

Game goes for 60 to 90 seconds and the players keep score.

Each player group gets a chance to repeat the game to try and beat their own score. It is appropriate for younger players to compete against themselves, not other players.

VARIATION: For a round the Coach orders players to move the ball only with the OUTSIDE/INSIDE of their feet ...BOTTOM of their feet (turned like an "L") ...or orders players to SWITCH balls during the game! Play again and see if players can better their score.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

This activity encourages problem-solving, speed of passing, changing direction, and receiving and passing to feet. Players will have to keep their head up in traffic and the pairs must work together! They should talk and communicate! They are learning to dribble to a specific target and pass to a target at a pace that suits them.

Why use the BOTTOM of their foot (turned like an "L") to move the ball? Because it simulates them turning their foot to make that all-important inside of the foot pass...an important skill to learn.



Reach the Square Game

SETUP:

Set up (ideally) six 6x6 yard squares as shown below. Three squares marked by RED cones (7+ yards between the squares) and 20 yards from that have three squares marked by another color let's say BLUE cones.

Three players without a soccer ball (the Ps) stand just outside the blue squares. All other players (the Xs) are in one of the red squares each with a soccer ball.



THE GAME:

On coach's command every player must change to a square at the other end. The team/players in the middle (the Ps) try to regain the ball in the process and dribble to one of the original squares.

Whoever is able to switch to a square with a ball gets a point. After 60-90 seconds stop the game and any player who has NOT reached a square gets ZERO points.

Play again before switching players. See how many points each player gets. Rotate until all players have started without the ball.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Dribbling in traffic and dribbling to a target under pressure and give them experience in taking away the ball from another player!

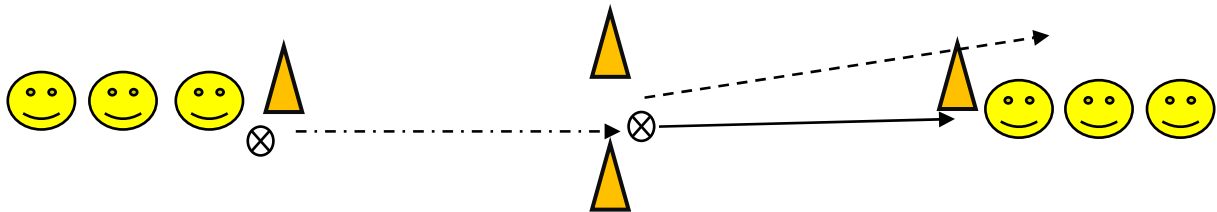


Receiving Line (Dribble and Pass)

SETUP:

Two cones, spaced apart, half of the group on one side (side A) in a line and the other half behind the other cone (side B) facing them in a line.

One ball. No more than 8 players per game. If more, have 2 games running.



Path of DRIBBLE =→

Path of RUN =→

Path of PASS = —————→

BALL = ⊗

THE GAME:

Player1 (Side A) with the ball dribbles the ball (touch it with every step!) through the cone(s) at the middle. Once at the middle they pass the ball the Player2 at the other line on Side B. Then player on Side B dribbles the ball through the cone(s) at the middle and does the same. Players go back to the end of line they passed to.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Gets players used to dribbling the ball with purpose/to a specific target

Passing while moving!

First touch sets up your second touch!



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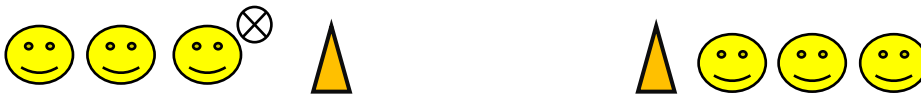
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Receiving Line (Throw In)

SETUP:

Two cones, spaced apart, half of the group on one side (side A) in a line and the other half behind the other cone (side B) facing them in a line.

One ball. No more than 8 players per game. If more, have 2 games running.



THE GAME:

First player (Side A) with the ball uses a Throw-in technique to throw ball to first player on Side B. After throwing the ball the Side A player runs toward the receiving player to simulate pressure BUT DOES NOT TAKE THE BALL AWAY! After pressure they go back to the end of Side B's line.

Receiving Player on Side B brings down the ball and then dribbles to the Side A line and leaves the ball at his feet to repeat.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

First touch and importance of trapping the ball

Get in line with the ball

Select what part of body you will use to trap the ball

Relax body part at impact

First touch sets up your second touch!

Ball should come down no farther than a "legs length" away.



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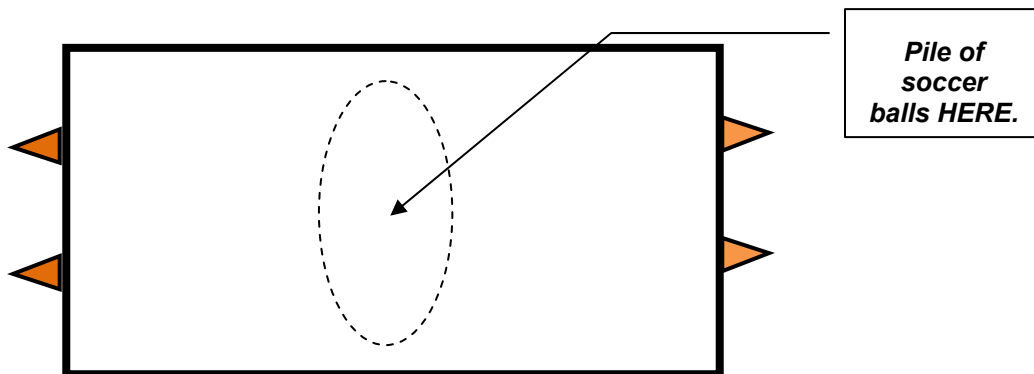
Rock Collectors

SETUP:

A rectangular area (20x30 yard area) **with 2 Cone Goals** on opposite sides of the area.

All soccer balls, many more than players, are scattered about in the mid-field area (dotted area below).

Players are grouped in teams behind their 'goal'.



THE GAME: Tell the players they are rock collectors. All the soccer balls are rocks!

On "GO" teams must COLLECT balls (one at a time) from the center pile, **dribble it back THRU their CONE GOALS and leave it there and go back and get more.** Do this until ALL BALLS in the center are gone. The team with the most rocks (soccer balls) collected wins!

Players should keep the ball close! Dribbling is NOT KICK AND CHASE!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Dribbling to a target under timed pressure.

This game self-adjusts for skill as a skilled kid may collect 3 balls for his team while a slower kid may do 1.



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Shark Attack!

SETUP:

- Use pylons to create a 15 to 20 yard square.
- One player, the SHARK, starts outside the square without a ball.
- All other players, the TUNA FISHES, start inside the square (the TANK) each with a ball.

THE GAME:

- At the start, players in the Tank begin dribbling. Coach can use commands like "Outside Foot Only"... "Inside Foot Only"... "Do a U Turn"...etc.
- When the coach yells, "Shark's getting hungry!" the shark starts running around the outside of the square and the fish start dribbling around inside the square.
- Coach yells, "SHARK ATTACK!" the shark enters the square and has 30 - 45 seconds to kick balls outside the square "tank". When a ball leaves the square for any reason, the corresponding fish must leave the square and sit down.
- Choose a new shark and play another round until every player has been the shark once.

Play once and then explain and illustrate what "SHIELDING THE BALL" is. Explain that the player should put himself between the opposing player and the ball.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

For the TUNAS: Dribbling quickly in traffic and avoiding an opponent. They should also be using their outside, inside, & hoop cuts to keep the ball. Teaches & encourages them to SHIELD the ball from the shark.

For the SHARK: how to strip the ball from another player.



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Soccer Island Tag

SETUP:

Set up an "island" area with cones. It should be a big area like a 30x20 yard area.

All players inside the area with soccer balls, 2 players (the taggers) start outside the area without balls.

NOTE! The players with the balls should be considered a TEAM as should the 2 taggers!

THE GAME:

On "GO" players with the ball dribble around the area. The 2 taggers enter the area and try to tag all the players within 2 minutes.

Once a player is tagged frozen, they can only be un-frozen by another player dribbling by them and touching them.

While dribbling players must keep the ball close to them and stay in the area!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Dribbling to avoid an opponent and dribbling towards a target and teamwork!



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Soccer Marbles

SETUP:

Group all players into groups of pairs with each player having a ball (2 balls per pair).

THE GAME:

Taking turns each player tries to hit the ball of the other player they are grouped with. **NO DRIBBLING!** One kick/pass of the ball is allowed per player turn.

Have the players keep score and have them play for 2 to 3 minutes.

See who gets the most amount of hits.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Passing and kicking accuracy, kicking to a point under no pressure (i.e. goal & free kicks).

(A Good Cool-down game after practice or game)



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Taps

SETUP:

Every player has a soccer ball and starts with the ball between their feet with their knees bent.

THE GAME:

To start with, on coach's command each player bends down & touches the ball **between their hands** as many times as they can in 10 seconds. Do the same activity for **elbows**!

Use hands and elbows as the confidence builder. It's the FOOT touches that require balance and is harder!

Then, the next time, each player taps the ball **between their feet**. This is tricky as it requires balance and more coordination!

How many touches can each player get? Repeat 2 times

.

VARIATION#1:

Do '**Tap on Tops**' where the players touch the top of the ball with the bottom of their foot/toes. Start stationary and then see if they can tap alternating feet while going around the ball.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

We are helping develop the player's fine motor skills! This teaches and reinforces control of the ball. Keep knees bent & tap ball with the front of the foot (this gives better control than the back of the foot).



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Tigers & Antelopes a.k.a: “Sharks & Minnows”

SETUP:

A Big enclosed area about half a field size marked with cones.

Players (antelopes) each with a ball line up on one side of the field. If a large number players, start by doing it in 2 shifts.

Coach(s) (the ‘tigers’) start in the middle of the area.

THE GAME:

Players dribble their ball across the field and thru the Tiger(s) to the other side.

For first crossing, coach should not try to get the ball but go in front of player and force them to turn with the ball. Get more aggressive as rounds continue.

If a tiger kicks an antelope’s ball OUT OF THE SIDES OF THE FIELD, that antelope becomes a tiger.

Player until there is 1 or zero antelopes left!

(SEE ALSO: the “GLOB” game...it’s similar but COACH is the only one taking away the ball and player continues dribbling!)

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

ANTELOPES: Dribbling into free space, shielding the ball and change of speed & direction with the ball.

TIGERS: Tackling & stripping the ball from an opponent.

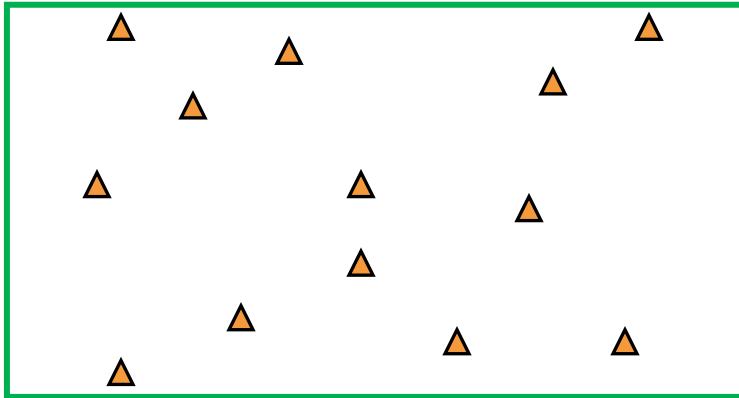
*BEWARE! * For U6 you could get some kids crying saying “he took my ball!” We must explain to the player that this IS part of soccer and that if someone takes away your soccer ball go get it back! It’s all part of the game!*



Zap the Space Invaders

SETUP:

Set down a dozen or so cones over a wide area (20x30 yards) and every player has a soccer ball.



THE GAME:

Explain to the players that "space invaders" have come and are trying to take over the soccer field!

Ask them to "ZAP" as many invaders as possible by dribbling to a cone and kicking the ball at the space invader. If they touch the Space Invader with their ball that counts as a point!

Ask them to reset any cone they knock over and keep track of how many space aliens they shoot! (Parents can help in this regard!)

**For Under 6 age players: Parents should help the players count how many times they pass through the gates as the ability to dribble through gates and count is difficult at this age. Each player gets a chance to repeat the exercise to try and beat their own score. It is appropriate for younger players to compete against themselves, not other players.

The Game goes for 60 - 90 seconds and Players/Coaches keep score.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Players will have to keep their head up in traffic! They are learning to dribble to a specific target and pass/shoot to that target.



Zen Master Warm-Up

SETUP: Spread out many cones (make sure you have at least one per player) throughout the small field, the small field perimeter works well.

Each Player stands near a cone, one cone per player! – cone serves as point of reference...this is good for keeping younger kids spread out from one another and focused! (i.e. "Jay – stay at your cone please!")

Coach is where all players can see him...probably in the center of the area.

THE GAME/ACTIVITY:

Coach is the Zen Master! Coach demonstrates a skill and on command players perform skill repeatedly (20-30 sec.) You can introduce a new skill by asking the players: "I can do THIS...can YOU?"

- ***Activities Without Ball (developing motor skills!):***
1 foot balance... Up on toes...Back on heels...1 foot hop... 2 foot hop...bear crawl...crab crawl...jumping jacks...run forwards around cone...run backwards around cone...hop over cone...rub tummy while patting your head...touch your toes...etc.
- ***Introduce ball (developing motor skills with the ball!):***
Move ball with hands around legs together....move ball with hands in figure 8's between & around legs...Dribble around the cone(inside foot/outside foot)...Throw ball up, let it bounce, & catch the ball...Throw-Clap-Catch...Ball Taps with foot...Ball Tap on Forehead...Balance the ball on top of your head...Bring Thigh up to meet ball...Thigh & Catch...Ask Player to pick, ...really anything you want to work on!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

This works to improve the player's motor skills and specific soccer ball control skills. Remember! US Soccer Federation states that for kids 4 to 8 years old "...*training sessions should be treated more as physical education than specifically soccer training*".

We coaches (& parents frankly) need to understand & acknowledge how limited the kids at this age are in what they're capable of doing on the field mentally & physically. Helping develop these motor skills is the critical first step.



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Zombie Soccer!

SETUP:

A big island area marked by cones (say 20x20 yards). Put all players with their ball in the area. The Coach (the Zombie/monster) stands just outside the area.

THE GAME:

On "GO" players dribble their ball to stay away from the zombie (the coach) BUT MUST STAY ON THE ISLAND!!

The zombie (you the COACH!) moves slowly around the area (perhaps dragging a leg, etc.. I like to put in my fake costume teeth and grunt for my U8 teams but that might be too scary for Under 6 kids!!)

If a player gets tagged by the zombie or goes off the island, they are either:

VARIATION#1: FROZEN until another player DRIBBLES the ball near them and touches them to un-freeze them.

...OR...

VARIATION#2: They must dribble to a "Hospital area" and do an activity to get back into the game (i.e. 5 jumping jacks, 5 toe taps on the ball or throw ball up and catch 3 times, etc)

Game goes for 2 minutes. Dribblers should be reminded to keep the ball close and keep their heads up!

This game is as good a time as ever to introduce the concept of 'keeping the ball close' and that dribbling is NOT kick and chase. The ball should be treated as a "puppy on a leash". If the puppy gets too far away you're going to lose him. In soccer if the ball gets too far away the other team is going to steal it.

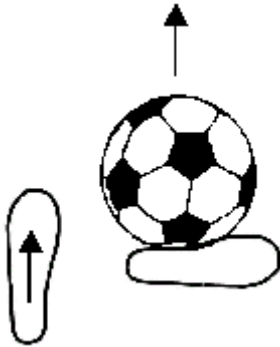
WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Dribbling in traffic and dribbling to a specific target (i.e. away from the zombie, toward the frozen teammate).

Inside-of-Foot Passing & Receiving (U-8 & up)

Over 75% of all passes & receptions are made using the inside-of-the-foot. SoccerHelp believes passing, receiving and dribbling are the most fundamental and important skills to teach. To be a good player, a child must learn the correct technique for the inside-of-foot "push" pass, yet over 50% of youth players use incorrect technique. The result is passes that are inaccurate, don't have the right pace or don't stay on the ground. It's important to teach proper technique at an early age because if a child hasn't learned the proper technique by U-10, it's hard to correct the improper technique.

Teaching The Inside-of-Foot "Push" Pass:



- Have the player face the target & "square up" so he, ball & the target are in a straight line.
- Place the "plant" foot about 4" from the side of the ball, pointing toward the target. (The direction the plant foot points is important because that is the direction the hips will face; try it). The plant foot can be toward the middle or back of the ball, whichever the player prefers.
- Head over ball, looking down; both knees slightly bent.
- Teach the proper motion by first having the player place his striking foot flat against the back of the ball (about 5" above the ground) and pushing the ball toward the target and following through toward the target. (A push & follow-through; not a jab. Think of a tennis serve. However, jabbing a 1-touch pass is okay).
- Be sure he contacts the ball with his toes pulled up (i.e., with the foot parallel to the ground) & the ankle locked. Make contact with the arch, below the anklebone & follow through toward the target so the ball has top spin.
- Then, have him do the same, except start one step back from the ball, so the player, the ball & the target are in a straight line. This step provides power to the pass. If the pass goes into the air it means it was struck too low.

Receiving A Pass Using Inside-of-Foot:



- Receive the ball even with the toes of the plant foot (or a little in front).
- Stiffen or relax the receiving foot so the ball stops about one step away (so you can quickly take one step & strike it; it is this step that gives power to the pass).
- Be sure the receiving foot is 4" - 5" off the ground (if too low the ball will pop up) & contact the ball on the back part of foot (under the anklebone), not near the toes. Pull the toes up so the foot is parallel with the ground (not pointing downward). (If a player can't remember to raise his foot, have him practice by raising his foot higher than the ball & then bringing the foot down in front of the ball to stop it. This will help him to remember).
- If you want the ball to go to the left or right (instead of straight in front) you must angle your foot & contact the ball more in front or behind, depending on whether you want it to go left or right.



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ESSAY

Remembering the Joy of Just Playing

By CHRISTOPHER CLAREY

WEST NEWBURY, Mass. — The girls finished their soccer season on an autumn afternoon in New England with only their families and a border collie in attendance.

The final game took place a few days before the presidential election, yet there was already plenty of hope as the players chased after the ball and attempted, with varying degrees of deftness, to put it in the back of the net.

They have time to get it right. The girls were playing in an under-12 league where the emphasis is on exercise, fundamentals and sportsmanship rather than all-affirming victory.

But the coaches still took it to heart, one of them being me. I have been coaching my two oldest daughters and their peers for nine seasons now. Along the gesticulating way, I have lost some of my zeal (I used to force Zidane videos on them), but none of my appreciation for being able to share a slice of their lives and teach them a game I was once convinced I knew a great deal about. That belief is no longer bedrock, and I now know that having played goalkeeper as a youth and having covered Real Madrid and Barcelona and a couple of World Cups as a journalist are no passports to a winning record.

For a simple game requiring little equipment, soccer can be a cipher: one where the chemistry set can start producing ominous smoke in a hurry and one where pushing the buttons that worked last year does not mean they are going to work this time around. All sportswriters should really be required to run this gantlet, because even if we know that we could never play like the people we critique for a living, some of us are convinced deeper down that we could coach like the people we critique for a living.

Somewhere in my shaken soul, I might still believe it. But for now and surely quite a bit longer, I'm settling for surfing the Internet for shooting drills, rolling out the balls and reading the minds and motivations of preteens, which seem much easier to decrypt than the intangibles of the age group that comes next. I have coached the under-8s, the u-10s, the u-12s and the u-14s, and the u-12s feel like a happy way station before the climb grows steeper.

The girls are old enough to grasp some essentials of the game, and fast and coordinated enough to make the essentials look pretty good at times. Yet they are still young enough to place their trust happily in adult authority without a lot of talking back, or even nonviolent resistance. The fact that puberty usually has not quite kicked in yet also seems to help with the concentration. U-14 practices can screech to a halt as soon as boys (boys!) come within periscope range of the field.

U-12 practices are more likely to break down over the sudden emergence of an Australian Shepherd or, in this semirural part of the Northeast, a horse. But the u-12s quickly get back to playing the game, and they can still shake off defeat with a lot more equanimity (and dignity) than their coaching staff.

I drive off clenching the steering wheel as if I am on a mountain road with no guard rail, replaying the second-half substitutions in my head. They drive off in the back seat of the family van, already living and laughing in the present. That is as it should be. Making the playoffs is nowhere near as important as making the effort or getting a cider doughnut afterward. And though I can get wrapped up in the formations and the standings, the real reward for me over the last few years, other than getting to spend extra time with my daughters, has been plunging back into the pure waters of sport.

Way down here at this unsullied level, you remember why you fell for it all in the first place. There is the empowerment of mastering a new skill, the sense of belonging to something just a bit bigger and the elemental thrills of chasing and being chased.

There is also the eau de cologne of freshly cut grass that does not yet smell like the opium of the people. Back at the surface, it is too easy to keep running into the oil slicks generated by big money, doping scandals, exploited prodigies and tribalism gone too far. But way down here, at the end of another up-and-down season where no jobs or business plans were on the line, it feels as if there are still values worth transmitting; still plenty of sport for sport's sake and fun for fun's sake to be had.

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