

Training Session Activities for the **HTRSA** Division 5 (U10) Players

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U10: Under 10

(as published by US Youth Soccer)

Some general characteristics of the U-10 player include:

- Lengthened attention span compared to the U-8 player.
- Much more team oriented.
- Still in motion, but not as 'busy'. Will stay in place long enough for a short explanation.
- Psychologically becoming more firm.
- Boys and girls beginning to develop separately, girls at a faster pace.
- Overall motor skills becoming much more refined.
- Pace factor becoming developed. (They DO think ahead)

Implications for training the U-10 player include:

- Training sessions should be 60 to 75 minutes.
- Give brief directions; repeat when necessary.
- Activities can be slightly more complex.
- A mixture of individual and partner activities. More target and problem-solving 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	Pre-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. 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.
	U14	Players must develop discipline at this stage by following the instructions of the coach both during and outside training sessions.





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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.



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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>





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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.

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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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!



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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 prowling 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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Ball Thieves

SETUP:

LARGE island area marked with cones.

Split the team into 2 groups and give one group pinis to wear.

Give one team balls to dribble. Not every player on the team should have a ball!
For example: If 6 players in a group, 4 have **soccer balls**.

THE GAME:

The team with the balls tries to dribble inside the area without losing possession of their ball to the other team.

The objective is to see which team has the most soccer balls at the end of the game.

Players with soccer balls should shield and Pass.

Players from the same team should work together to steal balls or keep possession of them.

Run game for 2 minutes and see which team is the winner!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Working on keeping the ball from an opponent, passing the ball to a teammate, and tackling (taking away) the ball from a player!

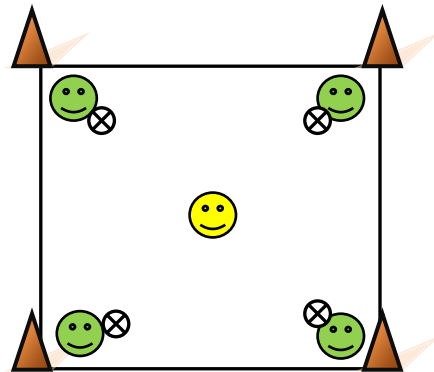


Bull in the Ring!

SETUP:

Set up a square with 4 cones, 5 to 6 yards apart.

5 players – Put one player in the middle of four. The four players on the outside each have a soccer ball.



THE GAME:

Players on the outside with the ball alternate by serving by hand (or feet if capable) to the player in the middle. The middleman (the BULL!) receives the ball and controls it (feet, chest, thigh, etc.) and passes it back to the server and turns to the next.

Go for 60 to 90 seconds and switch.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Quick touches on the ball and trapping/collecting the ball and getting it back to a teammate.

Make sure the BULL gets his body behind the ball (move the feet, don't stick a leg out!). This is a great way to get them moving.

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.



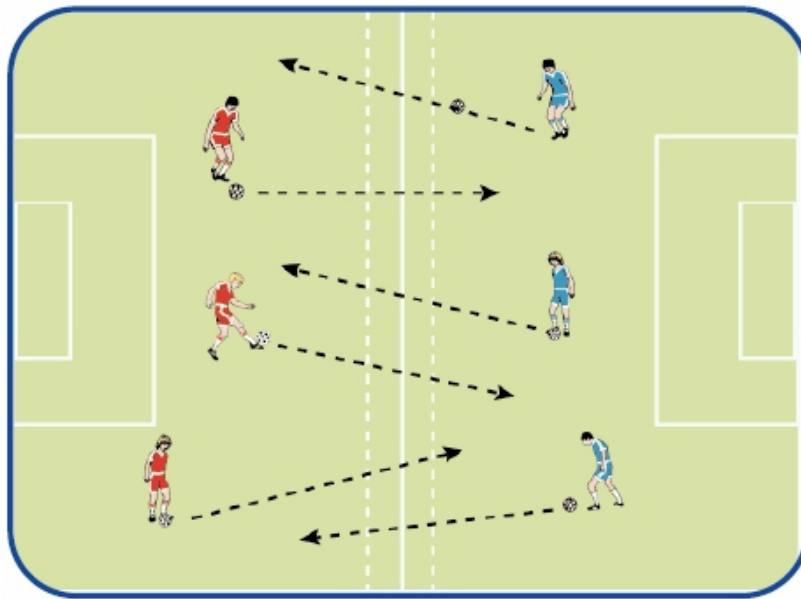
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Clean Up Your Yard

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!



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Cone Goal Pass

SETUP:

Players in pairs and each pair has one soccer ball.

2 cones about 1 to 2 yds apart between each pair of players.

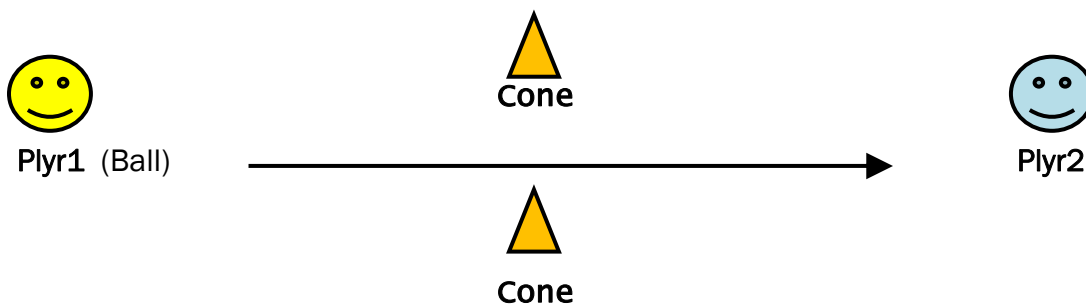
THE GAME:

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.

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.



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Defrost Tag

(from the USYouth Soccer Coaching Manual)

SETUP:

Two equal teams and a 20x20 or 30x30 playing area.

One team is inside the area without soccer balls.

The other team is on the outside of the area with 1 ball per player.

THE GAME:

On "GO" the team of players with the ball dribble into the area and try to hit the OTHER TEAM'S players BELOW THE KNEES!

Players can jump and run to avoid being hit with a ball and they CANNOT leave the area!

Once a player is hit they are frozen and must stand with their legs apart and hands on their head. They can only be un-frozen by another player on their team crawling through their legs.

The objective is to see how long it takes to freeze the entire team!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Passing/aiming at a target, dribbling towards a target and problem solving!

NOTE! – Coach should emphasize PASSING, not shooting!



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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/Pullback 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!

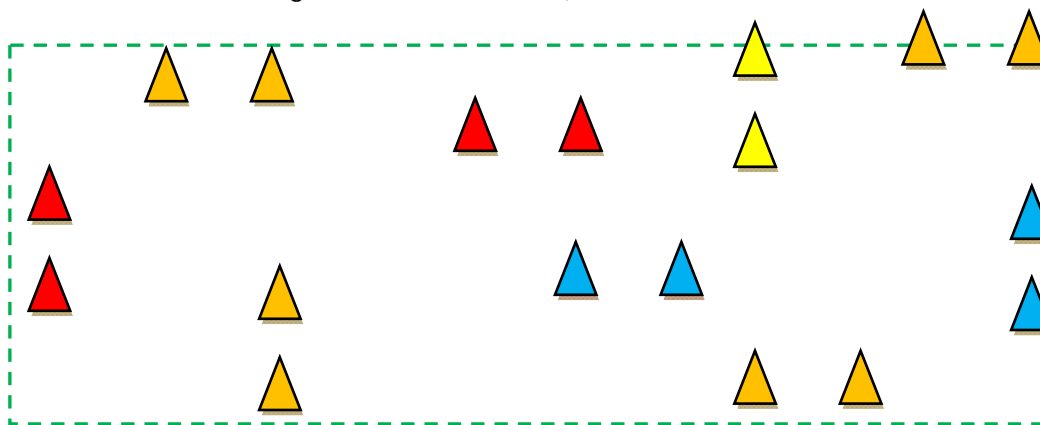
WHAT THIS TEACHES:

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

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.



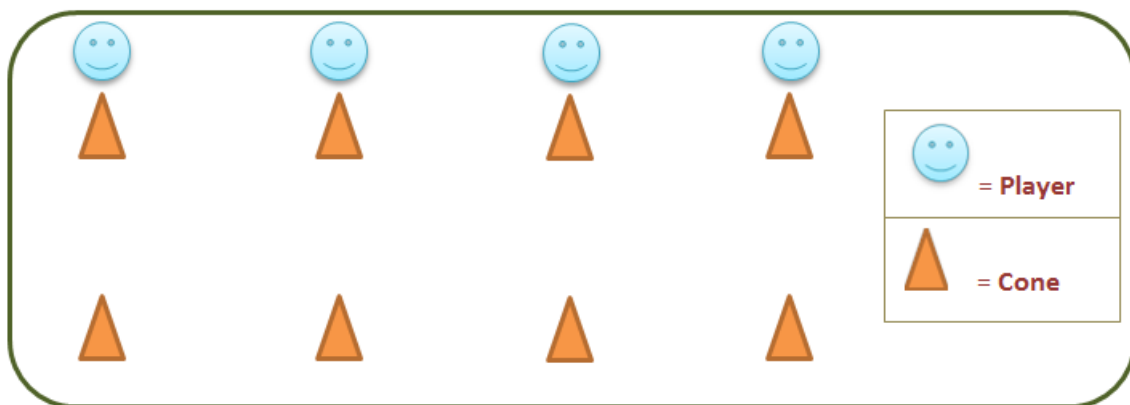
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Figure 8 Dribbling Race

SET-UP:

Split your players into 2 groups and let one group play while the other watches. Use disk cones to make 2 rows (like shown below), putting the cones opposite each other 3 or 4 steps apart (depending on age) and place the cones in each row also 3 or 4 steps apart so players will have enough room to turn around the cones without running into each other. Players will all start behind a cone and dribble around the opposite cone in a "Figure 8" pattern. The set-up is shown below:



THE GAME:

1. Each player has a ball. The players all start by standing behind a cone in the same row (as shown in the diagram above).
2. Players must only use one foot to dribble the ball. Show them how they can use the inside and outside of their foot to control the ball and make turns. Show them how they can use a "Outside Cut" to turn around the cone. Demonstrate how to dribble around the cones in a Figure 8 pattern (so they turn around one cone using the outside of the foot and around the other cone using the inside of the same foot). Allow players to use the bottom of their foot to help control the ball if they need to.
3. Tell them to use their preferred foot to dribble in the first game. This is so they are all competing using their strongest foot in the first game and their weaker foot in the second game. (Otherwise, it won't be as competitive).
4. On "Go" the players dribble in a "Figure 8" pattern around the other cone and back, until they have done it 5 times. Each time across and back is one trip. Tell players to yell "Done" when they have made 5 trips across and back. The first to make 5 trips across and back is the winner.
5. Then, play another game requiring each player to use the opposite foot.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Using the inside and outside of the same foot to dribble and turn. Being able to control the ball using the inside and outside of the same foot is very useful in dribbling and shielding the ball.



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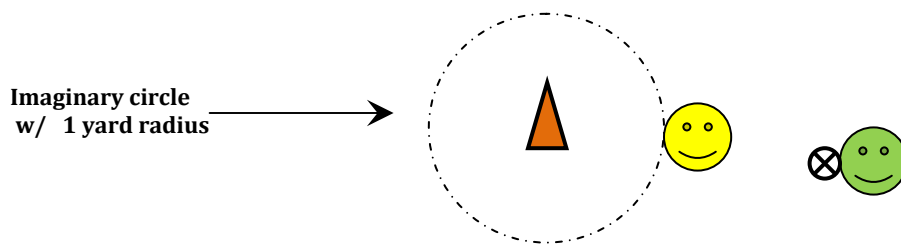
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Guard Your Cone!




SETUP:


Players are grouped in PAIRS and each pair has a soccer ball and a cone.

The stopwatch is set at two minutes!



THE GAME:

One player  is on offence trying to pass/shoot the ball  so it hits the cone  for a point.

The other player  is a defender trying to prevent the cone from being hit with the ball. However, he must stay 1 YARD AWAY from the cone at all times.

Attacking player may try to dribble around the defender or shoot. Have them use their moves (i.e. the Roll, Feint, Inside/Outside, Scissors, etc)!

Defender should defend their space. If he gets the ball just touch it back to the attacker and go again. Game goes for 2 minutes and then switch roles.

Variation: Make the Defender into a goalkeeper and let them use their hands to make themselves "BIG".

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

For the defender it's getting familiar with defending a space. The attacking player works on getting around a defender toward a desired space (the cone).



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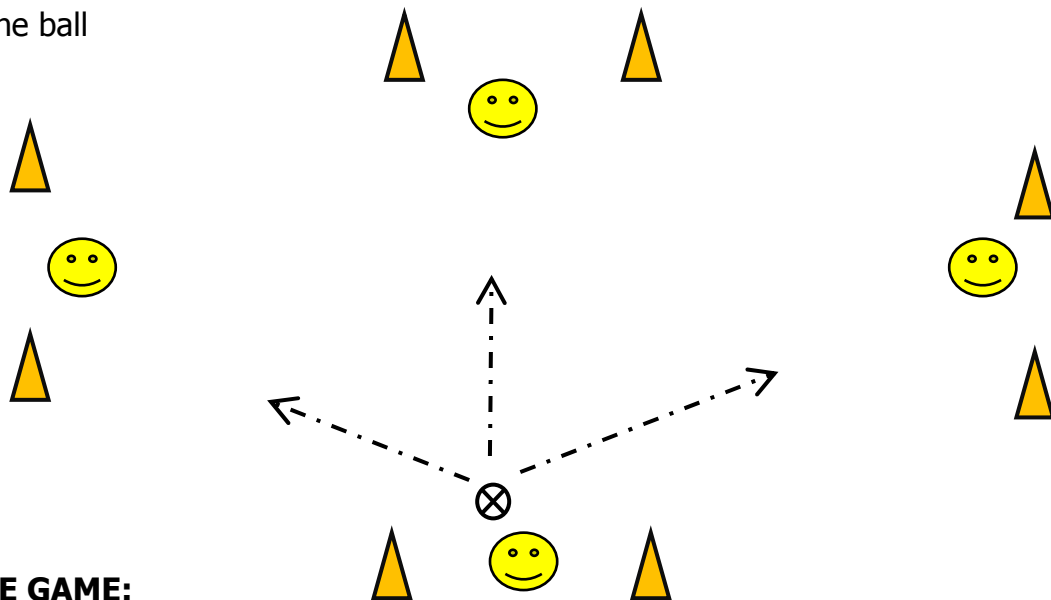
Hands Up!

SETUP:

*Four cone goals, spaced about 20 yards apart.

*Put a GOALKEEPER in each goal.

*One ball



THE GAME:

The Goalkeeper with the ball tries to score a goal by **THROWING** the ball into one of the other 3 goals.

Variation: Instead of throwing players try and score a goal from a full or half volley

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Emphasize the need for a transition from defending the goal and attacking quickly!

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:

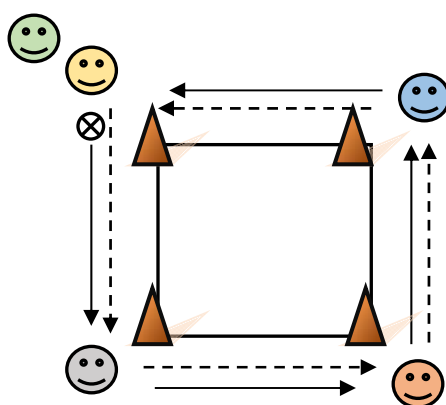
Shielding the ball and keeping it and taking the ball away from an opponent.


Kickabout the Square!

SETUP:


Set up a square with 4 cones, 7 to 15 feet apart.

5 players, the 3 without balls stand alone in front of a cone. The other 2 players have 1 ball and stand behind the last cone.



Path of RUN = 

Path of PASS = 

BALL = 

THE GAME:

Player 1 with the ball passes the ball to Player 2 at the cone on his right. Player 1 runs to the cone where Player 2 is and stops.

During this, Player 2 traps the ball, turns it with his foot and passes it to Player 3 at the cone on HIS right. Player 2 runs to the cone where player 3 is and stops...

And so it goes. Ball is played on the outside of the square. Keep the ball and players moving! Go for 3 to 4 minutes.

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Quick touches on the ball and change of direction and running to a space.

Try to get them to get to the point where they can do this two touch. One touch to set up the ball and the next to pass it.

This is a great way to get them moving.



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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

C - P1 - P2 - P3 - P4 - P5 - C

C - P1 - P2 - P3 - P4 - P5 - C

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.

‘Outta Here! (U10+)

(from the US Youth Soccer Coaching Manual)

SETUP:

Create a small sided field approximately 40X20 yards with a goal of ANY SIZE on each end line. 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 players 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. Tell them NO BLASTING the BALL down the field or it's pushups as punishment! Play ball on the ground.

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: No small goals available? Set up some cones for them to knock over for a score.

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

Variation#3: Require 3 passes before a team can score!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

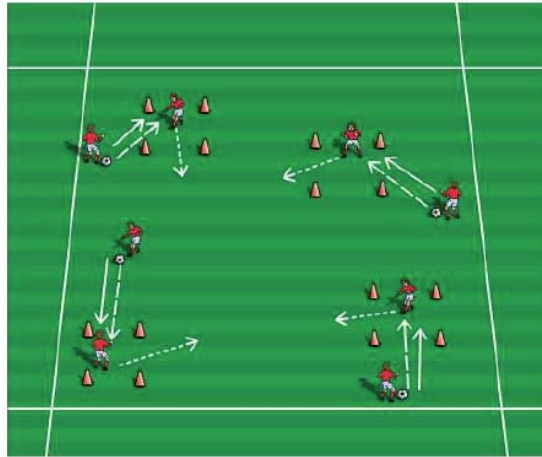
- Encourages players to take on their opponent.
- Encourages players to shoot when they have a chance of a goal.
- Gives players concentrated time in a game like situation. It's a game...just like Saturday!

[illegible]



Pass N' Go Squares: Pass & Replace

SETUP: Sets of 5x5 yards SQUARES set with cones in an area. Half of the players IN squares (1 per square) WITHOUT a ball. The other players in the area outside the squares each with a ball.



THE GAME:

1. All of the players with ball at their feet dribble and look for an open player inside a square. (make eye contact or call name!).
2. The player passes ball into square and the receiving player takes the ball into main area exiting out of a different side than where the ball entered.
3. The passing player then REPLACES the receiving player inside that square.
4. The player on the ball must then look for a new square to pass into.
5. Play for 90 seconds! Have players count how many times they switch!

Variations: (Progression/Regression)

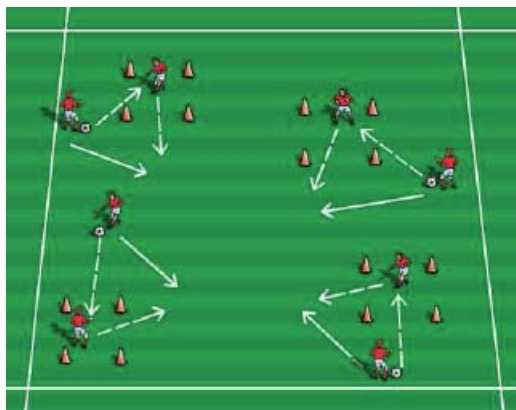
1. P - Receivers can only use 1 touch to move ball out of square
2. P - Add a roaming defender to prevent passes being made to open players
3. R - Players can exit the square using any four sides
4. R - Have the receiving player first stop the ball inside the square before exiting

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Communication between players! Use inside of foot push pass NOT toe or in-step! Use good 1st touch to get out of square and HEADS UP and figure out where player will go next!

Pass N' Go Squares: Wall Pass

SETUP: Sets of 5x5 yards SQUARES set with cones in an area. Half of the players IN squares (1 per square) WITHOUT a ball. The other players in the area outside the squares each with a ball.



THE GAME:

1. All of the players with ball at their feet dribble and look for an open player inside a square. (make eye contact or call name!).
2. The player with the ball passes the ball to the player inside the square. The receiving player traps (settles) the ball and then passes the ball back to the same player (Wall pass) in main area exiting out of a different side than where the ball entered.
3. The player then looks for another square to exchange the next wall pass with.
4. Play for 90 seconds! Have players count how many times they switch!

Variations: (Progression/Regression)

1. P – Players in the square must use 1 touch to pass the ball out of square
2. P – Add a roaming defender to prevent passes being made to open players
3. R – Players can exit the square using any four sides
4. R – Have the receiving player first stop the ball inside the square before exiting

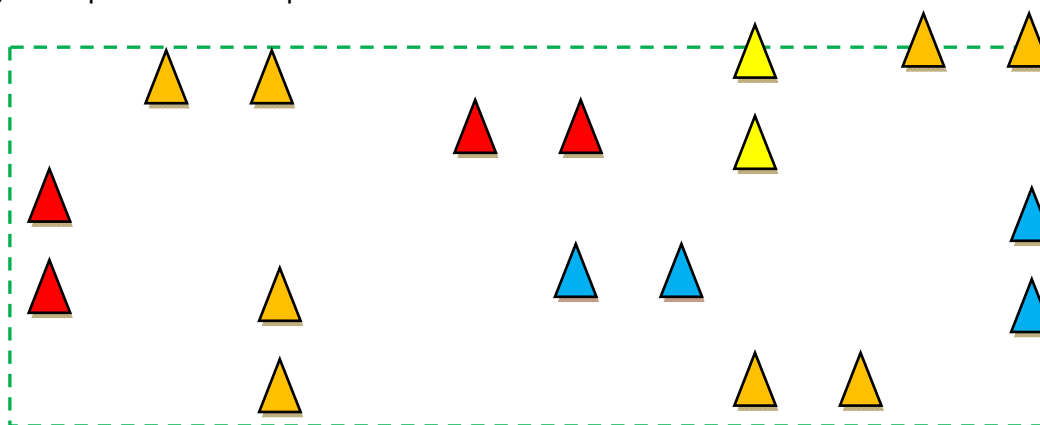
WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Communication between players! Use inside of foot push pass NOT toe or in-step! HEADS UP and figure out where player will go next!
Use this for ALL age groups!

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.



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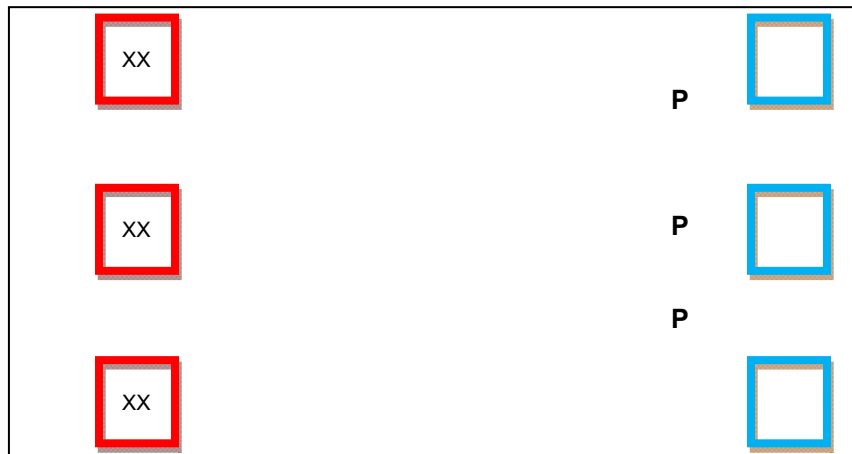
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Reach the Square Game

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:

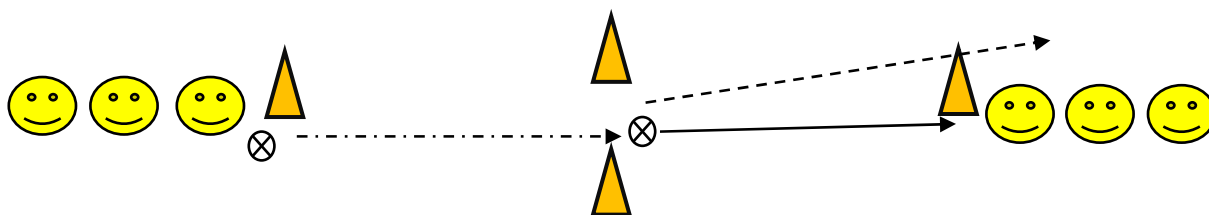
Dribbling in traffic and dribbling to a target under pressure and give them experience in taking away the ball from another player!

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 to 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!

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.

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 Hook 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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Shooting Gallery

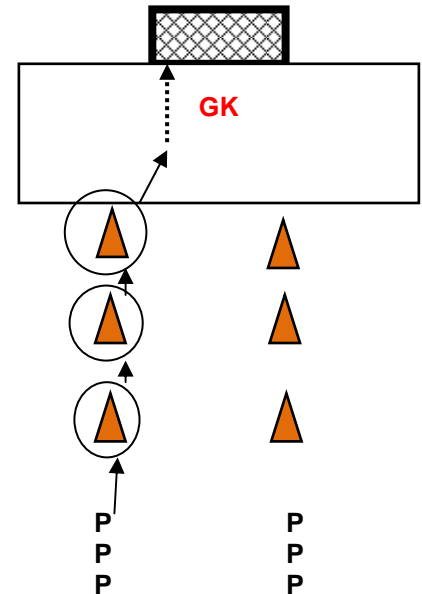
SETUP:

Use a Regular size soccer goal. Two lines of 3 to 4 cones starting on the 18-yard box. Two groups of players with balls line up behind the first cone.

All extra soccer balls are in the center circle.

▲ = Cone

P = Player



THE GAME:

First player in the line starts dribbling. When the player gets to a cone they must dribble around the cone in a complete circle and go to the next cone. Do this for all the cones in their line.

After the last cone they shoot the ball (instep drive kick) on frame (on goal). The next player in the line goes.

Then they go back, get another ball and go to the end of the same line and repeat.

Do until all balls are gone. Have players get the balls after the game. Switch sides. This game can easily be done as a race!

VARIATION: Line up the cones so the players are dribbling ACROSS the 18-yard box. In soccer shots come from all directions!

WHAT THIS TEACHES:

Controlling the ball and getting comfortable shooting the ball. To change it up, move the cones closer or further away from the goal. Plus, gets your goalkeeper used to handling shots.

If you have more than 10 players, add another line!



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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)

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!*



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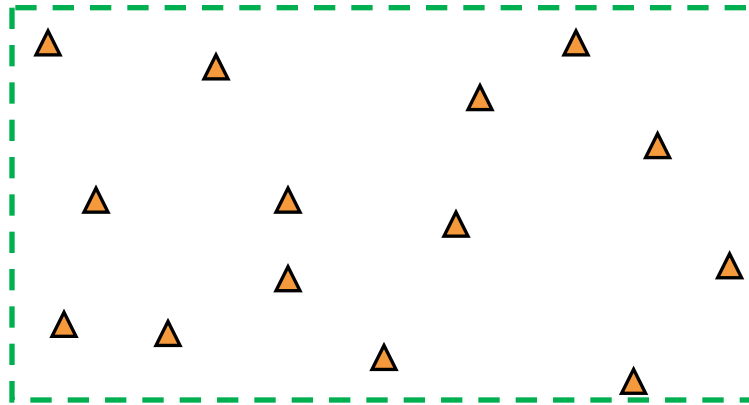
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Turkey Shoot!

SETUP:

Set down a dozen or so cones over a wide area (20x30 yards). Note the area does NOT have to be marked.

Every player has a soccer ball.



THE GAME:

Explain to the players that they are going on a "turkey shoot"!

The cones are the turkeys. Ask the players to keep track of the number of turkeys the shoot! If they hit the cone with their ball that counts as a point!

Ask them to reset any cone they knock over.

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

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.

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.



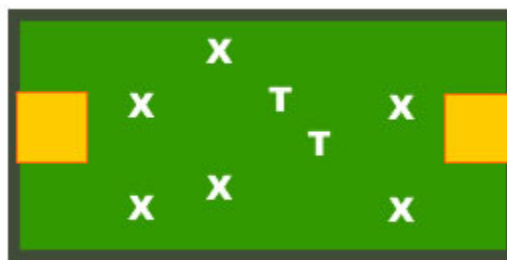
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Welcome to the Jungle! (Tigerball)

SETUP:

Mark off a field about 30x20 yards with two 5v5 yard squares at each end or near the end. Start with 8 players on the field, 6 players (X) with a ball each, and 2 players as the "tigers" (T) or defenders.



THE GAME: On the whistle the pair of tigers work together to win a ball and place the ball in one of the collection squares.

The tigers must work together and can only attack and win one ball at a time.

If a dribbler loses his ball to the tigers he can attempt to regain possession until the ball is put in a collection square, then the dribbler must leave the field.

If a ball goes out of bounds the coach should have 1 or 2 extra balls at his disposal and immediately throw another ball onto the field towards the player(s) who did not play the ball out.

Keep track of how long it takes each tiger pair to collect all 6 balls. Rotate the "tigers" and rotate in the players on the sidelines. If you have 16 just have two groups of 8 players or have your other coach do something else with the other players.

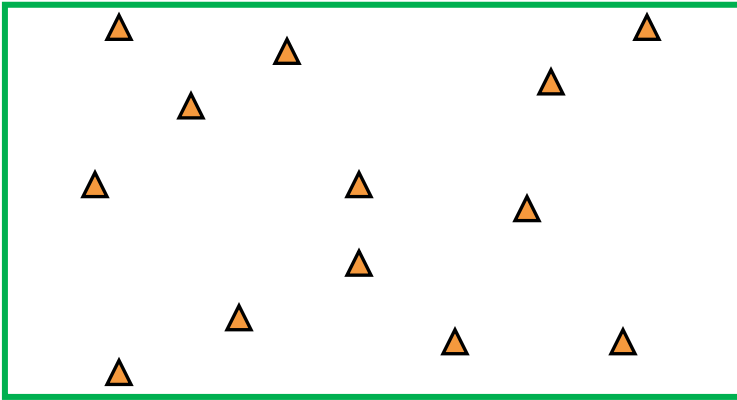
WHAT THIS TEACHES: Gets defenders working together! Tip: Before playing explain how one tiger should pressure the dribbler while the other tiger should lurk 3-8 yards behind and to the side of his partner anticipating where the dribbler might go. The first tiger wants to force the dribbler into his partner or into a mistake and the second tiger, if necessary, should pounce on the ball when that happens.



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.

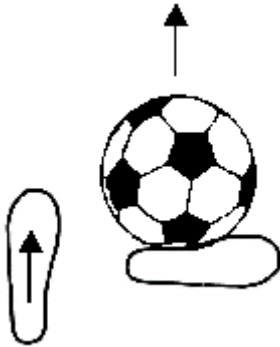
WHAT THIS TEACHES:

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.

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.

Winning's not everything: How to convince parents

by Mike Woitalla

From SoccerAmerica: Youth Soccer Insider

Coaching young players to increase their chances of excelling at the higher levels can often mean losing games. So how can coaches convince parents not to confuse scorelines with player development progress?

Here are a couple of methods that can help coaches show parents how to look for improvement without focusing on wins and losses:

A "Parent Pregame" is how [U.S. Soccer](#) Director of Coaching Education **Dave Chesler** addressed the issue during his long career of youth coaching.

"When I was directing clubs, I expected all the coaches to do it, and it was awkward for them at first," says Chesler. "When the referee is checking equipment and checking in the players, I would gather our parents around and I would give them the Parent Pregame. Very simple things. ...

"I'd review the major topics we've covered ... 'This week we worked on trying to pass shorter, play it out from the goalkeeper, and build the game from back -- because ultimately that's good for their development as they get older. And it includes everyone in the game. They're all participating -- the people defending, from the people in midfield, etc.'"

The parents now understood why the team might give up goals -- because they're trying to learn to play in a manner that's the most successful at the highest levels.

"It's not always warm and fuzzy," Chesler says. "There's always the parent who thinks they know more. At least, you've taken away the guesswork and provided them with something they can grasp onto and really focus their emotion and energy toward.

"I'd provide them with tools to encourage the kids. 'When the goalkeeper has the ball, and you see the goalkeeper try and pass or play to one of those defenders, it would be great if you would encourage them because that's exactly what we worked on.'"

With older teams -- 13s, 14s -- Chesler made a habit of handing out a target sheet to the players at the end of the last training before a match. He'd give parents a copy so they knew exactly what the targets were for the game. It'd be a very concise summary of what the team had worked on in training.

"There was information provided for the parents every game," he says. "Not for them to discuss or debate from a technical standpoint, but just to support their kids.

"If you don't do that, you leave it completely open-ended and now the atmosphere is such that a parent can make assumptions and really be critical of things that aren't even relevant to what you're trying to do."

With younger players, the targets would be mostly technical.

"When I coached a 9-year-old team, it would be, for example, work on how to prepare the ball," he says. "We're going to try and prepare it so we keep it moving, so we don't just stop it or kill it. I felt it was important to distinguish between trapping and redirecting -- a higher level skill, more challenging."

When a young player starts acquiring the skills of a good first touch that sets up her next move, it's a major sign of progress. When parents see their children succeeding more frequently at that during a game, they realize the coach has helped the players improve even when the scores favor the opponent.

With older players, the targets could be more tactical, like group defending.

For Chesler, the Parent Pregame is part of a triad that keeps a youth team on track: "I call it PCP -- Parent-Coach-Player all being connected."

One of the recommendations from [Stan Baker](#) in his book, "[Our Competition is the World](#)," for helping parents comprehend a team's long-term development philosophy is creating a stat sheet to gauge the team's definition of success.

The idea is to track accomplishments by jotting down how many times the team accomplishes goals such as:

- * Plays out of the back successfully.
- * Plays through the lines (backs to midfield).
- * Has a sequence of 7 passes.
- * Changes point of attack.
- * Creates 2v1 situations.
- * Crosses the ball from the endline.
- * Chances created.
- * Goals scored.

"I recommend the stat duty is assigned to various parents each game for monitoring," Baker writes. "Buy a few of the small clipboards and you'll be ready to go. This will be a shared assignment so all parents get a chance to take part. ... Shifting the focus from winning onto the various aspects of the game that you are trying to improve on will help redefine success."

(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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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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