



U8/U9 Coaches Guide and Drills

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U-8 Soccer Coaching, Ages 6, 7 and 8

With these age groups do not try to teach too much in one practice; their attention spans are too short & it won't be fun. The Games included here are fun, they keep all the players involved and active, and they are "self-teaching" and players learn by simply playing the games. The Games are designed to teach different skills and concepts. Simply select the Games that teach the things you want your team to learn

The 9 things listed in "U-6 Soccer Coaching, Ages 5 and 6" also apply to U-8. However, there are some other things you can also start to teach:

1. **Dribbling and Shielding the ball may be the most important skill to teach.**
2. **Basic rules** such as not using hands except on Throw-Ins or when the Goalie.
3. **Encourage teamwork, passing, getting open for a pass, passing to space, constant movement when on offense (to support the attack by shifting or pushing up) & on defense (constant "shifting & sagging"), talking, & no straight legs (knees should always be slightly bent).**
4. **Teach them what it means to "pivot" (they usually don't know)**
5. **Definitely work on proper technique for inside-of-foot passing and receiving. These are 2 of the most important things you can teach** & it is important to teach the correct technique early before they learn the wrong technique. (By age 11 improper passing technique is hard to correct).
6. **Teach proper technique for a Simple Throw-In** and start working on Advanced Throw-Ins.
7. **Since we play 5 per side plus goalies, don't worry about "Formations"; instead, stress "First Attacker/Second Attacker", "First Defender/Second Defender", "Shift & Sag", "Go To Goal", "Don't Get Thrown Over" & similar concepts.** Only if you play 6 or more per side will you need to worry about teaching the concept of positions & playing a position in a formation
8. **You can easily teach U-8 to start marking up behind an opponent on the other team's throw-ins, goal kick, punts & free kicks & then stepping in front & stealing the ball.** (U-8 can catch on to this quickly, but you will have to keep reminding them)
9. **Start to teach a "Lofted Kick".** This is important so your players can clear the ball when on defense and so they can send lofted passes or take lofted shots when on offense. It is important to practice this and to try to teach it to your players starting at U8.
10. **Start teaching your players to use the inside of the foot and the "instep" of the foot (i.e., the top of the foot where the shoelaces are) to kick the ball and discourage them from kicking it with their toes.**

Show your players how it is better to use the inside of the foot and the "laces" to kick the ball instead of using their toes, and encourage them to use the inside of the foot and the instep when they practice kicking and shooting. The natural tendency will be for beginners to use the toe to kick the ball. In soccer, the toe is only used to "poke" the ball (on defense as a way to "dispossess" the ball from the ball handler or on offense as a way to take a short shot near goal). The toe is an inferior surface for kicking the ball because it is too small. It is easier to kick the ball accurately for long distances by using larger surfaces such as the top (instep) of the foot or the inside or outside of the foot. The instep can be used to kick both low "power" drives or for "lofted drives". Don't expect U-8 players to become great at kicking the ball, just try to get them to start kicking with the inside of the foot and the "laces".

11. **By U-8, soccer matches often start to become more competitive.**

Practice Plans - Key is to Keep it Simple:

Practice Plan No. 1 - (for a 60-minute practice)

U-8 Warm Up: "[Follow The Leader](#)" (dribbling)

- let several players be the leader (5-7 minutes)

Games:

1. "[Attack & Defend Ball Tag](#)" or "[Dribble Past Defenders No. 2](#)"
(5-10 minutes)
2. "[Driving School](#)"
(5-7 minutes)
3. "[Race Around The Track](#)"
(7-10 minutes)
4. "[Throw-Ins Teaching Game](#)"
(10 minutes)

If extra time: play "[Hit The Coach](#)"

Also, have everyone say their name while everyone else repeats the names at several different times during practice.

Practice Plan No. 2 - (for a 60-minute practice)

U-8 Warm Up:

1. "[Follow The Leader](#)" (3-5 minutes)
2. "[Dribble Across A Square \(Improved\)](#)" (5 minutes)

Fast Feet:

1. "[Tick Tock](#)" (2 minutes)
2. "[Tap-On-Top](#)" (5 minutes)

Passing:

1. "[Passing Pairs Game](#)" (10 minutes)

Games:

1. "[Dribble & Tag/Reverse](#)" (10 minutes)
2. "[Dribble Around Cone & Back Relay Race](#)" (10 minutes)

Or: If you want to try another new game, substitute "[Kick Balls Onto Other Field](#)" or "[Dribble Through Goals Race](#)"

Practice Plan No. 3 - (for a 60-minute practice)

U-8 Warm Up:

1. "[Dribble Across A Square \(Improved\)](#)" (5 minutes)

Fast Feet:

1. "[Tick Tock](#)" (2 minutes)
2. "[Tap-On-Top](#)" (2 minutes)
3. "[Steparounds](#)" (2 minutes)

Games:

1. "[Kick Balls Onto Other Field](#)" (10 minutes)
2. "[Shoulder Tackle & Strength On The Ball Game](#)" (10 minutes)
3. "[Dribble Past Defenders No. 2](#)" (10 minutes)

Or: Substitute one or two of the games you liked from prior practices,
or try "[Small Sided Scrimmage Without A Goalie](#)"

Repeat this Process for each week after that, very easy to create a plan should take you about 5 minutes to come up with a new plan each week.

U8 PREMIUM SOCCER SKILLS

Outside-of-the-Foot The outside-of-the-foot can be used to pass, shoot, turn, reverse, dribble & control the ball. It is important to encourage its use. A pass or shot made with the outside of the foot & without a backswing is called a "Flick Pass" or a "Forward Foot Pass". This is a quickly made & deceptive pass mostly used when attacking near the goal. It can be especially effective when dribbling with the inside of the foot & suddenly using the outside of the same foot to make a "flick pass". This is an important pass to teach. To make a "flick pass", the player should take a short backswing & use a jabbing motion (with little follow-thru) to strike the ball with the outside of the front part of the "laces", this is done by turning the foot inward. Some children will naturally be able to do this by U-8. Watch their technique.

Low Instep Drive or Power Shot This is also called shooting with the "laces". The ball is struck with the "instep" on the top of the foot. This is also called the "laces" because it is where the shoelaces are. The foot does not go under the ball & the knee should be over the ball when it is struck, with the head looking down (it is very important to keep the eyes on the ball until it is kicked; just like it is important to keep the eyes on a baseball, or a football when catching it or a golf ball when hitting it; if the head goes up too soon, it moves the hips) & a long follow through with the kicking foot. Strike the ball halfway up. The shoulder on the same side of the body as the non-kicking foot should be pointing toward the goal before the shot & the shoulders will "square up" to the goal as the kicking foot follows through. (This rotation creates power). Unless the shot must go over a defender, a low shot close to the ground is preferred because it is more difficult for the goalkeeper to block.

Chip Pass or Shot Similar to golf, a chip pass or chip shot is made by a jabbing motion down & under the ball so the ball goes up into the air. Chipped balls have backspin. The ball can be approached straight on or from the side & can be struck with the top of the laces or the side of the laces, but in all cases the ball is struck low using a downward jabbing motion with little follow-through. The more downward the strike, the more rapidly the ball rises & the more backspin. A chip shot will only work if the goalkeeper is out of the goal or if the goal is too tall for the goalkeeper to cover. But it can be very effective in youth leagues against a short goalkeeper in a tall goal. To be precise, not all "airballs" are "chips". A ball struck low with a normal backswing and a normal follow-through will also rise into the air. This ball, called a "lofted drive", will not rise as quickly as a chip and has little backspin, but it will travel farther & with more pace. When coaching a Rec team, I often used the term "chip" in a generic way when I wanted a player to send a pass "over the top" of the opponents or to "clear" the ball. I used the word "chip" because it was easier than saying "kick a lofted ball with backspin".

How To Teach Kick-Offs Don't spend much time on kick-offs, there are so few of them it isn't worth it. If you have a Rec team, I suggest just bringing your Forwards and Midfielders up on the half way line, kicking the ball deep to the corner, and running forward to try to double-team the ball to win it back. This removes the risk of your team losing possession in the Middle Third and being vulnerable to a quick goal. If you want to try a kick-off that controls the ball, see "Kick-Off" in the Dictionary. Also, see kick-off tips at "Tips".

Practice Games:

"Follow The Leader" (Dribbling)

Comment: A great warm-up that teaches dribbling skills. Easy set-up & everyone has a ball.

Teaches:

- "Control dribbling" and "speed dribbling" if the leader goes fast

Set-up:

- Every player has a ball.

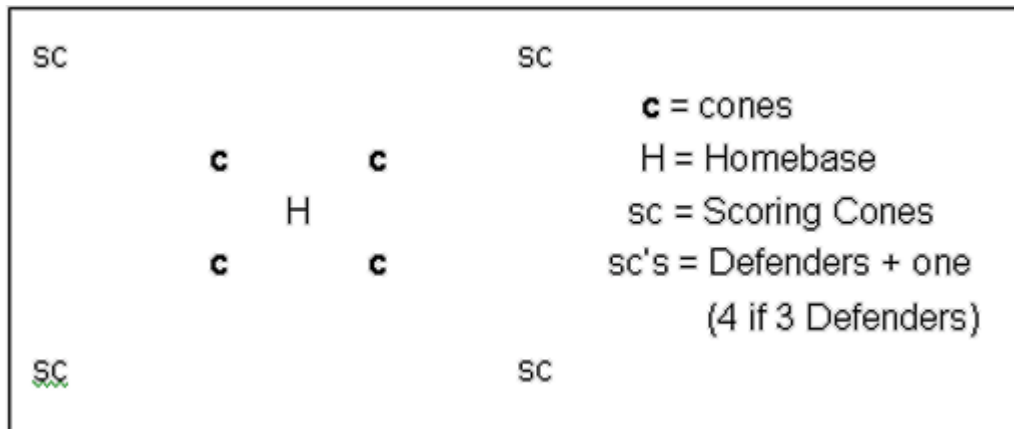
The Game:

- Ask who wants to be the "leader"
- All others line up behind the leader & follow him dribbling while he dribbles around the field at a moderate speed for about 1 minute (or, if you wish, allow the leader to speed up)
- Only go forward (no pullbacks), but the leader can circle around & cross thru the line following her
- Emphasize control of the ball over speed
- Then ask for another volunteer leader & let him lead them for another minute; then a third

"Attack & Defend Ball Tag" (Dribbling, turning, tackling, All ages)

Summary: A fun, simple, tag game that teaches dribbling, turning, shielding, and tackling.

- Set-up:**
- Use 4 cones to make a square "Homebase" 3-4 steps wide (3 steps for younger and 4 for older)
 - Out from the Homebase, put cones (call them "Scoring Cones") equal to the number of Defenders plus one (e.g., 4 Scoring Cones if 3 Defenders), like shown below. Put the Scoring Cones 5-10 steps from the Homebase (5 if younger and 7 or 10 if older)
 - Pick 1/4 of the players to be "Defenders". They are "it" and will try to use their feet to tag the "Attackers" balls.
 - Give each the remaining players a ball. They are "Attackers".



- The Game:**
- Attackers start inside the Homebase
 - Defenders must stay outside the Homebase and may not enter it or cross it
 - On "Go", Attackers try to dribble around one the Scoring Cones and back to the Homebase without having their ball tagged by a Defender. Every time they dribble around a Scoring Cone and make it back

home without their ball being tagged they get one point.

- Defenders try to tag a ball by touching it with a foot. If they touch it, they get a point.
- If an Attacker's ball is tagged, he must return to the Homebase and start over.
- Play for two minutes and ask everyone's score and switch Defenders so everyone gets a turn.
- See which Attacker and Defender has the highest score in a round and the highest cumulative score. Also, notice which players have the lowest scores, because that will tell you who to try to help or who isn't a good Defender.

Rules:

- Defenders cannot enter or cross the Homebase
- To score, Attackers must go around a Scoring Cone and get their ball back inside the Homebase without it being tagged. They can only go around one Scoring Cone at a time.
- Defenders only have to touch a ball with their feet (i.e., tag the ball) to score a point.
- When tagged, Attackers must return to the Homebase and start over, but they don't lose points they have scored.
- Only one Defender at a time may challenge an Attacker
- No one may use hands to push or hold. However, Defenders may "shoulder charge" to try to get to the ball. (See "[Shoulder Charge](#)" in Dictionary). Defenders must stand straight up to shoulder charge and cannot lean into or run into the Attacker.
- No slide tackles, tripping or hard tackles.
- Defenders may not kick, tackle from behind or knock down the Attacker.
- Attackers may shield the ball from Defenders by keeping their body between the Defender and the ball. They cannot push

or lean into the Defender.

- Teaching Points:
- "Speed dribbling" and "Control dribbling"
 - "Shielding" the ball
 - "Shoulder charge"
 - "Toe poke" (show Defenders how)
 - Turning using inside or outside of foot

- Variations:
1. Allow tagging with hands instead of feet.
 2. Increase or decrease the number of defenders.

"Dribble Past Defenders No. 2" **(Dribbling, 1 vs. 1 defending, U-8 & up)**

Summary: Create 2 teams. Use cones to make "goals" that are in a line or in a circle. One team is "Attackers" and each has a ball. The other team is "Defenders" and one player defends each goal. Attackers try to dribble through all goals. They can start one at a time or all at once. Let one team be the Attackers for 3 attacks & then switch & let the other team be Attackers for 3 attacks. A simple, fun game.

Set-up:

- Use cones to make "goals" that are about 3 yards wide. Put the goals 5-7 steps apart and in an obvious sequence so players can easily go from one to the next. Place them in a line or a circle. Make one goal for each 2 players (e.g., if 10 players make 5 goals)
- Create 2 "teams" of similar ability (it is okay for one team to have an extra player).

The Game:

1. One team starts as "Attackers" and each player has a ball. The other team is "Defenders".
2. One Defender stands between the cones to defend each goal.
3. Attackers start behind a "Starting Cone", 5 steps from the first goal.
4. Attackers try to dribble through each goal. If they lose the ball, or the ball or Attacker go outside the cones or touch the cones, or if the ball is kicked outside the cones, they stop at that goal. If they make it through, they go to the next goal.
5. Attackers can start one at a time, 2 at a time, or 3 at a time (you choose)
6. Scoring can either be the sum of the number of goals the Attackers made it through or the number of Attackers who made it through all goals.
7. Have one team be the Attackers for 3 attacks and then switch & let the other team

be the Attackers for 3 attacks.

Rules:

- See No. 4 above.
- Defenders must stay between their cones.

Teaching Points:

- Encourage Attackers to Shield the ball, change speed and use feints.
- Encourage Defenders to watch the ball and not the Dribbler's feet.
- Show Defenders how to "Toe Poke" the ball and how to "Black Tackle". Tell them to keep their knees bent and to get in front of the Dribbler.

Similar Games:

["Steparounds"](#) and ["Tick Tock"](#)

"Driving School" (Dribbling & Turning)

- Comment: This is a great game & teaches many basic skills. Easy set-up & everyone has a ball.
- Teaches: Control dribbling, using bottom of foot to stop, pullbacks, using outside of right foot & left foot.
- Set-up: Use disk cones to outline a 20-yard x 20-yard "field". (Smaller or larger, depending on age & numbers of players, but not too small or they will collide. Better for this game to be on the larger size at first).
- The Game:
- "This is Driving School & I'm your Instructor. I'm going to teach you how to drive but you must listen carefully & do exactly what I say."
 - Each player has a ball & must stay inside the cones.
 - Coach uses a ball to demonstrate what each of the instructions means:
 - a. **"Go"** - Start dribbling ("Keep the ball **near your feet & look up** while you dribble so you don't run into someone").
 - b. **"Stop"** - Put foot on top of ball to stop it
 - c. **"Slow"** - Dribble slow
 - d. **"Speed Up"** - Dribble faster but keep looking up & don't "wreck".
 - e. **"Turn right"** - Use the outside of the right foot to push the ball to the right & then dribble in that direction. (This teaches them to stop & turn the ball using the outside of the foot). Be sure they know which is the right foot.
 - f. **"Turn left"** - Use the outside of the left foot to push the ball to the left & then dribble in that direction. (If U-6 get confused about which is right & left, it's okay. Don't stop the game).
 - g. **"Pull back & go the other way"** - Use the bottom of foot to pull the ball back (i.e., flick

it backward) & then turn around & go the other way.

- Tell them to be careful & not have a "wreck". As they dribble they must look up to see where they are going. If they intentionally have a wreck or have too many wrecks, they may have to go to Jail (i.e., make them go outside the cones & dribble a lap around the outside of the cone field to practice dribbling; tell them to look up while they dribble this lap & go slow & keep the ball close to their feet).

Time:

- Do this for 2 minutes & then evaluate & give any driving "tips" needed. Then continue the class for 2 or 3 more minutes & then stop, give "tips" & encouragement (tell them they are really improving & they can all become great drivers), & then another round of 2 - 5 minutes.

At The End:

- Tell everyone they did great & if they keep coming to class they will become a good driver.

"Race Around The Track" (Dribbling/Turning/Shielding)

- Teaches:** Control dribbling, speed dribbling, turning & shielding.
Variation No. 2 also teaches teamwork, talking & movement of the ball.
- Set-up:** Use 4 disk cones to make a square that is 10 - 20 steps wide (10 steps if U-6, 12 if U-8, 15 if U-10 & 17 - 20 if U-12).
- The Game:**
- Players race (i.e., dribble) around the outside of a square
 - Each player has a ball & starts at the "Starting Line" (i.e., to the outside of whichever cone the Coach picks)
 - Put the slowest players nearest the cone & in front & have the fastest players start behind or on the outside; this will even things up some
 - On "Go", players dribble around the "track" & the first one to go around 2 or 3 times is the winner. (You decide how many times).
 - At the end of each game, ask each player how many times he or she went around the track & give encouragement
 - Have 2 or 3 races one way, each time making the faster players start a little farther back, so everyone has a chance of winning & the fastest dribblers will be challenged
 - Then, reverse & race in the opposite direction so they get practice making turns to the right & to the left
 - At the end of each game comment & give encouragement
- Rules:** No pushing, tripping, or kicking away balls & must stay outside the cones

"Throw-Ins Teaching Game" (Throw-Ins, U-8 & up)

Note: This game is a quick and effective way to teach or practice throw-ins. This isn't great fun, but it is quick & effective.

First: If your players need to practice throw-ins, I suggest first lining them up shoulder-to-shoulder (facing you) without a ball. On "Go" have them all pretend to make a throw-in while you watch. Comment & have them do it again. Be sure they drag the toe of their rear foot so hard they can hear it, that their hands go behind their head, & that they remain upright & follow through with both arms. Do this 5 consecutive times.

Then:

- Have them pair up, one ball per pair (a parent or assistant coach plays if an extra is needed)
- Members of each pair face each other, 7-15 steps apart (depending on age). (There will be 2 lines facing each other shoulder-to-shoulder, about two steps apart).
- Start with the balls all on one side, so the players will first be throwing the same way
- On "Go", the players with the ball all make a throw-in to their teammate while the Coach or parents watch for distance, side spin and to be sure they are dragging the rear foot (side spin is bad because it means they are using one arm too much & the referee can give the ball to the other team if he believes one arm is used too much)
- Encourage high throw-ins that would go over an opponent's head; not a throw-in toward the ground
- Have each player take about 5 throws
- The Coach selects the "winners" who he believes have done the best & is complimentary of everyone who is trying

Teaching Points:

1. Drag the toes of the rear foot so hard that they can hear it
2. When the ball goes behind the head, elbows should be pointing out to the side (this gives power)

3. Remain upright, follow through, snap wrists
4. Through over opponents; not toward the ground
(this is less likely to cause the rear foot to come off
the ground)
5. Avoid too much side spin

"Hit The Coach" **(Dribbling & kicking the ball)**

Teaches: Dribbling, kicking & teaches the Coach how to be funny

Comment: A simple, fun game for U-6

Set-up:

- Each player has a ball

The Game:

- Players stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing Coach who is about 5 steps away
- On "Go", the Coach runs slowly away while players dribble to chase him & try to hit him with the ball by shooting at him
- They get 1 point each time they hit him
- Recruit parents to help & split into 2 games or even 3, so it is less crowded
- Stay in a small area & have fun with this game
- Play for about 5 minutes

Variation:

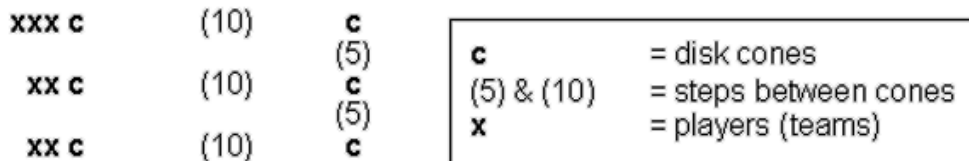
- Before starting, tell the players that if they hit you 5 times (total) you will make the sound of their favorite animal, like a dog or a cow, etc. When you are hit 5 times, stop & let them choose a sound. Then start all over.
- Try to stop about every 60 seconds. You can adjust by changing the number of required hits to 3 or 4

"Dribble Around Cone & Back Relay Race" (Dribbling & Turning)

Teaches: Dribbling & turning and a variation that includes passing

Set-up: Set up one relay "course" for each 2, 3 or 4 players, like below:

(Note: For U-6, put the cones 5 or 6 steps apart and for U-8, 8 steps apart).



The Game:

- Divide into "teams" of 2, 3, or 4 (it's okay to have more players on one team than on another)
- Each team has one ball
- On "Go", the first player in each line dribbles around the cone & back to the starting line & gives the ball to his teammate who then dribbles around the cone & back, etc. (By U-10, teach them to "pop the ball" for a fast start. Do this by kicking the ball forward about 5 steps & then running to it. Also do this after making the turn).
- Everyone must go around the right side of the cone (in the next game you can make them go around the left side)
- The dribbler must dribble it to his teammates & not pass it.
- The 1st team to complete 12 trips wins.

Scoring:

- One point for each time a player goes around & back to the start
- First team to 12 wins

- Play 2 or 3 games

Next:

- Do "Relay Race No. 2" using the same set-up

Variation No. 1: Require everyone to go around the cone on the left side so they are turning with either the inside of the left foot or the outside of the right foot.
(All ages)

"Dribble & Tag / Reverse" (Dribbling, Steering, Talking)

Summary: A fun, simple tag game where one or two players with a ball attempt to tag players without a ball. When tagged, a player gets a ball and helps the others with the ball tag those who don't have a ball. When only one player is left without a ball, that player is the winner, but then that player is "it" and the game reverses so players with a ball try to avoid being tagged by those without a ball. This can be played as one game, or the first or second part only. The second part can be made harder by requiring that the ball is tagged by a foot. Encourage "its" to talk and work together. A good game because it is simple

Teaches: Dribbling, some 1 vs. 1 play, steering toward the sideline and can be used to encourage talking & teamwork by those who are "it". If, in the second game, tags must be made with the foot, then "shielding" can be taught.

Set-up:

- Use cones to make a square 10-20 steps wide (depending on age and number of players).
- Put balls outside the square

The Game:

- 2 players have a ball & the others don't
- On "Go", the players with the ball try to use their hands to try to tag those without a ball
- When a player is tagged, he becomes one the "its" and gets a ball and tries to tag players without a ball
- The last player left without a ball is the winner. Stop the game and tell the players that now, the player without the ball is going to try to tag those with a ball (preferably using his foot to tag the ball, but for U-6 or

U-8, tagging with hands is okay).

- Now, when players with a ball are tagged, they kick their ball out of the square and try to tag players with the ball
- The last player with a ball is the winner

Rules:

- If a player or his ball goes out of bounds to avoid being tagged, he is considered tagged. Thus, a good strategy is to try to "steer" the player you are trying to tag to the sideline.

Teaching Points:

- "Steering"
- "Shielding" (if tagged with feet)
- "Its" talking and working together

"Dribble Through Goals Race" (Dribbling)

Summary: Use cones to create "goals" through which players dribble. Place the goals about 5 steps apart and in an obvious sequence (like a circle). This is another game that helps players learn to control the ball with their feet.

Set-up:

- Use cones to make "goals" that are about 3 yards wide and 5 steps apart. Place them in an obvious sequence so players can easily go from one to the next (e.g., a circle).
- Each player has a ball.

The Game:

- One "goal" is the starting line
- Have 3 or 4 players start at a time, and others 10 seconds later
- Each group competes against each other to see who can finish the course first
- In the second race, re-group the players so the fastest compete against each other

Variations:

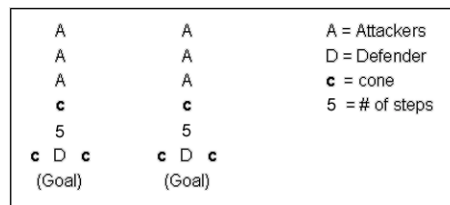
1. One group starts at the "Start" and another at the "Finish" so they dribble toward each other. (Only do this if you believe they won't collide).
2. Create 2 teams. One starts as "Attackers" and try to dribble through the goals while the other team defends the goals (one "Defender" per goal). Then switch. The winner is the team that has the most Attackers to cross the finish line with the ball. The Defender must stay between the cones he is defending.

"Dribble Past Defender" (Dribbling and Tackling)

Comment: Comment: A simple way to teach basic 1 vs. 1 attacking and defense.

Teaches: Just playing the game will teach a lot. But, you can also encourage or teach defenders U-8 and older to watch the ball (don't watch the dribbler), to "toe poke", to "block tackle" (see Dictionary or Skills), to not jump at the attacker, to keep knees bent and stay on balls of feet, how to "shuffle" from side to side (feet don't crossover), a crossover step, and at older ages a "boxing" stance. Encourage attackers to shield the ball, control dribbling, and using change of speed, a quick change of direction, or feints to beat a defender.

- Set-up:**
- For U-6, use one line (unless you have an assistant to supervise a second line) and don't have "teams", just give everyone a chance to be the Defender.
 - For U-8 and older, divide into 2 or 3 teams (it's okay if one team has an extra player)
 - Select one player from each team to be the first one to play Defender against the other team.
 - Use cones to make a goal (about 3-5 steps wide) for each Defender to defend, as shown below:



- The Game:**
- Each Attacker has a ball
 - Attackers line up behind a "Starting Cone", 5 steps out from the Goal defended by a player from the other team.

- On "Go", the first Attacker in each line dribbles forward and tries to dribble across the Goal without the Defender touching the ball.
- The Attacker's team gets one point if he crosses the imaginary line between the cones without the Defender touching the ball with his foot. After scoring, the Attacker goes to the end of the line.
- If the Defender touches the ball with his foot, or kicks it, or if the Attacker or his ball touch the cones or go around them, then the Attacker does not get a point and must go to the end of the line.
- The next Attacker in line can start his attack as soon as his teammate goes to the end of the line
- Play for 1 or 2 minutes, and then switch Defenders
- The team with the most points after everyone has been a Defender wins. If the line moves fast, Attackers may score more than once before time expires.

Rules:

- Attackers must dribble across the goal line and cannot kick the ball across
- Goals only count if the ball goes between the cones.
- Attacker goes to the end of the line if the Defender touches the ball with his foot or if the Attacker or ball touch the cones or go around them.

Tip:

Because this is a timed game, Attackers should not be slow, but should go quickly. If they do, they may have a chance to score again before time expires.

Teaching Points:

Encourage Attackers to change their speed (go slow, then fast), a quick change of direction, or feints. Encourage shielding the ball. See "Teaches"



above for things you can teach Defenders.

"Longest Kick Game" (Kicking)

Teaches: Instep (i.e., "laces") kick

Comment: A simple, fun game

Set-Up:

- Each player has a ball
- Put 3 or 4 cones in a straight line as a "Shooting Line"

The Game:

- Players line up shoulder-to-shoulder one step apart behind the Shooting Line & place their ball in front of them on the Shooting Line
- Tell players to back up about 3 steps from their ball
- On "Go", the player on the right runs & kicks his ball as far as possible (if U-8, encourage them to use their "laces"; if U-6, just a solid kick)
- As soon as he kicks, the kicker runs to his ball & puts his foot on it where it has stopped
- Players kick one at a time.
- Longest kick wins
- Play 2 or 3 games

Teaching Points:

U-6: Watch the ball & have fun

U-8: Discourage "toe kicks" & encourage "drives". Primarily, encourage U-8 to keep their head down, eyes on the ball, lead with the knee, strike the ball with the "laces" & follow through toward target.

"Kick Balls Onto Other Field" (Passing/Defending)

Teaches: Passing, defending, anticipating the direction of the ball, "Weight", teamwork, & the concept of passing to "space" (in this case, away from the other team). With U-6, just let them kick the ball & don't try to teach them anything except to kick it in the correct direction.

Set-up:

- Use disk cones to mark an area 20 yards x 20 yards (smaller or larger depending on age & number of players)
- Use disk cones to divide the area in half; each half is a "field"

The Game:

- Divide into 2 teams: each team starts on their End Line facing the other team & each player has a ball
- On "Go", the players pass their ball onto the other team's "field" & each team kicks the balls back onto the other team's "field" as fast as possible (no dribbling allowed)
- At the end of one minute (or two), stop & count the balls on each field (only count balls on the field, not balls out of bounds)
- At the end of the game, the team that has passed the most balls onto the other team's field wins. (But for U-10 & up, any balls that a team has kicked out-of-bounds are deducted from their score; this is to discourage just kicking it hard & to encourage control).
- Encourage players to spread out in order to cover their entire field & to kick the ball between players on the other team, but don't kick it too hard (or it will go out of bounds & not count)
- Encourage players U-10 & up to anticipate the other team's passes, intercept them or cut them off, & one-touch pass them back

Rules:

- Balls kicked out of bounds are left there & not

played again (but players cannot kick balls out on their end just to get them off their field; they can only kick them toward the other team's field). However, balls accidentally kicked out-of-bounds by the receiver can be dribbled back in-bounds, but no dribbling once in-bounds.

- No dribbling allowed & players must stay on their side of the half-way line. (Players must pass the ball from where it stops or from where they intercept it).
- Players must pass the ball within 5 seconds of receiving it (i.e., by the count of 5). This is to keep them from trying to run down the time.

"Tick Tock"

(aka "The Foundation")
(Fast feet & footwork)

- Teaches:
- Fast feet, touch & ball control using inside-of-feet
- Set-up:
- Every player has a ball & starts with the ball between his feet, with knees bent
- The Game:
- On "Go" each player taps the ball between his feet. Each tap is "one"
 - 1st to reach 20 wins (1st to 40 if U-12).
- Tip:
- Keep knees bent & tap ball with the front of the foot (this gives better control than the back of the

"Tap-On-Top Race"

(Fast feet, a good warm-up, U-8 & up)

Summary: Each player has a ball at her feet and alternates tapping the top of the ball with the sole of each foot. Good for fast feet, touch and coordination. A good warm-up exercise.

Set-up: Each player has ball and is in a circle, facing each other, with the ball in front of his feet.

The Game:

- On "Go" the players quickly use the bottom of one foot to tap the top of the ball, then the other foot, etc. (right, left, right, etc.)
- First to 20 wins

Teaching Points:

- After a while, encourage players to look up while doing this

Similar Games: ["Steparounds"](#) and ["Tick Tock"](#)

"Steparounds" (Fast feet & footwork)

- Fast feet & part of the "Scissors" feint

Set-up:

- Each player has a ball & starts with the ball between his feet, with knees bent

The Game:

- On "Go" each player moves one foot around the back of the ball (toward the other foot) & then around the front of the ball & ends with the foot back where it started. Then do the other foot. Then the first foot, etc. (e.g., left, right, left, right). **First to 20 wins.**

Comment:

- This is one part of a feint called the "Scissors"; the other part is like the ["Push & Blast Off Game"](#). (See ["How To Teach Feints & Fancy Footwork"](#) for a description of the Scissors feint).

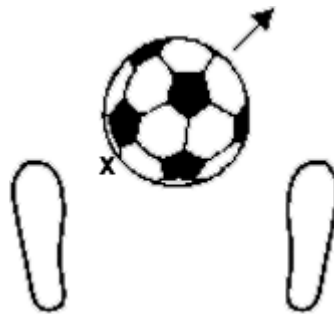
"Push & Blast Off" (Footwork, U-8 & up)

Teaches:

- Use of outside-of-foot & a quick first step to get past an opponent.

Set-up:

- Each player stands behind the ball with feet apart like below:



The Game:

- Put the laces of the right foot on the inside of the back of the ball about where the **x** is. (Do this by drawing the right leg back like you are going to kick the ball, but then bend the leg at the knee so the right foot goes to the inside of the ball. The foot will be at about a 45 degree angle to the ground & the right side of the laces will be touching the ball).
- Push the ball to the forward-right (about 45 degrees in the direction of the arrow) so it goes 3 - 10 feet & as you do drop the right shoulder a little & push off with the left leg so you "blast off" toward the ball. You must go fast so you can beat the defender to the ball.
- Do for 1 minute & then with the left foot

Comment: This teaches fundamentals that will be used many times in a game. This is a good warm-up.



"Dribble Across A Square Game"

(Control dribbling, speed dribbling, turning, peripheral vision, instinctive reactions and reflexes, acceleration into open space, U-6 & up)

Tip: The best way to get your players to play this game is to tell them that it's part of "Warming Up" and play it at the start of practice.

U-6
Coaches
Read
This:

For U-6, make the square 5 or 6 adult steps wide and have the players just dribble across and stop (don't have them turn and dribble back). As soon as they have all dribbled across, have them all face inward and dribble back across to the opposite side and stop. Continue this approach of dribbling across and stopping each time until they have crossed the square 6 to 8 times (each trip across is "one"). Don't try to teach turns and don't keep score, just encourage them all and have fun. The benefit of this for U-6 is learning to dribble in traffic. Tell them to focus on their own ball and to NOT try to kick anyone else's ball.

Comment:

This is the best way to teach dribbling and how to use the bottom of the foot & the inside & outside of the foot to stop the ball and turn. Easy set-up & everyone has a ball. This is a great warm-up. It is 10 times better than dribbling through cones & is a good way to evaluate dribbling skill. This game helps children's brains to learn to process a lot of activity, to use peripheral vision, and to make correct, instinctive decisions and maintain composure when under pressure and in heavy traffic.

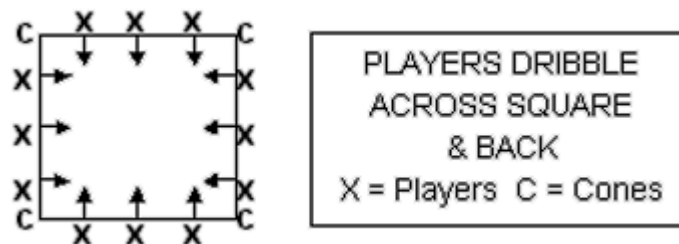
Teaches:

- **Control dribbling, speed dribbling**, to look up while dribbling, turning, how to dribble through traffic without panicking, shielding the ball, how to naturally find open space, "strength on the ball", dribbling under pressure, and instinctively avoiding other players. Players learn to use peripheral vision, to shield the ball when in traffic, and that they can speed up if they get in the clear. It is a

"self-teaching" game and playing the game really teaches these skills and self-confidence & composure in heavy traffic & under pressure. It also teaches composure in chaotic situations and how to recognize openings in traffic and when it's safe to speed up. You will notice an improvement in "field vision" and "field awareness" (the ability to see opportunities in a crowd and across a field, and to make quick, instinctive, correct decisions).

Set-up:

- Use 4 disk cones to make a square about 10 steps wide (smaller or larger depending on age & number of players) -- make your "steps" the size of your players; so a "step" for U-8 is shorter than a "step" for U-14... by doing this, the square will always be about the correct size for your players.
- Every player has a ball
- Spread players around the square, all facing inward (like below):



The Game:

- All players start on "Go" & **each player dribbles across the square & back**. (Tell them to dribble to the imaginary line on the opposite side of the square, make a turn & dribble back to where they started. Point out at the first of the game that the cones create an imaginary "Starting Line" and "Turning Line" for each player).
- **Teaching Turns** Among the best ways to turn are a "Pullback", a "Stop/Turn", a "Cutback" or a "Hook Turn" to turn. Demonstrate the different ways to turn and then let each player choose the one that works best for them. When going really fast, a "Stop/Turn" is a good way to turn... when not going so fast, any of the 3 other ways are good. The way

that is best for one player may not be the best for another. If certain players are doing better on their turns, have them demonstrate while the others watch. Your players will want to be able to turn better so they can improve their scores. You can give them "Tips" about how they can get a higher score. Here is a brief description of several turns: Do a **Pullback**, aka a "Drag Back", by putting the bottom of the foot on top of ball to stop it & then pull it back in the direction you came from. Do a **Hook Turn** by pulling the toes up & turning the foot so the outside of the foot can "hook" the ball, stop it & pull it back. A Cutback uses the inside of the foot to hook the ball). **See photos of a Pullback (called a "Drag Back"), Hook, Cutback & Stop/Turn** at www.fa-soccerstar.com (click "Turning" on the left side and then "How To Master" on the right side above the photo).

- Tell players to look up while they dribble so they don't run into each other (don't worry, there won't be many collisions).
- Each player keeps count of his or her trips across the square. The first to 12 is the winner (each time he turns is "one"). Tell players to yell "Done" when finished and ask each player his score after each game.
- Play 3 games; 1st to 12, then to 10, then to 8. Play at the start of practice as a warm-up and at the end of practice until dribbling skills improve or your team gets tired of this game. For beginners, let them decide how to turn using the method they are most comfortable with. For advanced or select players, require a Pullback one game, then a Hook, then a Cutback. Let a "Stop/Turn" count for a Pullback.
- **Teaching Acceleration into "Open Space" and "Speed Dribbling"**. After your team has played this game in a few practices, play the game twice with the square the smaller size (about 10 "steps" wide, using the "step" length of your players), which will teach your players "control dribbling" and improve their reactions and peripheral vision, and THEN make the square larger so it is less crowded (about 14 steps wide) and use the larger square to

teach your players how to accelerate into "open space" -- this is an important skill that will help them learn how to "blow past" an opponent and will lead to "breakaways". Play 2 more games with the larger square. In the larger square players will still have to "**Control Dribble**" when in "traffic," but they will also have to learn how to look for "Open Space" and to quickly accelerate and "**Speed Dribble**" when they get Open Space. Tell them that they can go faster if they kick the ball in front of them, but they MUST still keep control of the ball. If they kick it too far, they won't be able to make their turn. In most games, a player will lose the game if he or she loses control of the ball even once. The game is self-teaching, but it is helpful for the coach to be encouraging and to point out how players can improve their performance. Give your players "tips" on how they can improve their score. This approach works because the players want to improve their score and if they use your "tips" they will see immediate results and get higher scores.

Teaching
Points:

- "**Control Dribbling**" - When in traffic, keep the ball close to your feet so you can protect it ("shield" it) and learn how to look up while dribbling by keeping the ball close to your feet so you know where it is.
- "**Speed Dribbling**" - When you get "open" (out of traffic), you can kick the ball using the inside of foot or the "laces" & run to it so you can go faster, but you must still keep it under control so you can turn.
- How to do a "Pullback", "Stop/Turn", "Hook Turn", and a "Cutback".

"Passing Pairs Game" (Passing, U-8 & up)

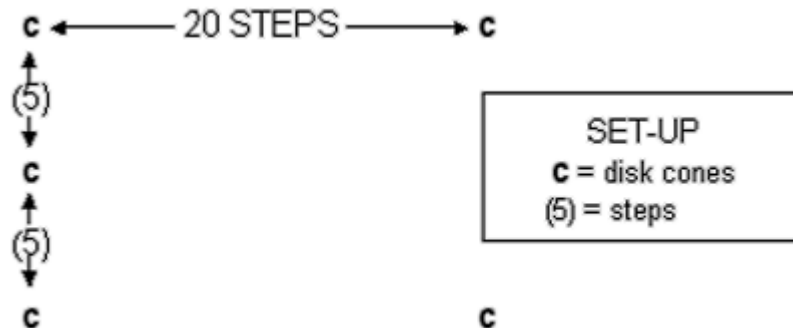
NOTE: This game is only good for teaching correct passing technique -- the problem with it is that the players aren't running and it might teach receivers that a pass should come to their feet, so they don't move to stop a bad pass.

To practice passing and receiving, We suggest you use the "[Dribble Around Cone & Pass Relay Race](#)" Practice Game -- the reason is because it practices passing while running and you can use it to teach "[Aggressive Receiving](#)", which is VERY important. You want your players to learn that passes WON'T be perfect and that they MUST be ready for bad passes and learn to move toward the pass. The [Dribble Around Cone & Pass Relay Race](#)" Practice Game can teach Aggressive Receiving, turning, passing, kicking a ball while running and under pressure, importance of "first-touch", one-touch control, and receivers to move to the ball.

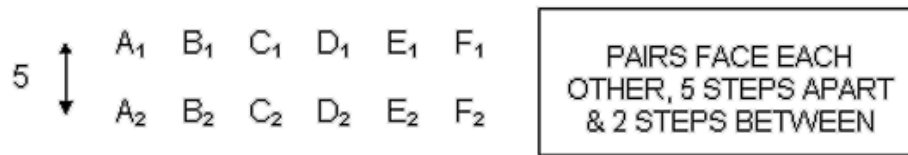
Teaches: Quick & accurate passing to feet

Set-up:

- Put 3 disk cones 5 steps apart and then walk 20 steps & set out 3 more (like shown below):



- Pair up players & have them face each other, 5 steps apart (use the cones as a guide). They should be in 2 rows (shoulder to shoulder) about 2 steps apart, like below. If an odd number, the coach or a parent must fill in.



The Game:

- One ball per pair (each pair is a "team")
- On "Go", see which team can complete **20 two-touch inside-of-foot "push passes"** first. Before they start, review the fundamentals such as knees bent, bounce on your toes while waiting to receive the pass, etc. (See ["How To Teach Passing & Receiving"](#)).
- Have first team to 20 yell out "Done". Then ask each other team how many they did.

At the end of each "game", give tips on how they can improve (e.g., if the pass is going into the air, it is because they are striking the ball too low; if their pass isn't straight, see if their plant foot is pointing toward the target & if they are following through with their kicking foot toward the target. Remember why this is called a "push" pass; are they following through toward the target?)

- Then, have them do **30 one-touch passes using either inside-of-foot or outside-of-foot** (a pair of U-12 players should be able to complete 60 one-touch passes in one minute from 5 steps apart).
- **Then**, have them do **20 one-touch using outside-of-foot only**
- **Then**, move one row back to the next cones so they are 10 steps apart & do 20 two-touch passes, 30 one-touch passes & 15 chip shots

Comment

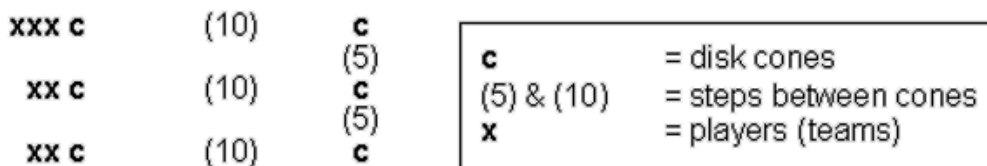
- **It is hugely beneficial to teach proper passing & receiving at an early age.** Over 50% of youth players use improper technique.

"Dribble Around Cone & Back Relay Race" (Dribbling & Turning, All ages)

Teaches: Dribbling & turning and a variation that includes passing

Set-up: Set up one relay "course" for each 2, 3 or 4 players, like below:

(Note: For U-6, put the cones 5 or 6 steps apart and for U-8, 8 steps apart).



- The Game:
- Divide into "teams" of 2, 3, or 4 (it's okay to have more players on one team than on another)
 - Each team has one ball
 - On "Go", the first player in each line dribbles around the cone & back to the starting line & gives the ball to his teammate who then dribbles around the cone & back, etc. (By U-10, teach them to "pop the ball" for a fast start. Do this by kicking the ball forward about 5 steps & then running to it. Also do this after making the turn).
 - Everyone must go around the right side of the cone (in the next game you can make them go around the left side)
 - The dribbler must dribble it to his teammates & not pass it.
 - The 1st team to complete 12 trips wins.

- Scoring:
- One point for each time a player goes around & back to the start
 - First team to 12 wins

- Play 2 or 3 games

Next:

- Do "Relay Race No. 2" using the same set-up

Variation No. 1: Require everyone to go around the cone on the left side so they are turning with either the inside of the left foot or the outside of the right foot.
(All ages)

Variation No. 2: Dribblers go past the cone (rather than around it) & turn by using a pullback
(U-8 & up)

Variation No. 3: Can only use top of foot or outside of foot to dribble
(U-8 & up)

Variation No. 4: Dribbler can pass the ball to teammate as soon as he makes the turn
(U-8 & up)

"Dribble & Tag / Reverse" **(Dribbling, Steering, Talking, All ages)**

Summary: A fun, simple tag game where one or two players with a ball attempt to tag players without a ball. When tagged, a player gets a ball and helps the others with the ball tag those who don't have a ball. When only one player is left without a ball, that player is the winner, but then that player is "it" and the game reverses so players with a ball try to avoid being tagged by those without a ball. This can be played as one game, or the first or second part only. The second part can be made harder by requiring that the ball is tagged by a foot. Encourage "its" to talk and work together.

Teaches: Dribbling, some 1 vs. 1 play, steering toward the sideline and can be used to encourage talking & teamwork by those who are "it". If, in the second game, tags must be made with the foot, then "shielding" can be taught.

Set-up:

- Use cones to make a square 10-20 steps wide (depending on age and number of players).
- Put balls outside the square

The Game:

- 2 players have a ball & the others don't
- On "Go", the players with the ball try to use their hands to try to tag those without a ball
- When a player is tagged, he becomes one the "its" and gets a ball and tries to tag players without a ball
- The last player left without a ball is the winner. Stop the game and tell the players that now, the player without the ball is going to try to tag those with a ball (preferably using his foot to tag the ball, but for U-6 or U-8, tagging with hands is okay).
- Now, when players with a ball are tagged,

they kick their ball out of the square and try to tag players with the ball

- The last player with a ball is the winner

Rules:

- If a player or his ball goes out of bounds to avoid being tagged, he is considered tagged. Thus, a good strategy is to try to "steer" the player you are trying to tag to the sideline.

Teaching Points:

- "Steering"
- "Shielding" (if tagged with feet)
- "Its" talking and working together

"Shoulder Tackle & Strength On The Ball Game" (Winning the ball & strength on the ball, shoulder tackle, shielding, U-8 & up)

Summary: **"Winning the ball"** is critical. The team that wins the ball the most will usually win the game. Young players often aren't used to physical play, but the more physical team will usually win. This game teaches defenders how to legally use their shoulder to "tackle" (called a "**Shoulder Charge**") and teaches players how to avoid being pushed off the ball while dribbling (which is called "**Strength on the Ball**"). It will get your players used to contact, which is very important. Players pair up and walk or run side-by-side, while pushing each other shoulder-to-shoulder.

Teaches: **"Shoulder Tackle"**, **"Shielding"**, **"Strength on the Ball"**.

Set-up:

- Use cones to create a "Starting Line" and a "Finish Line" 10 steps away
- Pair up players. Coach or parent plays if odd number.
- Try to pair up players by size and ability.

The Game:

- 1st, place the pairs on the Starting Line without a ball, facing the Finish Line, "shoulder-to-shoulder" and "hip-to-hip", with feet apart and knees bent for balance. See which players can make the other one move. Tell them to keep their arms straight down by their side (they cannot raise their arm or push with it, just the shoulder). Also, they must stay straight up and cannot "dip" their shoulder (if they do, they will often be called for a foul). They can move their feet, bend

their legs and use their hip so long as their shoulder is in contact with the opponent's shoulder. (Read "**Shoulder Charge**" in the Dictionary for more rules). Tell your players "You can't let other players push you around".

- 2nd, have the pairs walk toward the Finish Line (without a ball), pushing shoulder-to-shoulder, hip-to-hip. If some pairs don't push, switch up the pairs. Encourage players and praise improvement. For some players physical play is not natural, but with praise & encouragement they will improve. Tell them to keep their feet apart and knees bent so they are difficult to push.
- 3rd, do the same thing while running
- 4th, give one player in each pair a ball, line up all pairs on the Starting Line and have the players with the ball try to dribble to the Finish Line while the other player tries to kick the ball away or steal it. If the "off-the-ball" player touches the ball he gets one point; if he steals it he gets 2 points. Then, give the other players the ball and let them try to dribble from the Finish Line to the Starting line. Do this several times and switch up the pairs for variety.

Rules:

- Off-the-ball players (those without the ball) must stay shoulder-to-shoulder with the dribbler and try to win the ball by pushing with the shoulder and hip. (They cannot push the front, back or go around; only shoulder-to-shoulder).

Teaching Points:

- Show dribblers how to "**shield**" the ball by dribbling with the foot farthest from the opponent.
- "**Strength on the Ball**"
- "**Shoulder tackling**" technique



"Small Sided Scrimmage Without a Goalie"

**(Team Attacking & Defending, Teaching Positions,
Evaluating Players, U-8 & up)**

Summary: If you scrimmage at practice, this is the best way. Divide your team in half, don't use a Goalie, and goals only count if shot from within The Scoring Zone, which is identified by a Red Cone. This game is better than a regular scrimmage in 2 ways: (1). All players learn to defend and play tough defense and block shots, and not rely on The Goalie, and (2). To score, they must work the ball close to the goal and not take long shots, so control, dribbling, passing, and movement off the ball in the Attacking Third are encouraged.

Comments:

1. Most Rec teams should only scrimmage for 15-20 minutes per practice. Scrimmaging doesn't give enough touches on the ball, isn't a good way to practice specific techniques or tactics, can reinforce bad habits and players are often less enthusiastic on game day if they have scrimmaged a lot during the week. Practice games are a more effective use of most Rec team's limited practice time.
2. Small sided scrimmages on a small field are good because everyone plays, there are many touches and many transitions from offense to defense.
3. This is great to do in one your first practices with new players because by watching you can tell a lot about a player's skills, natural abilities, and where they prefer to play.

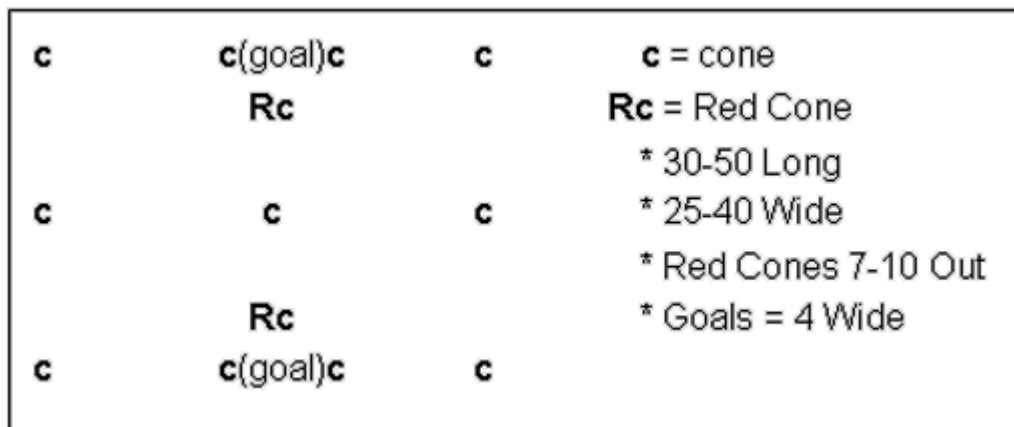
Teaches:

1. This will teach all players that they must defend and block shots with their feet and body.
2. It will teach attackers to move the ball into scoring position in front of the goal. Encourage passing, crosses, and centering the ball in the "Attacking Third".

3. Quick transitions from offense to defense and vice versa.

Set-up:

1. Divide into 2 balanced teams (a parent or coach can play if needed). Use vests or some method to identify the teams (I suggest avoiding "skins" since it can cause embarrassment).
2. Use disk cones to outline the field that is 30-50 steps in length and 25-40 steps wide, depending on the age group. (Better to be too short than too long, but width is good so they have room to take the ball wide).
3. Use 2 cones to make a "goal" at each end that is 4 steps wide.
4. Put one cone in the middle to mark the halfway line.
5. Put a Red or painted cone 7-10 steps out from each goal (toward The Halfway Line) to mark the "Scoring Zone" (goals can only be scored from shots inside these cones)



The Game:

- Start each game by having each team start from behind its Red Cone (i.e., from inside its "Scoring Zone"). This way they start by controlling the ball and don't get bogged down in "Kick-Offs", which are among the least important things to worry about. Allow the team with the ball to start by dribbling.
- Neither team has a Goalie (i.e., no one can use their

hands). This forces all players to learn to defend without relying on a Goalie. In this way, the "Game is the Teacher". Trust us, this works.

- For U-12 and older, try to avoid assigning positions. Give the players a minute to talk about it before the game.
- Before they start, be sure they know each other's names.
- You can call offside if it is blatant.
- For corners, allow either a throw-in or a corner kick.
- Goals can only be scored on shots from inside the "Red Cone" (i.e., on an imaginary line straight across the field) and must be below "goal height" to count (you make the call on these).
- Play 2 games of about 7-10 minutes each and at the end of the first game swap up the teams so you can see how different combinations play together.