

Racine Area Soccer Association



Recreational Coaching Manual



Table of Contents

Credits

Importance of Coaches

The Most Important Skills to Teach

General Coaching Tips

Formations & Positioning

Preseason Meeting

Running Successful Practices

Stretching

Selecting Age Appropriate Activities

Management and Discipline

The Game Day

Micro Soccer (ages 4-6)

Ages 7-8

Ages 9-10

Ages 11-12

Ages 12-14

Soccer Activities



Credits

Note on copyright: The following material was created from many sources, including other coaching manuals. The rights to this manual are jointly held by the individuals who created and wrote this work.

Note on reproduction: all copyrighted material contained in these pages, except for any pages containing a specific notice to the contrary, may be copied and distributed subject to the following restrictions:

- a. no fee of any kind may be charged for the material;
- b. all copied material must clearly identify its source and contain the statement on copyright shown above.

Below is list of the generous contributors to this manual. Their materials and advice have helped to create an important reference manual which will benefit Racine's soccer community for generations to come.

SOCCER-COACH-L Coaching Manual Collective, which is a pseudonym for a joint project among several individuals intended to provide basic information for the benefit of soccer coaches, especially those who are new to the game.

Gavin Spooner (various coaching manuals)

"Coaching 6, 7, and 8 Year Olds" (Tony Waiters and Bobby Howe)

"Coaching 9, 10, and 11 Year Olds" (Tony Waiters and Bobby Howe)



The Role and Importance of Coaches

Looking back on all of my soccer years, I can remember every coach that I ever had. Today, as an adult and a parent, I realize that many of them also served as mentors and role models. Whether the children view you as a coach or parental figure, you have a tremendous impact on how these children feel about themselves.

Please take your responsibility to heart. All of us, including the children, appreciate your time and effort.

Below are some important guidelines to remember during your coaching experience:

- YOUR POSITION IS VERY IMPORTANT
- YOU ARE A ROLE MODEL TO THESE CHILDREN
- SET EXEMPLARY STANDARDS. DEVELOPING GOOD TOUCH AND TECHNIQUE
- GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP AND A GOOD ATMOSPHERE IS THE GOAL
- KEEP AWAY FROM CREATING A PRESSURE TO WIN
- COMMUNICATION: Ensure the terminology you use is clear and precise. Let players know you are in charge.
- POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT: Whenever possible give individuals and/or groups positive reinforcement. Refrain from using negative comments. Use praise as an incentive.
- BE CREATIVE AND USE INITIATIVE: If the drill or game is too advanced, modify to increase the chances of success.
- MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Be motivational and inspirational. Enthusiasm and being energetic are contagious.
- KEEP PLAYERS ACTIVE: If the drill is static, create need of helpers or assistants to keep everyone involved.
- EACH PLAYER IS AN INDIVIDUAL: Be aware of player differences. Aggressive or quiet, recognition of player personalities will allow you to respond to all players, and they will respond to you positively.
- STRIVE FOR QUALITY: In all demonstrations make the desired objectives clear. If a player shows mastery of a skill, use him/her to demonstrate.
- REINFORCE CORRECT TECHNIQUE: In all drills and games continually emphasis the use of correct techniques.
- ENCOURAGE PLAYER MOVEMENT: At all times make players aware of importance of readiness. Emphasize weight forward on toes and bouncing instead of flat footed-ness.
- ROTATE POSITIONS: All players should be active as servers, assistants. In game situations change positions each quarter.
- DEVELOP PLAYER RESPECT: Continually get players to support one another. To show good sportsmanship towards all players including opponents, and respect for others attempts and effort.
- EQUALITY AMONGST PLAYERS: Give equal attention to all players in group or games. Do not leave the less competent players behind nor slow the advanced players.
- FUN AND ENJOYMENT: Players will respond and want to continue if things are fun. Create their enjoyment.



How You Define "Winning" Will Affect All You Do

It is important to let players and parents know what the coach defines as "winning" at the start of the season. In their developmental years, kids really do "win" at soccer or, for that matter, any other sport if they have fun with their friends; learn enough about the game to become a fan; and get some healthy exercise. Numerous studies show that while kids certainly enjoy winning contests, their short attention span allows them to quickly forget the score in the last game, at least until some adult makes a big deal out of it. In addition, because kids are naturally more focused on their own performance than on the performance of the group, kids can be perfectly happy if they had a great game themselves even if the team lost in a blow-out.

Because kids have these wonderfully short memories and an ingrained focus on "me", any coach can have a "winning" season by setting the kids up to succeed at some task in every game and praising them for this accomplishment. Of course, a good coach also wants to teach them to work together and to whittle down the "me" focus a bit. Therefore, good coaches will include some team objectives that encourage the kids to work together (e.g., "Let's see if we can get 3 passes in a row in each quarter"). So, don't be afraid to use a long-term focus and to define "winning" in a way that gives everyone a fair chance to succeed.

Most teams (and new coaches) are thrown into games after just a few practices, often before the coach has had a real chance to teach the players anything. Thus, new coaches often feel intense pressure to "win", and may take early losses personally. This can lead them to worry excessively about where to put their players to maximize their "wins" when they really should be worrying about giving their young charges valuable experience in all parts of the field. These same fears of "failure" (i.e., not winning) can also cause some youth coaches to focus on a few stars and relegate the rest to the bench or supporting roles. When this happens, most of the players don't learn anything nor have any fun, and even the development of the "stars" can be harmed in the long run.

The first few games simply show the skills that any prior coaches taught your players and give you an idea of their natural athletic talent. So, the last thing on the mind of a new coach should be worries about winning the early games. Instead, the focus properly should be on long-term skill development. When this happens, the wins ultimately will start coming to your team as they become one of the more skilled teams on the field. This can take up to a year or more, so be sure to let everyone know in advance that you do not intend to worry at all about the short-term won/loss record.



The Most Important Skills to Teach

Soccer players need a lot of different skills, and it does not matter for most of these skills whether you teach Skill A or Skill B first. However, there are some skills that are absolute "must-haves" for any player- and are so important that you probably will want to teach them first. These skills are;

- basic ball-holding skills (receiving and shielding)
- basic ball-stealing skills (defense)
- basic take-on skills (attacking).

Most kids naturally seem to have a few basic defensive skills, even if they were never formally taught. The other two areas require instruction to accomplish with even minimal competency, so there is a good argument to start first with ball-holding skills; move next to take-on skills; and then to get to ball-stealing skills.

Why ball-holding before take-on? Simple. Once you get possession, the other side is going to try to take the ball back. If you can hang onto the ball under pressure, you'll have time to make better decisions (including finding an open teammate to pass the ball to). Also, if you are confident that you can hold the ball, you are much less likely to blindly try to simply whack it away and let someone else worry about it (a technique commonly known as "passing the responsibility rather than the ball" or the "hot-potato phenomenon"). What are ball-holding skills? Most folks refer to them as receiving and shielding skills. The first step (receiving) is to bring the ball under control quickly. Then, you use your body/legs to get between the opponent and the ball to protect (shield) the ball. It includes really basic stuff like simply stepping over the ball when somebody is coming in, as well as somewhat harder stuff (but still easy) like rolling/pulling the ball back behind you or to your side. The rolling/pulling of the ball requires some work, as you need to learn to use both feet - and to switch feet. However, one of the key ingredients is to learn to bend the knees; get the arms out; and use your weight to push back into the opponent. As kids get more advanced, they can learn how to spring off of an opponent (or roll off of him by using a circle turn). However, at the very beginning stages, they are fine if they can simply get their bottoms down; get those knees bent; push hard back into the opponent; and get enough weight on their support leg to be able to free their far foot and use it to roll the ball around. Along with these ball-holding skills, you will want to introduce some basic receiving skills, so that they can bring the ball under control quickly (which is essential if they are going to have any hope of shielding it).

After learning some basic shielding/receiving skills, the next thing to learn is some basic dribbling skills. Different coaches have different philosophies on how to teach dribbling. Many coaches spend a lot of time trying to teach young players a lot of fancy moves which were made famous by noted international stars (who, incidentally, only perfected these fancy moves after years and years of hard work on the basics). This approach works for some kids who are naturally graceful and quick. However, it can have the unfortunate result of convincing an awful lot of kids that "I can't dribble" when they simply are still growing; are a bit clumsy; and cannot get their big feet and/or unwieldy bodies to do all of the ballerina stuff. What these coaches don't realize is that a player only needs to know about 3 basic moves to be able to dribble very successfully--and that virtually all top-notch players use these same 3 moves about 90% of the time when they are dribbling the ball.

The next thing to learn is basic defense including simple delay as well as ball-stealing. The first thing to teach is simple delaying tactics by use of good footwork to get in the attacker's way. Time is the defender's friend, and speed is the attacker's friend, so you want to delay and delay and delay to allow your teammates to come and help. Once you're "numbers up", it's easier to steal the ball! The second skill is the standing tackle followed by the shoulder charge.

Of course, after you've taught these very basic skills, you'll need to work on passing technique and kicking technique since most kids won't be able to pass accurately or do a laces kick or a chip without instruction (although most will toe-kick just fine). Whatever you do, please don't teach your kids that the "proper" way to score is to break the net with a hard shot. Many kids get the impression that they cannot play forward unless they have a very hard shot. This is garbage. Most goals in games will be scored by passes, not by blistering shots on goal (pull out your WC tapes and watch - this is universally true for most goals, except for set plays). So, get them used to scoring by simply passing the ball into the net and their future coaches will thank you. Nothing wrong with scoring by a kick, mind you. Just don't get them

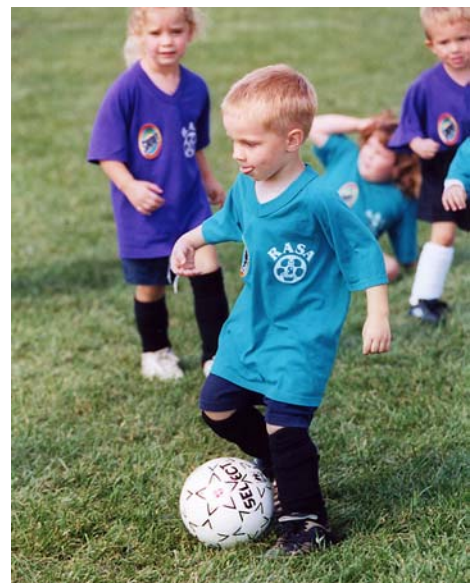
into the mindset that their spectacular dribbling run through 6 defenders needs to end with a bullet shot as they'll inevitably put the ball out too far in front of them to get the shot off and the keeper will make a meal of it. On the other hand, they most likely would have scored if they had simply kept the head up; watched the keeper; and pushed it past him.

Expectations

Below is a list of skills that we would like to see the players develop by the time that they are ten years old and have at least one year of playing experience.

- Head a fairly gentle ball (they shouldn't even think of attempting teeth-rattlers until around U13 or so).
- Be able to execute a decent chest trap (and decide whether to use the head or chest as the ball is coming in).
- Know the basic rules for a first defender (delay/deny), and be able to successfully mark/hold an attacker of similar size/speed/skill for a count of about 7-8.
- Execute a basic standing tackle and shoulder charge.
- Be able to pass a stationary ball through cones 1 yard apart at distances of 6 yards with dominant foot. Be able to pass accurately with non-dominant foot at the 3 yard distance.
- Be able to receive/control with 2 touches/then push pass a moving ball through cones 1 yard apart at a distance of 4 yards (2-3 yards with non-dominant).
- Be able to execute a laces kick with some power and accuracy.
- Be able to execute a lofted kick/chip which will clear an average-sized player in their age bracket.
- Understand the basic rules on throw-ins, and be able to execute them properly.
- Be able to dribble/beat an unskilled defender by use of simple cuts and changes of pace.
- Be able to shield the ball and hold in 1v1 situation to count of 8.
- Understand basic principles of keep away (talking, taking the ball where the defenders aren't, basic rules of support triangles, planning your reception to take ball into space/away from pressure).
- Understand usual game rules (restarts, fouls, fair play, ref signals, basic offsides if applicable).
- Understand/follow the team rules (paying attention, bringing proper equipment to practice, cleanup, subbing, calling if late/missing, no hassle of teammates, etc.).
- Be able to juggle the ball with the foot or thigh at least 5-10 times.
- Be able to pass the ball appropriately to a teammate who is 10 yards or more away, both when teammate is stationary and when moving (i.e., understands the concept of leading a moving player so that he does not overrun the ball).
- Be able to receive a well-struck ball passed with the inside of both feet, and with at least the outside of the dominant foot.

This may seem like a lot to get accomplished by the time children are ten, but with good, consistent coaching it is achievable. In the later chapters we'll help you identify which skills to work on for each age group.



Formations & Positioning

How does a new coach who knows nothing about soccer get these kids trained and organized, so that they will be the most skilled? It is not very hard, as long as you keep it simple.

Adopt Developmental Rotation Plans

You need to create a plan to train your players so that, over the course of 1-2 seasons, most will be able to play in any position on the field. Also, you will need to spend considerable time teaching the fundamental principles of support and defense, as well as the basic skills that form their foundation. As a result, as your players gain the knowledge and skill to apply these principles, their "positions" can ultimately serve more as guidelines for their major area of responsibility while they are in this particular relative space.

What initial formation should you choose? The basic decisions involved in choosing formations can be quite complex. However, regardless of the formation, you must remember that your ultimate goal is to develop every player to the point where he can do any job on the field with reasonable competence and that, to reach this goal, each player **MUST** know the basic principles of offensive and defensive support.

As players get to high school age, it is likely that they will start to "specialize" in one or two particular areas of the field which best suit their talents. At this stage, coaches will also pay greater attention to adopting a formation and style of play that capitalizes on the special skills/talents available, while masking any weaknesses. This approach is possible because the players have progressed intellectually to the point where their brains are ready for the challenge of complex tactical decisions and they will have developed emotionally to the point where they are more willing to sacrifice their individual goals for the goals of the group. Even at this age, however, coaches must be mindful of their duty to work on correcting those weaknesses, instead of merely trying to cover them up.

Do not make the mistake of treating your young charges like older high-school players. There is, obviously, huge difference between a 17 year-old and an 8 year-old. Similarly, but less obviously, there is a huge difference between a 12 year-old beginner and a 12 year-old who has been playing soccer for six years.

New players need to gain experience in all positions. Don't try to constantly "hide" them in positions that will cover up their deficiencies. This is the lazy coach approach. Far better to take the time to develop their skills, so that they don't need to be hidden.

Of course, this does not mean that a player should be forced into a position/job for which he clearly is not ready. Many shy players are reluctant to play goalkeeper, for instance. While it may be okay to give them chances to try this out in practice, and even push them to try, games may be a different story. If they really think that they'll humiliate themselves playing keeper, they'll rarely do a good job there. Ditto for players who are fearful of playing forward or back positions. So, if you get a shy one or one who is afraid to try new things, you may need to take a longer-term approach to their particular development. As long as you are keeping the player's development in mind in making positioning decisions, rather than focusing on the "wins", you should pat yourself on the back.

Will you make mistakes? Of course. Some probably will be doozies. But, every game or two, you will have some little tyke who gets the wonderful "I can't believe I did it" grin on his face as he attempts something which he never thought was possible and sees it work. Be careful about those grins, though. They tend to be addictive!

Basic Defensive Positioning In a Nutshell

The 3 basic positions of players on defense are best described by the acronym "PCB" (Pressure-Cover-Balance).

The person closest to the ball is called the First Defender, and his job is to provide **PRESSURE** on the ball. The second-closest person who is goal-side of the ball (meaning closer to his team's goal than the opponent) is called the Second Defender. His job is to provide **COVER**. That is, to be in a position to immediately become the pressure person if the attacker gets by the First Defender. In addition, the

Second Defender will frequently have the additional job of guarding (called "marking") another off-ball attacker to whom the ball might be passed for a shot. The Second Defender will normally choose to take up a position ball-side of his mark if possible, but will mark goal-side if the ball-side position makes it impossible for him to provide support for the First Defender. Goal-side marking is also used if a defender knows that his mark is much faster than he is, as it gives him the lead that he needs to keep from being beaten. The defender who is in the deepest position (closest to goal) if a line were to be drawn directly from the attacker to the goal is called the Third Defender. His job is to provide BALANCE to the defense. In essence, he is providing additional cover for the two primary defenders, and also watching out for additional incoming attackers making runs towards the center or far post areas of the goal. All players should be taught these basic principles, and how to apply them in a game setting. It's also very important that players understand their supporting duties to those players who are immediately around them.

Basic Offensive Positioning In a Nutshell

There are also 3 basic positions in the attack. The person with the ball is called the First Attacker. His job is to retain possession while getting the ball as close to goal as possible by dribbling, passing or shooting.

The player(s) within an easy ground pass of the First Attacker are called Second Attackers. Up until the time when the ball is advanced to within scoring range of the goal, the primary role of the Second Attacker(s) is to prevent loss of possession, while still allowing the ball to be advanced forward if at all possible. Prior to getting into scoring range, a single Second Attacker typically will position himself so as to allow short relay passes between himself and the First Attacker in order to move the ball around the defenders). Of course, the goal of the attackers is to get the ball past all of the defenders into unobstructed space within scoring range of the goal and then, ultimately, into the goal itself.

Therefore, as the ball moves into scoring range, the role of the single Second Attacker switches from a "safety-first" orientation of keeping possession, which may even involve moving the ball away from the goal in order to keep it. Instead of "safety", the Second Attacker's role is to set up a shot on goal for himself or the First Attacker.

At this point, the Second Attacker's needs to move into a position that will allow the First Attacker to pass the ball into "scoring space" behind or to the side of the defenders, i.e., space from which an immediate shot can be taken. The positioning of the single Second Attacker will depend on the number of defenders to be beaten. Normally, however, a single Second Attacker will position himself on the far side of the defenders and set up within scoring range of the far post area. This allows him to distract and/or pull one defender away from the central goal area or, if unobserved, to sneak in the "back door" while everyone is watching the attacker with the ball.

Where there are two Second Attackers (i.e. close supporters) available, they will position themselves to form a moving triangle with their on-ball teammate, by moving into space between or to the side of the defenders so that the ball always has a clear path to their feet. As the ball is moved into scoring range, one of these players will often abandon his close support role and will become a Third Attacker although this job also may be taken up by any other off-ball teammate who can fulfill the duties.

The Third Attacker's job is to unbalance the defense by making deep runs, usually to the far side of the goal. By doing this, the Third Attacker pulls defenders away from the goal mouth; distracts the keeper and defenders in front of the goal; and opens up space in front of the goal which can be exploited by incoming teammates.

All players need to be taught these basic principles of attacking support. In particular, they need to learn the concepts of setting support triangles (basic keep away) and how to move to create basic 2-man and 3-man attacking support, because these tools are essential weapons used by all soccer players to maintain possession in tight spaces and create scoring chances.

Ideas for your First Practice

Your first practice sets the tone for your upcoming season, and it is important to create a proper first impression. Often in a new coach's rush to get players out on the field, you might forget something as basic as introducing yourself and your assistants. Take a little extra time to prepare for this session, and be ready when the players arrive.

It is very important to have a preseason meeting with both parents and players. This is your opportunity to set out your coaching philosophy (including your plans for the team as a whole and your approach to player development). This is also your chance to explain team rules in a non-confrontational setting (before any discipline is needed), and to recruit volunteers to help you with administrative tasks.

Skip this first meeting at your peril. If the first time that some bossy parent has any contact with you is on Game Day when your team is getting pounded, and this parent tries to "help" you by yelling at the kids or standing beside you to offer "helpful" suggestions, you will be **very** sorry that you did not lay out your game-day ground rules early.

We are not kidding when we suggest that this is probably the most important meeting which your team will have for the entire season. So, plan it carefully; get organized; and do your best to make an excellent first impression.

What To Cover At The Meeting

First of all, introduce yourself and your assistants (if any) to the parents. Most parents like to hear something about your background and your philosophy of coaching, especially as it impinges on their own child, so you may want to say something about how much playing time each player can expect. It's also a good idea to go around the room and ask parents to introduce themselves and say which player they're related to. Some of the parents may know one another well, others may not, and they'll be seeing quite a bit of one another! You may also want to pass around a sign-in sheet and ask people to put their name and phone number on it; this can be useful later to see who was present at the meeting and to check phone numbers.

Some parents may be divorced, so bring extra questionnaires, rosters and game schedules to the meeting for the other parent. If you note that the parents are divorced, make a mental note to check with the parent attending the meeting with the child about custody problems (including who is allowed to pick up the child after practice). This can save a lot of arguments later.

Be sure to go over the team rules and RASA's code on conduct, including your expectations for parental behavior (especially at games). While being friendly, be firm that you expect that parents will not yell at kids on the field or yell at referees - and that the **ONLY** talk that you want to see is positive (good try, nice save, etc.). Remind parents that children perform worse if distracted or harshly criticized, so you really need their cooperation. Also remind them that Refs are usually inexperienced themselves at lower age groups, and often will make mistakes. However, if we yell at the Refs, we can make the Ref more rattled, or get the Ref mad at the team, or even might convince the kids that the Ref is against them, which tends to make players want to stop trying or say/do bad things to the Refs themselves (which can get the kids in really hot water) - so you expect the parents to set a good example of sportsmanship for the team.

If you are going to take a long-term approach toward player development, and move players around (instead of locking players into single positions to increase your win/loss record), tell the parents why you have chosen this route. Explain how you define "winning", and what your approach towards player development will be.

For logistical reasons, many coaches prefer to hold their organizational meeting in conjunction with their first practice session. If you do this, remember two things: Meeting before the practice can leave young players bored and restless. Meeting after the practice could lead to problems with parents rushing off early without really listening.

Learn Everyone's Name

At the recreational level, it is common for coaches to know only a few of their players by name or face. The same is true for the players who will tend to cluster near the teammates they know and ignore the ones they don't know. Your goal is to get everyone to learn everyone's name as quickly as possible.

What to Watch For

As you learn your players' names, you will also learn a little bit about their personalities, skill level, and knowledge of the game. Younger players (U-12 and below) should not be locked into set positions, so it's not as important to find out where they prefer to play. Please realize this is a frequent area of disagreement among coaches, and players vary considerably. For every shy pumpkin who freaks at the slightest change, there's a ferocious feline ready to take on any challenge. Adjust to your young players' needs to maximize their individual success.

With older teams, you might find certain players have definite preferences and strongly resist being put into unfamiliar positions. Recognizing these preferences early can help you plan ahead, whether you want to keep the player in a favorite position or help the player adjust to a new position.

You also need to make an early assessment of your team's overall abilities and each player's individual skill level. This will help you plan practices that are most effective at developing skills and an understanding of the game. The reality of most recreational teams is that you will find a wide range of interest, ability, and experience. You will need to challenge the talented while reaching out to the newbies as well. There are a number of ways to address mismatches without causing problems during practice.

Recruit Helpers

If you were unable to get volunteers to serve as assistants during your pre-season meeting, it's not too late. Parents of young players tend to stay at the practice field, and you should quickly round up 2-3 helpers from the crowd. These parents can tend to minor injuries, watch over discipline problems, help retrieve balls, or serve as assistant coaches. Problems can occur when your assistants don't share your philosophy or focus only on their own child. If you're not sure you have the right folks for the job, wait a few practices before officially naming your assistants.

Importance of Stretching

Stretching is almost universally advocated but there is considerable confusion about who should stretch, how long to stretch for, what muscles should be stretched, and how to perform a stretch. Rather than attempt to offer an exhaustive review of the subject here, this section will only offer suggestions and a review of frequently asked questions.

Stretching, like all physical activity, should be approached with an appropriate amount of care and understanding of the individual problems that a player may have. Some children have medical conditions or anatomic problems that prevent certain stretches. Additionally, some coaches like to stretch with the team prior to demonstrating activities. It is very important that the coaches warm-up and stretch properly since their risk of injury is greater, in general, than the youngsters they are coaching. As a rule of thumb, if there is marked pain associated with a stretch, you should back off and either try an alternate stretch or decrease the degree of stretch.

Who should stretch?

The easy answer is everyone but, of course, easy isn't always correct. Most young, pre-puberty children have enough flexibility that it is debatable whether stretching is effective or useful. Indeed, if improper technique is used, there is a real risk of injury. However, it is important that young children develop good habits on the soccer field and it is for this reason that all age groups should perform some stretching routine.

When should I stretch?

To be most effective, the muscle should be warmed up prior to stretching. Most coaches will incorporate intermittent stretching during their warm-up activities (i.e. start an activity, stretch, begin a new phase of activity, stretch, and so on). In addition, studies suggest that stretching during the cool down after training helps in clearing lactic acid from the muscles and speeds muscle recovery.

What muscles should I stretch?

Again, the easy answer is all of them, but, realistically, this is not possible and may not be essential. Besides the general, large muscle groups, some coaches like to stretch muscles that will be specifically involved in that sport. For example, soccer coaches will often specifically stretch the calves, hamstrings, and quadriceps while not specifically working on arms or forearms. Most stretching programs begin with the back, then stretch the upper body, and finish with the legs starting with the buttocks and progressing down to the calves.

How do I stretch?

There are many different forms of stretching, each with advantages and disadvantages. It is generally agreed, however, that the old ballistic stretching that many of us did in physical education classes long ago is not useful. This type of stretching has the individual bouncing into a stretch (remember gently bouncing up and down in an effort to touch your toes?). Passive stretching is where the muscle is stretched and held by some other force (another body part, a partner, the floor, etc.). Isometric stretching is similar to passive stretching, but now the muscle is contracted against the other force (e.g. pushing against a wall while attempting to lower the heel). This form of stretching, while very effective, is only recommended when the contractions and stretches are performed in the submaximal, pain-free range of movement (pain during contractions is a precursor to damaged tendons and ligaments).

How long do I stretch?

There truly is no easy answer to this question. Little research has been done to investigate the time it takes to adequately stretch most muscle groups. It is known, however, that hamstrings take a minimum of 15 seconds to achieve benefit from stretching. Other muscle groups may take as long as 30 seconds. As a general rule of thumb, therefore, stretches should be held for between 15 and 30 seconds.

Should I stretch if I have been injured?

Most rehabilitation programs include some form of stretching. However the degree and frequency are best decided by your doctor and physical therapist, not your average youth soccer coach.

Are there stretches that I shouldn't do?

While most young children have no problem performing a variety of stretches, coaches who try to stretch with their team should be warned. Straight leg toe touches compress the disc spaces in the back and can cause severe pain. Similarly, lying on the ground and trying to put your feet over your head compresses the discs. The 'hurdler's' stretch (sitting down with one or both legs bent so the foot is next to the hip while you lean back) can cause damage to the medial collateral ligaments (the ligaments on the inside of the knee), compress the medial meniscus (the cartilage that separates the bones that form the knee joint), and may cause dislocation of the patella (the knee cap).

In summary, stretching is an activity that should be done by all age groups after warming up and during the cool down after practice or games. Developing the habit and proper technique at an early age will pay great dividends later in life.

How to Select Age Appropriate Drills

In the back of this manual is an extensive list of soccer drills. This list is organized from beginner to advanced, including recommended ages. Please select drills that are appropriate for the age and skill level.

There are certain skills which every soccer player needs to acquire. One of the most important is the ability to receive and control the ball with the feet, as this skill is essential in order to be able to do almost anything else with the ball.

In order to develop a season plan, the coach normally will want to take a look at the players for a session or two, unless the players are all first-time players. This allows the coach to get an idea of the average skill level of the players and to identify players who are exceptionally weak or strong (as these players will present challenges).

Once this assessment is done, the coach will set up the plans for the season by listing out the skills which need to be learned; looking at the available practice times; and deciding which skills to teach, in which order. Some flexibility should be built into the schedule, as practices have a way of getting rained out - or the whole team will come down with chickenpox - or there may be some event (such as a huge win by a team which has been having trouble) which may cause the coach to decide to have a "fun" practice instead.

Once the coach has decided on the skills to be taught, the next step is to pick drills or games which will be useful vehicles to teach those skills. Selection of drills can be tough for a new coach, especially if the coach has not spent a lot of time teaching children in this particular age group. It is not uncommon to pick drills which end up being too easy or too hard. Here are some good rules of thumb which can help in drill selection:

- If you cannot explain the game rules in 30 seconds, the drill probably is too hard.
- Games that all kids play (like tag or relay races) require the least explanation.
- The game/drill should be designed to force the weak ones to improve (avoid knock-out games that eliminate weakest players first).
- If some initial individual skill work will be required before it is possible to play a game or hold a contest, make sure that the players understand that you have a contest planned (as it is easier to do work on "boring" things if an end is in sight).
- To avoid wasting time, try to pick a series of games/drills which allow you to use the same grids/cones more than once.
- Always have at least one backup drill ready, just in case a game falls flat.
- Avoid picking games which involve lots of idle time or standing around, such as line drills (as the old saying that "the devil makes work for idle hands" also applies to young players with idle feet).
- Design drills so that, over the course of the practice, the player ultimately will be doing the skill at game-like speed and in game-like conditions. For instance, in teaching shooting on goal, players will be unprepared to score in games if their only shooting practice involves shooting a stationary ball at an undefended goal with all the time in the world.
- The important thing is to keep your eye on what your objective is. If your objective is to teach passing, then you need to be sure that you are giving plenty of practice to those who need the work the most (while still retaining some "consequences" for doing the skill poorly - at least after a decent time to experiment with no pressure has been given).

Getting them ready to practice

Young children often arrive at practice full of energy. After a long day indoors, they are ready to run and play - and not ready to sit and listen. Therefore, it can make your drill go a lot better if you begin with some vigorous warm-ups. Once they have been running around for awhile, they will be begging for a water-break. Use the time when they are panting/drinking for your announcements and instructions - they tend to be MUCH less disruptive when pooped.

The first thing to do in order to start getting rid of some of this excess energy is to get players working as soon as possible. Involve them in some game or fun activity as soon as they get there. There are plenty of activities that players can do alone or with 1 or 2 others.

When should size or skill be a factor?

Even in a harmonious group, there are times when it makes sense to put the strongest with the strongest (especially in attacking/defending work). A very good (or very big) defender will destroy the confidence of a budding tiny attacker, so there are times when it makes sense to pair them up by body size and/or skill - with body size being quite important in things like teaching shoulder charges or tackles to beginners (even though, once confident, it makes sense to mix them up again). The whole idea is to set the kids up to succeed by controlling as many variables as you can which would tend to make success less likely.

How to handle very skilled players?

Often, a very good player who has been playing almost since birth will end up on a team with a bunch of teammates who have never seen a soccer ball before. This is tough on the coach and on the good player, but it is not an insurmountable hurdle. Here are some ideas of ways to keep this player challenged:

- Assign this player to teach a skill to a group (most kids do not mind showing off, and the other kids already will know that this kid is really awesome, so this can work nicely - and, by breaking down the skill into steps, the player often learns more than he realizes).
- Reduce the space the stronger player must work in.
- Make their target smaller or further away
- Limit their number of touches
- Limit them to use their weaker foot only
- Pit the stronger players against you or your assistant.
- By being creative, the coach can provide for challenges for the better player, while keeping the better player from being so dominant that the rest of the group do not get to participate.

Factors to consider in choosing teams

While the coach occasionally may allow the players to choose up sides (simply to get a feel for friendships or the assessments by players of relative skill levels), this should not be done this on a regular basis, because of the likelihood that these selections will hurt the feelings of the weakest kids.

Once the teams are selected, consider having a captain who is responsible for each team. Kids need to develop leadership skills, and to learn to take responsibility by observing what is happening on the field. If the player is a "captain", consider letting the player pick the positions for his team - and put him in charge of watching to make sure that his team marks up, recovers back, and pushes up and supports. Try to let everyone act as captain from time to time - but announce who is to be captain on that particular day based upon hard work, performance in the last game, or some other criteria which serves as an "atta boy" or "atta girl" to the player. Pay attention to which kids do a good job as captain, so that you can put them in charge of certain areas of the field in games (e.g., a sweeper who is observant and confident enough to give clear instructions to his/her teammates is a jewel to have on the field).

How to introduce the lesson for the day

In your very first practice, you may want to adopt a Rule about what you want players to do when you are talking. Many adults don't know this - but kids love rules - so if you want them to line up or sit down or put one foot on the ball or cross their arms in front of their chests or put one hand over their mouths - just tell them. Then, if a player is being disruptive, you can simply say "What is our Rule about what you are supposed to do when coach is talking?" Players hate for everyone else to think that they cannot follow the Rules, or don't know what the Rules are, so this can be very effective in getting them to display non-disruptive behaviors. And, if you have a Rule, then a simple announcement that it is "Time to line up" will cause them to assemble for the lesson.

The younger the age group, the shorter the time that you should be talking in any single burst. And, the younger the players, the more it is necessary to get them mentally involved in the lesson. The best way to get their attention is to introduce the topic through a series of questions, which allows them to show how smart they are - and gets them thinking.

First, the coach almost never says more than about 15 words at any one stretch (so it doesn't seem to the kids that the coach is saying very much). Secondly, the coach is allowing the kids to feel that they are smart and that they can figure out the answers themselves - because the coach is consulting them and asking for their feedback. Third, the coach is using demonstrators from the team who already know how to do the skill - which helps to convince them that they really can learn how to do this (and challenges the competitive ones to try to beat the demonstrators).

Once most coaches learn to use the Q & A technique, they will solve most of their problems in introducing the drills and getting the players started on what they want them to work on. The bulk of any remaining problems will disappear with use of the 3 R's. These are:

- Rules (we always do things this way)
- Restrictions (moving Johnny away from Jim; putting George beside you; etc.)
- Rewards (contests, games, scrimmages, etc. AFTER they do what you want).

How to correct errors

All beginners make mistakes. This is a normal part of learning. When players make mistakes, the very first thing which you need to decide is whether to correct the error. If, and only if, you decide that the error must be corrected at this stage will you then decide what method to use to correct the error.

Not every error needs immediate correction. In fact, one of the biggest mistakes that a coach can make is to try to get absolute perfection on the first few tries. If a player is corrected, and corrected, and corrected, it won't be long before he concludes that he cannot do ANYTHING right. And, it won't be much longer before he gives up and quits trying.

How do you decide whether to step in? The first clue is that the player is absolutely lost - and clearly doesn't understand what you wanted - so he is having zero success. Before you step in to correct one player, however, look around. Sometimes everybody is having trouble, which means one of two things: your instructions weren't clear or the skill is too difficult. If this happens, you need to stop the drill immediately; demonstrate again (don't use words - use actions); and start over. If they still don't get it with a full demonstration, the odds are very good that the skill is just too difficult - and that you need to go to your fall-back plan.

If most of your players are having some success, but are struggling with one or two elements of the skill (for instance, most are turning the foot correctly for the push pass, but accuracy is poor or the balls are often airborne), do a group correction. Young players often are very sensitive about being called aside (they think that this is a suggestion that they are stupid or slow - even though, in truth, most young players are so self-centered that they pay no attention at all to anyone else). As a result, a general statement that you noticed that a bunch of the players were having trouble with X is the better approach, followed by a quick demonstration. Then, as you go around the grids, you can simply issue reminders about "remember to hit the ball in the middle, not at the bottom".

Another option is to find the one or two players who are doing it right, and use them as your new demonstrators by praising them.

In the early stages of learning a skill, the coach must remember to praise, praise and praise. The player must feel that the coach is positive that the player CAN do it. Thus, as the coach makes the rounds, constant comments should be made to reinforce successes. Even if a player has messed up 3 out of the 4 elements of a skill, he still got one right. The coach needs to grasp onto this one right element, and build from there in order to get the player to keep on trying even when the skill is difficult for him.

Work-rate seems too low/players are bored...

Turn the drill into a contest. The work-rate, especially for boys, goes up dramatically if there is a race to see which pair is the first to, say, get 20 good passes in a row. So, if they are acting bored and aren't working hard, consider turning the drill into a contest.

Too many players are idle...

One common mistake is to have line drills (which are drills where all of the players are lined up in a row, waiting to take a turn at doing something). These drills are a recipe for disaster, as the kids are bound to get bored and will start pushing/shoving/bickering, instead of paying attention. If you have to have lines

for some reason (such as shooting drills), have multiple lines and turn whatever you are doing into a competition between the groups in the lines. Another option is relay races, which force the next in line to pay attention - and forces things to move much more quickly.

Not enough success (pressure too high)...

The basic rule of thumb in soccer is: More Space = More Time = Less Pressure on Attackers. By the same token, to get less pressure for defenders, you use the equation Less Space = Less Time (for the attackers) = Less Pressure on Defenders.

It obviously is important to let players have success. Generally, an offensive drill/activity will first be done with very little pressure. Pressure on the attackers can be adjusted in two ways - by increasing the space to the point where the attackers can move fairly easily around any defenders or by having the defenders move in slow-motion. Then, as the concept is learned, pressure is slowly increased. When defensive pressure is first applied on beginning attackers, it often may be better if the coach does it. Teammates will, even when instructed not to, may apply too much pressure to begin with.

Why? Defending is easier for younger players than attacking. Moreover, younger players like to move and run, so it can be hard to get them to act in slow-motion. However, it is essential to be able to restrict your defenders in the early stages of training attackers, so that your attackers don't get rattled and are able to gain confidence. Here are some ways to harness these over-eager defenders:

Have opposition play only as a shadow (good for introducing very light pressure)

Anchor the defender in some fashion, such as one foot always must be on a line or a cone, or one leg always must be anchored.

Act as the defender yourself when working with very timid players, and goof up to give them success. Assign players to work with others of similar size and skill level. Look for all sorts of ways to reduce pressure on the attacker, by giving the attacker more space or more time. You can do this by making the grid bigger, or giving the attacker a head start, or giving the defender a handicap. Be creative. For example, you can put a defender at a corner flag, and let him come out as soon as you serve a ball into an attacker coming straight at goal from around the 30 - or you can leave him by the goal post and not allow him to start until the attacker crosses the penalty arc. Or, you can put a defender 3-5 yards behind the attacker, and let them both go at once. And, all of these situations will arise in games (even the anchored defender, who is equivalent to somebody who has just twisted an ankle or knee), so don't be shy about using them.

New defenders also will need some help (although probably not as much as new attackers). A defensive drill/activity for newer players should be structured so that the space is relatively tight, which reduces the pressure on the defenders - and promotes their success. However, because defensive skills come somewhat more "naturally" to younger players than dribbling skills, the space which they are defending (and, hence, the pressure on them) typically can be increased more rapidly.

Management & Discipline

There are a number of problems which may occur over the course of a season due to the behavior of parents or players. These include attendance problems; disruptions/misconduct during practice or games; "overly-helpful" parents; and parents who are chronic grippers. Difficulties in handling these four problems are why most coaches decide to give up coaching, so it is very important to learn how to deal with them.

Dealing with discipline problems

The first trick in learning to handle players is to establish your authority early. If players do not get the idea that you are the "boss", and that you will insist that they follow your rules, it will be very difficult to control them. Here are some time-honored ways to get this message across early. Tips on Asserting Your Authority

Using "the Voice" and "the Look"

It's important for players to be able to recognize by your tone of voice and your manner when you intend a no-nonsense directive, or are drawing a boundary which they try to cross at their peril. Yelling does not work. Use a firm voice and a firm look, and DEMAND attention. Make it clear that this is non-negotiable - and your chances that they will listen increase substantially. Watch for their reaction, however. It is easy to scare little ones with a tone of voice which might induce teenagers to slowly think about complying - so adjust to your audience.

The Art of Refocusing Attention

Sometimes a quick, firm word in passing is enough to get things back on track without stopping an ongoing activity. If this doesn't work, don't try to yell or frantically run around to get the attention of the players. STOP the group, DEMAND that they all stop talking and look at you, and WAIT until everyone does so before even trying to start with the substance of your remarks. Using "the Voice", say something like: "Eyes on me. Now."

Choose Your Battles Wisely

Remember that all young kids misbehave at times. If the child is not normally disruptive or if the disruption is not serious - and is quickly abandoned with a quiet word from you, there is no reason to make a big deal over it.

If you are too stern, and use the proverbial cannon to deal with a small gnat of an offense, this causes two problems. First, the compliant players will start to fear you - and will become so upset by any correction from you that they will tend to freeze up and become afraid to make mistakes for fear of displeasing you (so they won't learn very well). Secondly, the more spirited or defiant players will figure out that you have already used up all of your ammunition on a trivial offense - so they won't see any reason why they shouldn't commit HUGE offenses if the punishment is going to be the same anyway. As a result, it is not uncommon to find utter chaos when the coach is not using good judgement on when/how/why/where to punish offenses.

Some Tips on Using "Punishments"

Be careful in using physical activity as punishment. Especially with younger players, learning to associate running or exercise with punishment can cause them to resent that activity when you need them to do this work. Nonetheless, there are times when a quick set of jumping jacks or pushups may help to refocus the player. As long as these are not onerous (no more than 5-10), the players usually accept the penalty with good humor and no lasting effects. However, if the player is looking for attention and wanting to clown around (or wanting to challenge the coach in some fashion), he will use the penance as an opportunity to have fun at the expense of the coach. As a result, if the coach already knows that he is dealing with a defiant player, the best bet may be to tell the player to go sit out until he can behave.

ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE sanctions is forcing the misbehaving player to sit out during an activity. Giving a time-out can often be very effective. Most players want to be with everyone else - even if they are being disruptive.

Usually, the coach will give the player the option of returning when the player decides to behave. However, if the player is refusing to participate in an activity which he doesn't like, then the better course is to sit the player out for the remainder of the practice. Otherwise, the coach will send the message to the team that, if you don't want to do an exercise, just go sit down - and you won't suffer any penalty. Once the players discover that you don't get to pick and choose what you do, and you don't get to scrimmage if you don't work, the incentives will be reduced to seek a time-out simply to avoid doing work.

Sometimes carrots work better!

It's important to not forget to use carrots as well as sticks. Just as in making corrections, good behavior should be praised and rewarded to reinforce behaviors you want at practices and games. One of the most effective ways to shape up a whole team that's half-hearted and distracted about whatever subject is the focus of the day's activities is to make most players' favorite part of the practice, THE SCRIMMAGE, contingent on the extent they get with the program. "The sooner we learn to do this, the longer we can scrimmage".

"Full Moon" Days

Sometimes, your players' energy and mood simply isn't a good match for the well-intended practice plan you designed. They're hopelessly restless, with unbounded energy. If the normally cooperative players are exceptionally wild, and none of the adjustments which you make seem to work, consider simply abandoning the plan for the day - and playing nothing but games (the winners of the last game get to pick the next one). As long as the games are soccer-related, the practice session is probably doing more good than you realize. The kids are getting lots of touches on the ball; team morale is soaring because coach is a good guy (and we got a free day); and coach is able to relax and enjoy watching the players act like a bunch of puppies. Consider it a vacation to recharge the batteries, and just have fun.

Dealing with "overly-helpful" parents

If parents have been acting as your assistants at practices, it is not uncommon for them to want to continue to participate during games. This is something which you need to watch closely, for several reasons. First, if other parents see a "non-coach" giving instructions to players on the field, they are going to be tempted to start doing this themselves. This will drive the kids crazy, because "too many cooks" really do spoil things. Secondly, most parents are going to be watching their own child - and giving most of their instructions to their own child. This can be very distracting to the child (even if the instructions are good) because it takes his attention away from the game and keeps him from using his own brain to figure things out for himself. Furthermore, many children simply want praise, praise and more praise from their parents - so any corrections will be viewed as a public statement of "Boy, you are so stupid, I hate having you as my kid." Finally, and often most importantly, the instructions being given by these "helpers" often tend to be completely wrong - and exactly opposite from what you have been working on at practice.

What to do? The key is tact - and a Preseason meeting. Explain to the parents that the kids need to be able to use the games as learning experiences - and too much criticism is going to feel to them that the parents view them as failures. Tell the parents that, on game day, the ONLY thing that you want to hear is some general praise "Nice job; good shot; unlucky; good idea; etc."). Tell your assistants that you really appreciate their help, but you need them to sit in the stands on game day, because you are afraid that other parents will be tempted to start "helping" by shouting instructions - and this will drive the kids nuts!

Then, if you have some parent who starts to give instructions, nip this in the bud early. Each time that the parent does this, smile and say "Remember the Rule, please." Be good humored about it. Make a sign which proclaims the stands as a NO COACHING ZONE. Bring a gag. But, don't permit this parent to violate your rules.

The same goes for parents who want to yell at opposing players or referees - except that you MUST leap in hard to prevent this.

The Game Day

Lots of issues come up on game day. How do you prepare your team? How should your team warm up before the game? How should you make adjustments during the game? What's the best way to get your subs on and off the field? Answering these sorts of question is the purpose of this section of the manual.

Dealing with Officials

The referee is a central part of the game, although ideally you will hardly notice him, like the grass on the field. As well as making matter-of-fact decisions, most refs use what they observe to develop and refine a mental model of how the game is and should be going. If you give the ref suitable positive feedback, you will find that sometimes it is possible to influence his mental model, possibly to the benefit of your team or both teams.

What you think are mistakes or missed calls might just be legitimate differences of interpretation. The law is clear that handling must be deliberate to be called, for instance, even though many observers think it's a foul every time the ball and an arm come in contact. On the other hand, if the referee isn't calling shirt-pulling, heel-clipping or other "sneaky" fouls, it might be that he doesn't realize they are occurring.

If you think the referee is missing certain calls, you may be able to constructively assist him. Having your captain or players politely tell the ref that specific players on the other team are using bad language or pulling on shirts, for instance, may cause the ref to pay more attention to those particular matters. If you would rather tell him yourself, then be at your most charming and phrase it as, "Ref, can you please pay more attention to number 8, who's doing such-and-such when you're not looking" rather than as a criticism. Another way to convey this information is to have a quiet word to the Assistant Referee on your touchline just before halftime.

You have limited options if you believe the referee is really dreadful. Rule No. 1 is never argue with a bad referee, since you expose yourself to the real chance of getting tossed out for dissent and, even if you get away with arguing, you probably will just make the referee worse. A new referee who is already nervous will make even more mistakes if you yell, and few will re-read the rules just because of your griping.

You can complain or appeal to league or tournament authorities after the game about referees who appear to be in over their head at your team's level, but remember: the referee is final judge of facts, and you won't win arguments about factual interpretations. Provide an objective report, not simply a list of complaints, and it will carry more weight if you are the winning team.

Pre-game

It is possible to begin a game with players running from the parking lot onto the playing field just before the whistle blows. It is also possible to be on the short side of a 1 - 0 score within a few minutes of kickoff because your team wasn't ready to play, physically or mentally. Showing up to a game on time means being on time for all warm-up activities. A coach can encourage punctuality by preparing a routine and making sure that every player and parent understands its purpose. The team's printed schedule should include arrival time for pre-game warm-up in bigger print than the kickoff time.

- The first players and parents to arrive can socialize, watch the previous game, and make sure they are properly dressed - shin guards, cleats, an extra layer or two in cold weather, etc..
- As players arrive, take the time to have a brief word with each one. Since the playing field will often be in use, find an area where they can pass a ball around in groups of threes. Encourage a variety of touches: one, two, juggle, dribble and turn, in the air, on the ground. Each group should intermix with the other groups using the entire area. Keep them moving.
- Assign a new player every week to lead dynamic stretching.
- Everyone get a drink of water. Organize them for static stretching, more to develop the habit rather than out of necessity as they approach their teens. Announce lineup.
- Note how many minutes until the final whistle of the previous game so you'll be ready to make the best use of the time between games. Organize a shooting drill that keeps balls and players moving. Make arrangements to have an assistant warm up the GK separately!
- Captains are called out for the coin toss by the referee. When they return, bring the team together for a very brief pep talk. A big cheer, and starters take their positions on the field. There should be a

minute or two to warm up the keeper in the goal area you will be defending and to pass a few balls among the players who are in their positions.

Half Time

Planning begins before the half is over. Pick a spot where you can assemble the team, preferably away from distractions (parents, friends, siblings, etc.). Depending on the weather you may want to select a sheltered area out of the wind and sun. Send your team in that direction while you briefly talk with your assistants to confirm your opinions or get more suggestions.

Try and get the team to face you with no distractions behind you.

Check for injuries- now is the time to note blisters, twisted ankles, etc. that may affect your line ups for the second half.

- Check for fun. In the younger age groups this is paramount. If they are not having fun, why are they there?
- Praise- be brief and complimentary.
- Announce line ups for second half.
- Make your points. They may just be a repeat of the topics you mentioned at the start of the game or a brief description of some problems you or the assistants noted. It should be limited to 2 or 3 points for U-10, just one point for U-8 and younger. More than that and you will run out of time or they will cease to hear you. Some coaches like to ask for players' opinions. This may best be left for older age groups since some immature teams will unleash a disruptive chorus of comments or complaints.
- Praise and encourage again.
- Send them out for warm ups/ start of the half (whichever there is time for). If there is time for warm-ups you may want to bring the team in just before the half starts for a huddle, very brief reminder of your points, and a team cheer. Be prepared to announce the line ups again since most younger age groups will have forgotten their position by now. Count the players on the field before the whistle.
- Have a seat and enjoy the game!

Post-game

Two or three long blasts of the whistle signal the end of the game, but don't send your players home just yet. Watch your players for possible unsporting behavior on the field and nip it in the bud. (You can expect the referee(s) to check as well). Before the traditional walk-by handshakes, have your players come together quickly away from everyone else and make the following points. "Regardless of the outcome of the game and opponents' attitude, tell them 'Good Game', look them in the eye, and mean it." Don't go into a long technical analysis of what went wrong. Consult with the manager, assistant coach, or other volunteer for any announcements. Avoid serious team meetings after a game, especially after a loss.

Effective Ways to Handle Subs

If you have a lot of players on your roster, it can be a nightmare to organize who is going in when. In addition, you can be constantly interrupted with questions about "when do I do in, coach?", which will distract your attention from the game. With all of these distractions, you can forget to put a player in - or lose track of the time to sub. This is a sure-fire way to get lots of players and parents upset with you.

What works? One of the easiest ways to handle subs is to get a dry-erase board (about \$10 at your local Walmart or equivalent) and a wind-up kitchen timer or stop watch.

Many coaches put their lineups on regular notebook paper and keep them in a 3-ring binder - and this can prove to be a useful resource for times when the coach has some personal crisis, and needs to grab a quick line-up at the last minute. It also can be useful to go back and look at lineups which worked, and those which didn't, to see which players seem to work best together and to spot areas where a particular player may need more development. Even if you choose not to publicize your lineup in advance, for fear of hurting feelings if you need to make mid-game adjustments, this method of filling slots is still useful - and the windup timer is lots easier to set (and keep track of) than a watch.

Micro Soccer (Ages 4-6)

Training the very young child

Very young children below the age of about 6 pose a set of special problems for the coach. This section of the manual is devoted to techniques designed to help you with those "young 'uns".

Characteristics of Young Children

- Short attention span.
- Can attend to only one problem at a time.
- May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- May or may not understand or remember: what lines mean on the field; what team they are on; what goal they are going for. We need to be patient and laugh with them as they get 'lost' on the field.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often. Give "hints", don't criticize.
- Need generous praise and to play without pressure. No extrinsic rewards (trophies, medals, etc.) should be given for winning.
- Prefer "parallel play" (Will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates).
- Very individually oriented (me, mine, my).
- Constantly in motion, but, with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop.
- Development for boys and girls are quite similar.
- Physical coordination limited. Eye - hand and eye - foot coordination is not developed. Need to explore qualities of a rolling ball.
- Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc..

New Skills & Development

- Socialization (interaction, cooperation, and competition with other children)
- Self-confidence (build self-esteem)
- Physical coordination (running, jumping, etc.)
- Gain a "Feel" for the ball (get used to the soccer ball)
- Have fun (a desire to return next season)

Coaching Emphasis

- Fun, fun, and more fun!
- Positive reinforcement (builds self-confidence)
- Most activities (stretching, games, etc) should include the ball ("feel" for the ball)
- Choose activities that build physical coordination
- Focus on games rather than drills
- Keep the lessons (games) short

It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 6 years old, in general, do not do so by their own choice. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives.

With the above assumptions, let's look at some things that we can do to energize the U-6 players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically initiate the sign up for next year!

Each session should be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible. Involve the ball in as many activities as possible. Basic movements such as running, skipping, hopping, etc. need to be emphasized. If these can be done while kicking, catching, rolling, or dribbling a ball... all the better!

Training should not last for more than one hour. This is primarily due to physical fatigue and attention span considerations. Train once or twice a week. Any more than this may lead to their and your burnout. Have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can get into one hour. Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!. Every player should bring his or her own ball. Remember, although they may have very similar birth dates, their physical and / or mental maturity may vary as much as 36 months.

Activities need to accommodate these individual differences whenever possible. Team play and passing is an alien concept to these players. They know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they often will steal it from their own teammates. Do not get uptight if they do not pass, let them dribble to their heart's content. Plan for at least 4, 90 second drink breaks, especially in warmer weather. Their "cooling system" is not as efficient as in older players.

Coaching children under six years of age presents some additional challenges due to their immaturity, short attention span, and less developed muscles. You will also need to deal with a great variation between personalities, physical size, and abilities. Your objective should be for all of the kids to have fun, make friends, and learn some soccer skills that will help them should they decide to continue to the next level. You should not expect to win all of your games or expect everyone to listen to long lectures. Your goal is to introduce them to basic concepts like dribbling and kicking and make it enough fun that they want to keep playing as their bodies and minds mature. Go down to their level of thinking. Don't try to bring them up to yours. What was fun when you were four years old? The kid who is watching seagulls will tell you were the greatest coach in the world if he had fun. He will have fun when he kicks the ball or at least when he makes an attempt and gets praise instead of criticism.

Here are some good principles to follow:

- Keep practices and matches fun. Play "games" that cause kids to learn skills, not "drills." If practice is fun, the kids will want to attend. If it is not fun, their parents will sometimes have to force them to attend and a potential star may drop out.
- Maximize touches on the ball per player in practice. Avoid lines - the kids won't behave well while waiting for their turn to play the ball.
- Minimize lecturing - they have very short attention spans. You have maybe ten seconds to make your point.
- Play lots of small-sided games. 3v3 is ideal for this age. Why doesn't 7v7 or 11v11 work at this age? Imagine putting 14 or 22 six-year-olds on the field to share one toy. When Billie finally gets the ball, will he pass it? No, because he knows he won't get it back! And shy Freddie may play a whole game and get only two touches on the ball.
- Concentrate on improving individual skills, i.e., dribbling, trapping, shielding the ball, shooting, getting around an opponent, etc. You will develop more skillful players this way and win more games in the process. Some passing will develop naturally if you play small-sided games, but you will get frustrated if you try to force it. Do not let anyone on your sideline yell, "Pass the ball!" during games.
- Don't keep standings or statistics. The kids will be having fun playing something else an hour after the game, win or lose. Only the parents and coaches will still be replaying the goals and mistakes in their minds the next day!

It's important to make sure parents understand what you are trying to accomplish and how you will be going about it. So, explain the objectives to the parents at the beginning of the season and get agreement. Some of the parents will be new to soccer, so (In addition to following the guidelines on the pre-season meeting) give the parents a written summary containing the following:

- safety rules (e.g. spikes and shin guards required at games and practices),
- the names of all children on the roster (this will help the kids get to know each other),
- the coach's rules or the additional guidelines that you ask the parents to commit to.
- Some that are appropriate for wee ones are:
 - Bring water
 - Make sure kids go to the bathroom just before leaving the house,
 - Have one ball for each child plus one for yourself. You should ask the kids to bring their own balls as most associations only give out a ball for every two kids

Keep things moving quickly. Participate in all of the warm-ups and drills -in fact; exaggerate your motions to illustrate the proper procedure. Do the actions at the same time as you are explaining a stretch or a drill (not after).

Do the same warm-ups and stretches each practice. It is less important to do a lot of stretches with U6s.

You may want to encourage 15 min of practice at home on the days we do not practice. You may encourage the parents to participate in the warm-up exercises with their own child. This allows the coach

to teach the proper technique to the parents, too, so that if they work with their child, they will reinforce proper technique. The coach may give the parents others suggestions for at home practice, i.e. dribbling and passing (working on leading your partner).

Have the kids hold a ball for the stretches where it is appropriate. This increases the fun and familiarizes them with the ball so they won't be alarmed when the balls comes their way on game day.

Avoid drills with line-ups. Try to incorporate skill development into soccer related games. They each should have the ball at their feet almost all of the time. Success is related to the attempt not the outcome. As a coach you must get excited about the attempt, not the outcome (if the attempt is genuine the outcomes will continually get better). This is difficult, because we as coaches (and parents) are conditioned to see the end results. Emphasize technique rather than speed.

At this age, there is less emphasis on progression than with older groups because they are too young to put several moves together successfully and they will get bored if there is not much variation between drills. For example, you may progress a drill to do it with the other foot, or complete a drill and then take a shot on net, but much more than this will bore them. However, a new drill or soccer related game can work on the same type of skill. An example might be:

- Dribble across the field.
- Dribble through some pylons.
- Play "Pirate", all the kids dribble the ball in a marked area and the coach tries to kick a ball out.
- Skills should be broken down into smaller components. For example, passing may be learned by one kid rolling the ball to a passer, who tries to pass it back. Then have the kids slowly push the balls with the inside of their feet and finally have them pass it back and forth at regular speed.

Drills for small children must be tailored to their abilities and promote the development of individual skills rather than team skills, which will come later. In a later section, we've included a short collection of good soccer-related drills for children under 6. Soccer-related games put the fun in learning soccer skills and teamwork.

Game Day Tips

Some of the kids may lose their concentration as soon as the game starts. The short attention span of children this age is why kindergarten programs are generally for a half day. Kids lose focus if they do not get to handle the ball enough. Smaller rosters and smaller sides help solve this problem.

Put any difficult children in at the start of the game. That way, as they start to lose focus they can come off and you can put in more mature children who will be focused for the duration of the game. There should be unlimited substitutions at this age. Have the parents help with substitutions so you can concentrate on the game.

However remember that it is not your game! Avoid active coaching on the field as it only encourages the kind of shouting that continues on into older age groups. If the coach does the thinking for them, they will never learn to do it for themselves. Same principle applies for doing the talking for them.

As the adults on the field, both coaches should assist kids on both teams. Each coach should cover one half of the field. Try to rotate throw-ins and free kicks among all of the kids, and give the ball to a nearby kid to reduce the time wasted. It serves no purpose at this level to call most fouls as they would be called at higher levels. Allowing the play to continue keeps the kids interested and provides a much better learning experience than for the players whistling down every foul and lining up for free kicks. At this level, the idea of "keep it safe, keep it fair, keep it moving" generally applies.

Don't spend too much time setting up formations at the beginning of the game or set plays. A simple "spread out" or "give five big steps for the free kick" is enough. At this age there is a universal tendency for the kids to bunch-up around the ball. You will see a swarm of kids move around with the ball popping out occasionally. This is normal and there is nothing you can do to prevent it, so don't worry about it or try to correct it. You may assign some kids to defensive duties but they are likely to make a run for the ball like the rest when they see it.

Here are some items that should be included in a U-6 training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that may or may not involve the ball. They can chase their ball as it is thrown by the coach, bringing it back with different parts of their body. Or, they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball. "Soccernastics" activities are very appropriate, like: rolling the ball with the bottom of their feet, with their elbows, backwards, with the back of their neck while holding on to it; throwing it up and catching it; keeping it up with their feet while sitting.

Stretching and Warm-Up

- Stand with legs shoulder-width apart. Try to roll the ball around your feet in a figure-eight pattern.
- Stand with legs shoulder-width apart. Hold the ball with both hands. Reach up towards the sky. Reach down (holding the ball) between your legs. Repeat.
- Jumping jacks.
- Butterflies. Sit down and pull your feet in so that the bottoms of your cleats are touching. Move your knees up and down like a butterfly.
- Stand with one foot on the ball. Now roll the ball around in a small circle with the bottom of your foot. Repeat the opposite foot. (This builds good balance and a feel for the ball).
- Hot Potato: Stand with one foot on the ball. Now put your other foot on top of the ball. Repeat with increasing speed until you are rapidly alternating feet on top of the ball. Try to keep the ball steady (and not fall down!).

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1 v. 1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or "Red Light - Green Light", or a game where players are trying to knock their ball through gates. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "looser sits". **See the section on soccer activities for age-specific ideas.**

PLAY THE GAME: Move on to the real game, but, make sure it is a 2 v. 2, 3 v. 3, or 4 v. 4 game. Switch the game every 5 minutes or so. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. It is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their thigh and then catch it. It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

Recommended Exercises (see the back of the manual for more)

Coaching Ages 7-8

Introduction

The following are some common characteristics of 7 and 8 year olds:

- Attention span is a bit longer than U-6 players but still not at a "competitive" stage
- Inclined towards small group activities.
- Always in motion: scratching; blinking; jerking; rocking....
- Easily bruised psychologically. They will remember negative comments for a long time. Shout praise. Give "hints".
- They want everybody to like them.
- Developing physical confidence. (Most are able to ride a two-wheeler.)
- Starting to imitate older players or sports heroes. Want the same "gear" as them.
- Lack sense of pace. They go flat out until they drop.
- Skeletal system growing rapidly. Often results in apparent lack of coordination.
- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed. Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. make sure that they get adequate water breaks.
- Limited understanding with personal evaluation. "If they try hard, they performed well" regardless of the actual performance. Thus, they need to be encouraged constantly, and asked "Now, can you do this?"
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play, and remembering what goal they are going for... but, in the heat of battle, they will sometimes still forget. They still find it difficult to really be aware of more than one thing at a time.

New Skills & Development

It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but the player still views their parents as the most significant people in their lives. A pre-season meeting should be held with the parents so that objectives and team policies can be addressed.

Six, seven and eight year old players are a bit more compliant than their U-6 counterparts. They will be able to follow 2 or 3 step instructions and are starting to have a good understanding about what it means to play a "game". They are also starting to cooperate more with their teammates. In fact, they now will recognize that they even have teammates by the fact that they occasionally, and I mean occasionally, will pass the ball to a teammate, on purpose. Often, they will repeat the phrase "I can't do that!", but, will quickly run to you to show you that they can, even when they only think that they can. Some other things that you can expect to happen during a season with this age group are:

- There will be at least 200-300 falls during the season, but, now they will usually pick themselves back up.
- The puddle in front of the goal is still too tempting to resist.
- Keep a spare pump in your bag as the players usually do not realize that their ball is flat until they try to kick it, or the coach tells them that it is flat.
- Some of the girls are a lot tougher than the boys.
- They will still want to wear a pinnie, even when the color is identical to their shirt.
- It will be impossible to remember who is who's best friend as you try to make up teams.
- School conflicts will come up... please, let them go (they must face their teachers five days a week).
- They will wear their uniform to bed.

Some of the players that are playing as a 7 year old have had two years of soccer experience and thus have already touched the ball a few thousand times in their lives. This, however, does not mean that these players are ready for the mental demands of tactical team soccer. True, they do have some idea of the game, but the emphasis still needs to be placed on the individual's ability to control the ball with his/her body. They are still there to have fun, and because some of the players may be brand new to the sport, it is imperative that activities are geared towards individual success and participation. Following are some more items that a coach of U-8 players should consider.

- Small sided soccer is the best option for these players. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but, it is an easier game to understand.
- Because of rapid growth spurts during this age, players will go through times when they seem to have lost control of their body. What they could easily do 2 weeks ago now seems unattainable. Be patient.

- Passing is not an important part of their game, no matter how much anybody yells at them to do otherwise, it is much more fun to dribble and shoot. Let them.
- Training once or twice a week is plenty, and should not last longer than one hour and fifteen minutes.
- Each player should bring their own size #4 ball to training. Learning how to control it should be the main objective. They need to touch it as many times as possible during fun activities that will engage them.
- Challenge them to get better by practicing on their own. There is no rule which states that they can't learn by themselves, no matter how important we think we are.
- Incidental things are important. They are forming the habits that will impact their future participation.
- Ask them to take care of their equipment (water bottle included), cooperate, listen, behave, and try hard. Realize, however, that they often forget and will need to be reminded often.
- Ask them to work with others to solve a particular challenge. Start them with just one partner and work from there.

Coaching Emphasis

The aim in every practice is to give the boys and girls plenty of action...

Fun	has to be an essential requirement of every exercise, at every practice.
Everyone	must receive an equal opportunity for involvement (equal time).
Activity	must be at the core of the soccer sessions, because it affects every other part of the FEAST.
Skills	must be developed to improve the enjoyment of soccer, through greater accomplishment.
Team play	must be included in every activity, because soccer is a team game.

Here are some items that should be included in a U-8 training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that may or may not involve the ball. They can chase their ball as it is thrown by the coach, bringing it back with different parts of their body. Or, they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball. "Soccernastics" activities are very appropriate, like: dribbling the ball with the bottom of their feet, with their elbows, backwards, with the back of their neck while holding on to it; keeping the ball up with their thighs; keeping it up with their feet while sitting.

INDIVIDUAL OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1v.1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or a game where players are trying to work with a partner or small group to obtain a goal. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" (where everyone plays), instead of games where the "looser sits". Be creative. These players like "crazy" games with a lot of action.

PLAY THE GAME: Small sided soccer can be used to heighten intensity and create some good competition. Play 1v.1 up to 5v.5. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Perhaps play to emphasize a particular skill (can only dribble the ball over a goal line in order to get a point). Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. Switch teams often, give everyone a chance to win. Also, it is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their head, then thigh and then catch it. Can one player kick a ball to a partner and then back without it hitting the ground? It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

The emphasis is on playing. Formal skills learning has little relevance to these young soccer minds. Game activities such as 3-a-side play or other fun situations where each player has a ball are strongly recommended. Only introduce more technique-oriented practices when it is apparent they have developed the desire, through play, to improve their skills.

As they get older, young players become familiar with soccer and handling the ball, both with feet and hands. More formal skills learning can now take place. Remain cautious about using drills that have players waiting in line. While more structured exercises are good for developing the essential skills, be aware that the concentration level of these players is low. If possible, split the group into two (it would be helpful to have an assistant) and work two groups at once; or one group on skills practice while the other plays a game. Then rotate the groups. Periodically introduce larger numbers into the end-of-session scrimmage (e.g., 4 and 5-a-side), but use 3-a-side as the basic format.

Recommended Exercises (see the back of the manual for more)

Coaching Ages 9-10

As players graduate from the beginner phase into the "Golden Age" they become very capable of progressing from the basic skills they have already learned, particularly those skills of dribbling, passing and ball control. These young players are ready and willing to enhance their play by adding some exciting intricacies.

The next segment will present some of these possibilities, mainly from a creative attacking viewpoint, and we would strongly recommend that all coaches of "Golden Age" players closely study this section. However, coaches should not feel that they must go out on the practice field, developing all of these more involved skills with the players. Experimentation by the players should always be encouraged - particularly if a mistake has resulted.

If the coach feels confident showing how the skill can be acquired or applied, then by all means, coach the play. If uncertain, the coach should not worry. Instead, continue to encourage player experimentation and let the games and practices be the teacher.

Introduction

This is the "golden age of learning." Coaches of these players find themselves faced by eager, co-ordinated and energetic youngsters who are like sponges in their ability and willingness to learn. They want to learn by "doing," not by being lectured, and their relationship with their parents, teachers and coaches is at an optimum. This is the most important stage in terms of skill development for young players.

Golden Age Kids are all Players and Goalkeepers

Players should not be wingers, strikers or fullbacks at this time in their soccer development and experience. Nor should there be a permanently-positioned and recognized team goalkeeper. These youngsters are soccer players. They are not attackers, midfielders or defenders.

The coach's duty: to assist each player in developing all the skills of the game (including goalkeeping). At 12 years of age positions and positional play should begin in earnest with the move into 11-a-side soccer.

Most educators believe the golden age of learning occurs in the 9 to 11 age group, as this is an important crossover time from "selfishness" to social abilities. In soccer terms, children in this age group learn the importance of cooperation in team play.

The following are some common characteristics of 9 and 10 year old players:

- Gross and small motor skills becoming more refined and reliable. " Boys and girls begin to develop separately.
- Ability to stay on task is lengthened. They have the ability to sequence thought and actions.
- Greater diversity in playing ability and physical maturity. •Skills are emerging. Becoming more predictable and recognizable.
- Some children begin moving from concrete thinking to abstract thinking.
- Able to pace themselves, to plan ahead.
- Increased self-responsibility. They remember to bring their own equipment.
- Starting to recognize basic tactical concepts, but not exactly sure why certain decisions are better.
- Repetition of technique is very important, but it must be dynamic, not static.
- Continued positive reinforcement needed.
- Explanations must be brief, concise, and mention "why".
- Becoming more "serious". Openly, intensively competitive, without intention of fouling.
- Still mostly intrinsically motivated. " Peer pressure starting to be a factor.
- Adult outside of the family may take on added significance.
- Prefer identification with a team. Like to have good uniforms, equipment, balls.
- More inclined towards wanting to play instead of being told to play. Will initiate play more.

It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but the player still views their parents as the most significant people in their lives.

THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT:

Some coaches say that the 9 and 10 year-old players are beginning to "turn the corner" and starting to look like real soccer players. However, games are still frantically paced and unpredictable for the most part. These players are starting to find out how much fun it is to play the game skillfully, but they will still stop and laugh if the referee gets hit in the backside with the ball during a game. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They start to understand offsides, but still forget themselves when the goal is in front of them.
- They will really beat up on each other during practice... especially boy's teams.
- During a game, the parents will scream out "HAND BALL" or "COME ON REF, CALL IT BOTH WAYS" at least fifteen times.
- They might cry after the game if they loose, but will forget it if you ask them if you want to go out for burgers and fries.
- You might actually catch them practicing on their own without you telling them to do so.
- Their parents are telling them to do one thing during the game, you are telling them another thing, but what they end up doing might be what their friend is telling them to do.
- You will see a pass that is deliberate. You might even see a "back pass".
- You will see your first \$100 pair of cleats during practice. They will call the other team bad names... really bad names.

Some of the players that are playing are seasoned veterans of the youth soccer scene. As a result, some of them might be very nervous about the whole process. It is our job to keep things in perspective for these young, developing players. True, some of them are becoming quite skillful and are seeing how fun it is to play the game when they can really control the ball. However, many of them are still learning the ropes. Even the more experienced players need to have the game be fun!!!

Emphasis is still placed on having players learn how to control the ball with his/her body, but now, they need to find themselves in more game-like situations. Training is more dynamic and starting to have players make simple, basic decisions such as "Which way is there more space?" or "Who should I pass to?".

Following are some more items that a coach of the players should consider:

- Use small sided games as the main teaching vehicle. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but the full 11-a-side game is still too complicated for them to understand.
- How we group players during training takes on even added significance because of the wide margins of ability levels. We need to mix players up often.
- Stretching is becoming more important, along with a good warm-up. Since the game is faster, make sure that they also have good shin guards. Safety and preventive measures take on added significance.
- Training twice a week is plenty. Sessions need not go longer than one hour, fifteen minutes.
- They should all come with their own size #4 ball. In fact, they still need to be encouraged to play with it by themselves.
- Put them into competitive environments as much as possible. This will not only keep them focused, but, it will allow the game itself to teach them. It also will keep things fun for them, and allow you to deal with issues such as 'winning' and 'loosing' which is now a very big concern for them.
- Now it is possible to teach them positional play with the expectation that they will get it some of the time. However, it is absolutely necessary that you do not allow players to specialize in any one position. They need to learn basic principles of the game, first. Having them play all of the positions is best for their individual development. Remember, our first responsibility is to develop players and let them have fun.
- Whenever possible, allow them to solve their own puzzles. Don't immediately give them solutions on how they can play better.

WARM-UP:

A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that involve the ball. Since there can be one theme to the session, hopefully, the warm-up will lead into the theme of the day. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time after the players have broken a sweat, again, hopefully done with the ball. Again, the warm-up should get the players ready to play. It should be lively, fun, and

engaging as well as instructional. There is nothing like a good, fast paced activity to grab the player's attention and make them glad that they came to practice.

INDIVIDUAL OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES:

Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not necessarily a real 1v.1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals or cooperate in small groups in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or a keep-away game. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "looser sits". Be creative. These players like "crazy" games with a lot of action. Please see the soccer activities section for more ideas.

PLAY THE GAME:

Try to always end a practice with some sort of game or scrimmage. Small sided soccer can be used to heighten intensity and create some good competition. Play 4 v.4 up to 8 v.8. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Perhaps play to emphasize a particular skill (can only dribble the ball over a goal line in order to get a point). Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. Switch teams often, give everyone a chance to win. Also, it is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK:

Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their head, then thigh, then foot, and then catch it. Can one player kick a ball to a partner and then back without it hitting the ground? Can they do that with their heads? It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

New Skills & Development

Essential skills

- Kicking
- Passing
- Shooting
- Crossing
- Ball handling/dribbling
- Ball control
- Defending

Understanding of team play

- Rules of the game
- Effective offense
- Combination play
- Effective defense
- Restarts

Activity that involves cooperation and communication between team members will always be less than perfect. Therefore the "bridge" from simple technique work, such as how to kick and control the ball, to the implementation of offensive and defensive techniques is one of the major objectives for the "Golden Age" player. An important part of coaching methodology at this stage is to develop the skills of soccer in game-related situations. A coach, therefore, need not complicate the practice by using large numbers or even fully abiding by rules (e.g., offside) in practice games.

The Shape of Things To Come

Mastering soccer techniques is a priority for players of this age. The principal emphasis in practice should be technique work. These ages are ideal for challenging technique practice, and coaches should encourage players to work on their own with the ball. The mechanics of performing specific techniques are important and, in all cases, there are some basic considerations of which players and coaches need to be aware: keeping an eye on the ball and being aware of which part of the body strikes the ball are two

examples. Much has been written about the intricacies and subtleties of kicking and controlling the ball. A typical direction coaches must suffer through goes as such: "the non-kicking foot should be 10 inches from the ball, body leaning away, and allowing full extension of the leg and foot," etc., etc. After painstaking study of the text, many coaches are no better off, frequently becoming perplexed and frustrated after these kinds of directions. Even experienced, successful professionals would have extreme difficulty if asked to describe, step-by-step, the process of executing a technique. If asked to perform the technique, however, he or she would find the task a simple one. Players learn technique through experience:

- Observation of the technique performed by others
- Repetitive practice with and without the pressure of opposition
- Execution of the technique in games

If a technique cannot be easily described, it stands to reason that it cannot be easily learned by either a verbal or written description. A technique is understood by observing a visual picture which illustrates the shape of the technique.

What Are the Key Techniques?

- **Passing:** Playing the ball with the feet; this is the most widely used of all techniques and, therefore, the most important to practice
- **Control:** Receiving a ball, either passed along the ground or in the air, using any part of the body to control the ball except the arms and hands
- **Heading:** Playing aerial balls with the forehead
- **Tackling:** Using the feet to win the ball and the body to correctly challenge for a ball in an opponent's possession
- **Dribbling:** Running with the ball and manipulating it with the feet
- **Shooting:** Trying to score by playing the ball with the feet or the head towards the opponent's goal

Passing

Learning the technique of passing and applying it in game situations is a necessity for all young players.

Side Foot Pass - Playing the ball along the ground with the inside (or the outside) of the foot is the most widely used pass in the game. This technique is the easiest to learn and simplest to execute. The pass is used in all areas of the field and is effective over distances of 5 to 25 yards. Position: Body shaped to allow foot to turn out; a slight sitting-back posture to open hips; note arm positions.

Low Drive - The execution of the low instep drive requires good timing and, therefore, much practice. A pass driven along the ground is an effective, quick method of changing play in a game. Low, driven crosses across the face of the opponent's goal are also effective because they are difficult for opponents to counter. The most common and rewarding use for the low drive is when shooting the ball towards the opponent's goal. Position: Head looking down; body and non-kicking knee flexed over the ball; arms and hands helping to orchestrate the movement.

Lofted Pass - The lofted pass, when the lower instep of the foot (top of the big toe) is used to hit the underside of the ball, is the most common crossing technique. It can be used effectively in all areas of the field to make aerial passes of over 25 yards. Position: Body leaning away from the ball to open up the swing for the lofted kick, with full extension of leg and foot; arms loose, balancing the movement.

The Chip - The chip is a delicate aerial pass, played with the front of the foot (top of the toes) through the underside of the ball. This technique is designed to get the ball in the air quickly and drop it into the target area quickly; the backspin on the ball will also stop the ball quickly. Position: Body hunched down, with head rounded downwards; arms are pulled down and locked on striking ball to enhance clipped action.

Swerving Pass - The swerving pass is used to curl the ball in the air. The technique is effected by striking the ball through its lower center with the inside or outside of the foot, or by striking the lower outside of the ball directly with the instep. This type of pass can be used in all areas of the field but is particularly effective at corner kicks, crossed balls and direct free kicks around the opponent's penalty area.

Coaching Points

Constant practice will improve the quality of passing techniques. However, the following coaching points should be taken into consideration when applying these techniques to the game itself.

- Weight or Pace of Pass - The pass should be played with the right amount of weight (pace) to either the feet of the receiver or the space into which the receiver is running, so that he or she is able to either control the ball easily or play the ball comfortably with one touch.
- Accuracy - It is important that all passes are made accurately to either the receiver's feet or the space into which the receiver is running.
- Timing of the Pass - The player in possession of the ball should not pass the ball if the intended receiver is not watching the ball, is not yet ready, or is not moving to receive the ball comfortably. A poorly-timed pass often results in loss of ball possession.
- Timing of the Run - The player running to receive a pass should ensure that the player in possession of the ball has the ball under good control, is ready to make the pass and is looking up and aware of his teammate. Not only is a poorly-timed run a waste of energy, but it could result in a loss of possession.
- Support - It is vital that the player in possession of the ball has immediate help from his or her teammates. The more options a player has to pass the ball, the easier it is to keep possession.

Control

When passing the ball, great care should be given to how the player receiving the ball can control it. Good control is the means of maintaining possession and developing the team attack. Again, shaping the body in order to effect ball control is essential.

Methods of Control

1. Chest - leaning back to cushion flighted pass (introduce with gentle service).
2. Thigh - raised to receive and control aerial passes.
3. Instep - raised to control aerial passes.
4. Side of foot - extended forward to receive and to control.

The first 4 methods of control use "cushioning" as the method of controlling the ball. The controlling surface is presented towards the ball and withdrawn on contact to take the pace off the ball.

5. Sole of the foot - to wedge and push the ball into space.
6. Inside and outside of foot - to wedge and drag the ball into space.
7. Chest - leaning forward to control a ball which is bouncing off the ground.

The final three methods of control make use of trapping and/or wedging. Part of the body is used to wedge or trap the ball between the ground and the controlling surface of the body.

Coaching Points

- Make an early selection in method
- Get in line with the flight of the ball
- Keep the eyes on the ball
 - a) Relax the controlling surface or
 - b) Wedge the ball.
- Pass the ball accurately or keep possession
- Indecision Leads to Poor Control

Many mistakes in control are caused by indecision. Often this results in the player being upright at the moment of control, and the ball rebounds off the body, instead of hitting it like a cushion. There is a body shape to each method of control. Observe the illustrations and note that the players' bodies are never upright at the moment of control.

Heading

Heading should not be regarded as a principal technique for players of this age. Guided by recent medical evidence, we are concerned that heading during this age period should be introduced slowly and with gentle service (see related information in appendix (Not the Golden Age of Heading!) and related game (The Howe Way - Game 3).

Shooting

Shooting is the most rewarding of all the techniques, but for many players, the most difficult. Players are tempted to look up at the goal as they are about to kick the ball. Other than the volley and half-volley, the techniques for shooting with the feet are almost identical to passing.

- Side foot
- Low drive - instep
- Swerve shot - inside and outside of foot
- Volley - shot taken with the ball in the air; ball needs to be kept inside the goalposts and under the cross bar, ideally dipping downwards to maximize the difficulty for the goalkeeper
- Half-volley - takes place when a shot is taken just as an aerial ball strikes the ground; this ball has to be kept under the height of the cross bar; the ground half-volley usually causes the greatest difficulty for the goalkeeper.
- Volley and Half-volley kicking occurs only rarely in play outside the penalty boxes. It is such an important method of scoring that situations presenting the opportunity for this type of shooting should be frequently used in practice.

Coaching Points

The same principles apply to shooting as to individual passing techniques.

It is important that players look at the ball during the entire process of striking the ball.

Players should ensure that their ankles are locked as they are about to strike the ball.

Players must be prepared to withstand a physical challenge as they prepare to shoot, and therefore may need to modify their body shape accordingly.

Dribbling

- Running with the ball at one's feet
- Manipulating and faking with the ball
- Moving the ball past opponents
- Shielding the ball

Coaching Points

- The body as well as the ball must be under control
- Manipulation of the ball to throw opponents off balance
- Movement of the body to throw opponents off balance
- Change of pace
- Change of direction
- Sideways stance of the body (shielding)
- Body between the ball and the opponent
- Turning away from the opponent

Summary

All technique practices, however simple, should excite the imagination of the players by being in the form of a competition. Mundane, static, unchallenging technique drills will lead to boredom, a lack of interest and, ultimately, bad habits.

Individual Possession

Modern soccer places heavy emphasis on passing the ball as a means of maintaining possession. While this is important, many coaches destroy individual creativity and dribbling ability in the process.

The art of good coaching is to help players recognize when to pass the ball and when to keep it. The illustrations in this chapter demonstrate a few of the many moves a player may practice to keep possession.

Turning with the ball - without close marking

There are times in a game when a player has

Time and room to turn with the ball

To change direction

Or to change the direction of the ball

Turning with the ball - Against tight marking

Defending

In soccer, all players have the opportunity to play both offense and defense. Indeed, they must play both offense and defense as soccer is a two-way game. Players go forward to attack and recover to defend.

Coaches of players 9, 10 and 11 years of age should recognize the importance of developing both aspects in practice. As it is much more difficult to create than to destroy, more practice time should be devoted to the players' understanding of offensive principles and functions and to mastering the techniques of the game. It would be a mistake, however, to neglect defense.

This chapter discusses simple defending.

Much of the defender's work can be accomplished before the opponent receives the ball, with the defender closing the distance between the attacker while the ball is en route. In order of priority, the defender then needs to: consider intercepting the pass, close down the opponent before he or she has time to turn with the ball and, if the opponent has turned, try to delay the forward progress of the ball.

With experience, anticipation and skillful marking, good players will be able to intercept some passes. This saves them work. However, there are many situations where the ball cannot be intercepted and patient defending is required.

The defender should be far enough from the attacking player to see the ball. Otherwise, the opponent with the ball may spin and go past. Nor should the defender be so far away from the opponent that the attacking player is able to turn without pressure and face the defender with the ball.

While size and ability dictate the exact defensive position, a good guide to the distance a defender should be from an opponent is an arm's length. Therefore, by extending an arm (slightly bent) the defender would be able to touch the opponent. But the defender should not actually touch the player as this may constitute a foul.

Patience is the key to success. The defender cannot win the ball in this situation. To try will, most likely, result in a foul (tackling from behind). While the ball is in this position the defending player is not in danger.

The defender should attempt to win the ball only when the opponent tries to turn with it. The defender must tackle the ball and not the opponent, focusing attention on the ball at all times and resist being thrown off balance by the movement of the opponent's body.

If the attacking player elects to pass the ball, the defender's first priority is to remain on the defending goal side of the opponent.

The coach should explain to the team how their timing is essential to a successful challenge.

Don't "dive in" to the ball when uncertain of the result.

Be patient.

Tackle with resolve.

Tackle when you know the ball can be won.

Recommended Exercises: Please see the soccer activities section.

Coaching Ages 11-12

Introduction

Children do not mature at the same rate. However, for most, early adolescence begins between 12 and 15 years of age. Physical and psychological changes manifest themselves during the early teen years. Physically, these players are dramatically influenced by rapid skeletal growth, and are therefore prone to an increased danger of injury. Psychologically, they become increasingly reliant on a larger social circle, more resistant to authority and more susceptible to peer pressure. The team aspect becomes much more important at this phase, and a coach attuned to these changes will have greater success. This stage should see greater physical and emotional maturation in players. A coach who takes advantage of this growth can accomplish much in terms of team-wide development and the role of the individual within the team. In the "Ages of Soccer," this is the phase where players begin to make a serious commitment to the game of soccer as a game for life.

The following are some common characteristics of 11 and 12 year olds:

- They begin to develop the abilities to sustain complex, coordinated skill sequences.
- Some of the players have reached puberty. Girls, in general, arrive earlier than boys.
- Most players are able to think abstractly and are thus able to understand some team concepts that are foundational to the game.
- They are beginning to be able to address hypothetical situations, and to solve problems systematically.
- They are spending more time with friends and less time with their parents. " They are susceptible to conformity to peer pressure.
- They are developing a conscience, morality and scale of values.
- Players tend to be highly self-critical. Instruction needs to be enabling. Show them what can be done instead of telling them what not to do.
- Although they are more serious with their play, they are still mainly involved because it is fun.
- They are openly competitive. A few may foul on purpose.
- They are looking towards their role models and heroes in order to know how to act.
- They have a more complex and developed sense of humor.

It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but the player still relies on their parents for support and encouragement.

Some coaches say that the 10 and 12 year-old players have "turned the corner" and are looking like real soccer players. However, games are still frantically paced and a bit unpredictable for the most part. These players know how much fun it is to play the game skillfully. As a result, we begin to see some of the players drop out who recognize the importance of skill and become discouraged with their lack of it. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They will yell at their teammates when they make a mistake.
- They will openly question the referee's decisions.
- Players will encourage each other.
- They will pass the ball even when they know that they will not get it back.
- Team cooperation is emerging. They will run to a spot, away from the play, even when they know that they might not get the ball.
- They will point out inconsistencies between what you say and what you do. They are "moral watchdogs".
- The difference in skill levels between the players is very pronounced.
- Some players might be as big as you are, some might be half your size.
- Not only will some of the players come to training with expensive cleats, but some will also come with matching uniforms, sweatsuits, and bag.
- Parents, during games, can be brutal. Some will yell at the referee at almost every call.
- They will get together with their friends and be able to set up and play their own game.

Coaching at this age level is a challenge because many of the players view themselves as real soccer players, while others are at the point where it is not as much fun as it used to be because they feel that their lack of skill development does not enable them to have an impact on the game. They see their skillful friends able to do magical things with the ball and since they can not do this themselves, they start to drop out. Our challenge then, if the players are willing, is to keep all of the players engaged, involved, and make them feel important. (as though they are improving.) Skills still need to be the primary focus of training and players need to be put into environments where they are under pressure so that they learn how to use their skills in a variety of contexts. Here are a few other considerations as we think about working with this aged youngster:

- Our goal is to develop players in a fun, engaging environment. Winning has its place but must be balanced with the other goals of teaching them to play properly. Some decisions will need to be made that might not necessarily lead to wins (ie: having players play different positions, or asking players to try to play the ball "out of the back".)
- Smaller, skilled players cannot be ignored. Although it may be tempting to "win" by playing only the bigger players in key positions, the smaller, skilled players must be put into areas of responsibility.
- Small sided games are still the preferred method of teaching the game. This makes learning fun and more efficient.
- Flexibility training is essential. Have them stretch after they have broken a sweat, and, perhaps most importantly, at the end of the workout at a "warm-down".
- Overuse injuries, burnout and high attrition rates are associated with programs that do not emphasize skill development and learning enjoyment.
- Playing 11-a-side games is now appropriate.
- Train for one and one-half hours, two to three times a week. Training pace needs to replicate the demands of the game itself.
- They are ready to have a preferred position, but, it is essential for their development for them to occasionally play out of their preferred spot, in training, as well as during games.
- Training is now best if it focuses on one, perhaps two topics a session. Activities should be geared to progressing from fundamental activities that have little or no pressure from an opponent to activities that are game like in their intensity and pressure.

Coaching Emphasis

WARM-UP:

A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual or small group activities that involve the ball. Since there can be one theme to the session, hopefully, the warm-up will lead into the theme of the day. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, after the players have broken a sweat, again, hopefully done with the ball. The warm-up should get the players ready to play. It should be lively, fun, and engaging as well as instructional. There is nothing like a good, fast-paced activity to grab the player's attention and make them glad that they came to practice.

INDIVIDUAL OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES:

Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not necessarily a real 1v.1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals or cooperate in small groups in a game environment. An example would be a kind of keep-away game, or small sided games that bring out or emphasize a specific skill or topic. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "looser sits". Be creative. These players like "crazy" games with a lot of action.

PLAY THE GAME:

Small sided soccer can be used to heighten intensity and create some good competition. Play 4v.4 up to 8v.8. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Perhaps play to emphasize a particular skill (can only dribble the ball over a goal line in order to get a point). Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. Switch teams often, give everyone a chance to win. Also, it is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible. Finish this stage with a real game with regular rules. Players need to apply their newly learned abilities to the real game.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK:

Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Challenge them with some ball trick. Can they complete a juggling pattern? Can one player kick a ball to a partner and then back without it hitting the ground? Can they do that with their heads? How many times can they do it back and forth? It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

New Skills & Development

Essential skills

- Kicking
- Passing
- Shooting
- Crossing
- Ball handling/dribbling
- Ball control
- Defending

Understanding of team play

- Rules of the game
- Effective offense
- Combination play
- Effective defense
- Restarts

Activity that involves cooperation and communication between team members will always be less than perfect. Therefore the "bridge" from simple technique work, such as how to kick and control the ball, to the implementation of offensive and defensive techniques is one of the major objectives for the "Golden Age" player. An important part of coaching methodology at this stage is to develop the skills of soccer in game-related situations. A coach, therefore, need not complicate the practice by using large numbers or even fully abiding by rules (e.g., offside) in practice games.

The Shape of Things To Come

Mastering soccer techniques is a priority for players of this age. The principal emphasis in practice should be technique work. These ages are ideal for challenging technique practice, and coaches should encourage players to work on their own with the ball. The mechanics of performing specific techniques are important and, in all cases, there are some basic considerations of which players and coaches need to be aware: keeping an eye on the ball and being aware of which part of the body strikes the ball are two examples. Much has been written about the intricacies and subtleties of kicking and controlling the ball. A typical direction coaches must suffer through goes as such: "the non-kicking foot should be 10 inches from the ball, body leaning away, and allowing full extension of the leg and foot," etc., etc. After painstaking study of the text, many coaches are no better off, frequently becoming perplexed and frustrated after these kinds of directions. Even experienced, successful professionals would have extreme difficulty if asked to describe, step-by-step, the process of executing a technique. If asked to perform the technique, however, he or she would find the task a simple one. Players learn technique through experience:

- Observation of the technique performed by others
- Repetitive practice with and without the pressure of opposition
- Execution of the technique in games

If a technique cannot be easily described, it stands to reason that it cannot be easily learned by either a verbal or written description. A technique is understood by observing a visual picture which illustrates the shape of the technique.

What Are the Key Techniques?

- **Passing:** Playing the ball with the feet; this is the most widely used of all techniques and, therefore, the most important to practice
- **Control:** Receiving a ball, either passed along the ground or in the air, using any part of the body to control the ball except the arms and hands
- **Heading:** Playing aerial balls with the forehead
- **Tackling:** Using the feet to win the ball and the body to correctly challenge for a ball in an opponent's possession
- **Dribbling:** Running with the ball and manipulating it with the feet
- **Shooting:** Trying to score by playing the ball with the feet or the head towards the opponent's goal

Passing

Learning the technique of passing and applying it in game situations is a necessity for all young players.

Side Foot Pass - Playing the ball along the ground with the inside (or the outside) of the foot is the most widely used pass in the game. This technique is the easiest to learn and simplest to execute. The pass is used in all areas of the field and is effective over distances of 5 to 25 yards. Position: Body shaped to allow foot to turn out; a slight sitting-back posture to open hips; note arm positions.

Low Drive - The execution of the low instep drive requires good timing and, therefore, much practice. A pass driven along the ground is an effective, quick method of changing play in a game. Low, driven crosses across the face of the opponent's goal are also effective because they are difficult for opponents to counter. The most common and rewarding use for the low drive is when shooting the ball towards the opponent's goal. Position: Head looking down; body and non-kicking knee flexed over the ball; arms and hands helping to orchestrate the movement.

Lofted Pass - The lofted pass, when the lower instep of the foot (top of the big toe) is used to hit the underside of the ball, is the most common crossing technique. It can be used effectively in all areas of the field to make aerial passes of over 25 yards. Position: Body leaning away from the ball to open up the swing for the lofted kick, with full extension of leg and foot; arms loose, balancing the movement.

The Chip - The chip is a delicate aerial pass, played with the front of the foot (top of the toes) through the underside of the ball. This technique is designed to get the ball in the air quickly and drop it into the target area quickly; the backspin on the ball will also stop the ball quickly. Position: Body hunched down, with head rounded downwards; arms are pulled down and locked on striking ball to enhance clipped action.

Swerving Pass - The swerving pass is used to curl the ball in the air. The technique is effected by striking the ball through its lower center with the inside or outside of the foot, or by striking the lower outside of the ball directly with the instep. This type of pass can be used in all areas of the field but is particularly effective at corner kicks, crossed balls and direct free kicks around the opponent's penalty area.

Coaching Points

Constant practice will improve the quality of passing techniques. However, the following coaching points should be taken into consideration when applying these techniques to the game itself.

- **Weight or Pace of Pass** - The pass should be played with the right amount of weight (pace) to either the feet of the receiver or the space into which the receiver is running, so that he or she is able to either control the ball easily or play the ball comfortably with one touch.
- **Accuracy** - It is important that all passes are made accurately to either the receiver's feet or the space into which the receiver is running.
- **Timing of the Pass** - The player in possession of the ball should not pass the ball if the intended receiver is not watching the ball, is not yet ready, or is not moving to receive the ball comfortably. A poorly-timed pass often results in loss of ball possession.
- **Timing of the Run** - The player running to receive a pass should ensure that the player in possession of the ball has the ball under good control, is ready to make the pass and is looking up and aware of his teammate. Not only is a poorly-timed run a waste of energy, but it could result in a loss of possession.
- **Support** - It is vital that the player in possession of the ball has immediate help from his or her teammates. The more options a player has to pass the ball, the easier it is to keep possession.

Control

When passing the ball, great care should be given to how the player receiving the ball can control it. Good control is the means of maintaining possession and developing the team attack. Again, shaping the body in order to effect ball control is essential.

Methods of Control

8. Chest - leaning back to cushion flighted pass (introduce with gentle service).
9. Thigh - raised to receive and control aerial passes.
10. Instep - raised to control aerial passes.
11. Side of foot - extended forward to receive and to control.

The first 4 methods of control use "cushioning" as the method of controlling the ball. The controlling surface is presented towards the ball and withdrawn on contact to take the pace off the ball.

12. Sole of the foot - to wedge and push the ball into space.
13. Inside and outside of foot - to wedge and drag the ball into space.
14. Chest - leaning forward to control a ball which is bouncing off the ground.

The final three methods of control make use of trapping and/or wedging. Part of the body is used to wedge or trap the ball between the ground and the controlling surface of the body.

Coaching Points

- Make an early selection in method
- Get in line with the flight of the ball
- Keep the eyes on the ball
 - a) Relax the controlling surface or
 - b) Wedge the ball.
- Pass the ball accurately or keep possession
- Indecision Leads to Poor Control

Many mistakes in control are caused by indecision. Often this results in the player being upright at the moment of control, and the ball rebounds off the body, instead of hitting it like a cushion. There is a body shape to each method of control. Observe the illustrations and note that the players' bodies are never upright at the moment of control.

Heading

Heading should not be regarded as a principal technique for players of this age. Guided by recent medical evidence, we are concerned that heading during this age period should be introduced slowly and with gentle service (see related information in appendix (Not the Golden Age of Heading!) and related game (The Howe Way - Game 3).

Shooting

Shooting is the most rewarding of all the techniques, but for many players, the most difficult. Players are tempted to look up at the goal as they are about to kick the ball. Other than the volley and half-volley, the techniques for shooting with the feet are almost identical to passing.

- Side foot
- Low drive - instep
- Swerve shot - inside and outside of foot
- Volley - shot taken with the ball in the air; ball needs to be kept inside the goalposts and under the cross bar, ideally dipping downwards to maximize the difficulty for the goalkeeper
- Half-volley - takes place when a shot is taken just as an aerial ball strikes the ground; this ball has to be kept under the height of the cross bar; the ground half-volley usually causes the greatest difficulty for the goalkeeper.
- Volley and Half-volley kicking occurs only rarely in play outside the penalty boxes. It is such an important method of scoring that situations presenting the opportunity for this type of shooting should be frequently used in practice.

Coaching Points

The same principles apply to shooting as to individual passing techniques.

It is important that players look at the ball during the entire process of striking the ball. Players should ensure that their ankles are locked as they are about to strike the ball. Players must be prepared to withstand a physical challenge as they prepare to shoot, and therefore may need to modify their body shape accordingly.

Dribbling

- Running with the ball at one's feet
- Manipulating and faking with the ball
- Moving the ball past opponents
- Shielding the ball

Coaching Points

- The body as well as the ball must be under control
- Manipulation of the ball to throw opponents off balance
- Movement of the body to throw opponents off balance
- Change of pace
- Change of direction
- Sideways stance of the body (shielding)
- Body between the ball and the opponent
- Turning away from the opponent

Summary

All technique practices, however simple, should excite the imagination of the players by being in the form of a competition. Mundane, static, unchallenging technique drills will lead to boredom, a lack of interest and, ultimately, bad habits.

Individual Possession

Modern soccer places heavy emphasis on passing the ball as a means of maintaining possession. While this is important, many coaches destroy individual creativity and dribbling ability in the process.

The art of good coaching is to help players recognize when to pass the ball and when to keep it. The illustrations in this chapter demonstrate a few of the many moves a player may practice to keep possession.

Turning with the ball - without close marking
There are times in a game when a player has
Time and room to turn with the ball
To change direction
Or to change the direction of the ball
Turning with the ball - Against tight marking

Defending

In soccer, all players have the opportunity to play both offense and defense. Indeed, they must play both offense and defense as soccer is a two-way game. Players go forward to attack and recover to defend.

Coaches of players 9, 10 and 11 years of age should recognize the importance of developing both aspects in practice. As it is much more difficult to create than to destroy, more practice time should be devoted to the players' understanding of offensive principles and functions and to mastering the techniques of the game. It would be a mistake, however, to neglect defense.

This chapter discusses simple defending.

Much of the defender's work can be accomplished before the opponent receives the ball, with the defender closing the distance between the attacker while the ball is en route. In order of priority, the defender then needs to: consider intercepting the pass, close down the opponent before he or she has time to turn with the ball and, if the opponent has turned, try to delay the forward progress of the ball.

With experience, anticipation and skillful marking, good players will be able to intercept some passes. This saves them work. However, there are many situations where the ball cannot be intercepted and patient defending is required.

The defender should be far enough from the attacking player to see the ball. Otherwise, the opponent with the ball may spin and go past. Nor should the defender be so far away from the opponent that the attacking player is able to turn without pressure and face the defender with the ball.

While size and ability dictate the exact defensive position, a good guide to the distance a defender should be from an opponent is an arm's length. Therefore, by extending an arm (slightly bent) the defender would be able to touch the opponent. But the defender should not actually touch the player as this may constitute a foul.

Patience is the key to success. The defender cannot win the ball in this situation. To try will, most likely, result in a foul (tackling from behind). While the ball is in this position the defending player is not in danger.

The defender should attempt to win the ball only when the opponent tries to turn with it. The defender must tackle the ball and not the opponent, focusing attention on the ball at all times and resist being thrown off balance by the movement of the opponent's body.

If the attacking player elects to pass the ball, the defender's first priority is to remain on the defending goal side of the opponent.

The coach should explain to the team how their timing is essential to a successful challenge.

Don't "dive in" to the ball when uncertain of the result.

Be patient.

Tackle with resolve.

Tackle when you know the ball can be won.

Recommended Exercises: See the Soccer Activities section.

Coaching Ages 13-14

By this age, both the game and players have become quite competitive. This manual was primarily developed for recreational soccer. Please review the previous sections as the same concepts can be applied to the older players. Also, please review the Soccer Activities section for new things to work into your practices.

Coaching Emphasis:

- The importance of possession: DO NOT GIVE THE BALL AWAY!!!
- Development of individual skill.
- All practices must challenge the player in competition.
- Understanding of combination play.

New Skills & Development:

- Support
- Takeovers
- Wall pass
- Individual and small group defending.
- One session in three devoted to 1v1's, 2v2's, 3v3's.
- Develop an understanding of:
 - Delay
 - Tracking back
 - Depth
 - Balance
 - LOWER EMPHASIS:
 - Functional play, Team play, Set Plays.
 - All activities should be challenging, motivating and involve TRANSITION!!!

Recommended Exercises: See the Soccer Activities section.

Soccer Activities

Fun Games that Teach Skills

NOTE: Several of the games listed are "knock out" games where the losers are knocked out and the last player left is the winner. Since the first ones knocked out are often the ones who need the most practice, those knocked out should be required to do something to either get back into the game or to keep them working on their ball skills until the game is over. One possibility is to set up a parallel game for those knocked out to participate in.

Drills for small children

- **Tip: Keep team numbers reasonable (avoid long boring lines), for example use two goals for two different groups so lines are half as long.**
- **Rule #1: be nice and have fun.**
- **Rule #2: if things aren't working give it a minute then move on.**
- **Rule #3: when more than one kid losses focus, change activity**
- Wee ones love the idea of a "new" game , so it is a good idea the change the rules of the game or chance the game every 10 minutes to keep interest. Instructions have to be broken into little steps and kept very brief. If you can not do it and show it in about 20 seconds, then do it in stages, demo part 1, then expand to part 2 etc.
- The key to little kids soccer drills is for every player to have a ball and a variety of 'games', and drills that include every player. After playing soccer related games, pick one aspect of the game (dribbling, or shooting, or passing) and build the rest of your practice session around that.

The Name Game (ages 4+)

4 or more players needed. Players stand in a circle and pass the ball to one another, but they must call out the name of the person they are passing to. This is great at the beginning of the season, so they learn everyone's names. If the players are doing well and you have enough players, add additional balls.

Run and shoot (ages 4+)

Have the players in two lines by the center circle. Have a player from one line start moving towards the net and feed him/her a ball from beside the net. They have to dribble toward the net and shoot. Normally avoid any drills with line-ups, however this one works because the kids move quickly through the line. You should have lots of parents to help collect balls and keep kids moving through the lines.

Sharks and Minnows (ages 4+)

Start with a defined area marked, adjusted for size depending on the age of the players. Half the players have balls and are Minnows. The rest do not have balls and are the Sharks. The Minnows start at one end of the area and must dribble across the area and across the opposite goal line without losing possession of their ball. The Sharks defend the area, trying to kick the Minnows' balls out of the defined area. Minnows who retain possession turn around and go back for round two. A Minnow who loses their ball join the Sharks for round two. The last successful Minnow is the Grand Champion.

Variations of Sharks and Minnows

Sharks steal ball and go to a goal instead of just kicking the ball out.

Instead of eliminating players until only one is left, give points to the sharks for kicking out balls but let everyone stay in the game. Everyone gets a turn as a shark.

Sharks who take possession of a ball immediately become Minnows; Minnows who lose the ball become Sharks.

Players are not knocked out, but must perform some task before getting back into the game. (Such as ball dance.)

Minnows must control the ball in a goal area to encourage good ball control instead of just kicking the ball over the end line if a Shark gets close.

Ice Monster (ages 4+)

Mark off an area for the game to be played and select one kid to be the "Monster". Have the rest of the kids (each with a ball) dribble around within the area. The "Ice Monster" attempts to touch each player's

ball, at which point that player "freezes" with their foot on the ball. If a player's ball goes out of bounds, they also freeze. The last remaining unfrozen player gets to be the new Ice Monster for the next round.

Cops and Robbers (ages 4+)

Have the kids (each with a ball) line up on one side of the field. These guys are the "Robbers". Have two more kids (the Cops) facing the Robbers somewhere near halfway to the other side. The object is for the Robbers to dribble to the other side without having a Cop tackle the ball away. If a robber loses his ball to a cop, he goes to jail (designate a small area off to the side or use a Goal structure.) Have the Robbers repeat the crossings until there are only 2 left. Make these guys the new cops, pull everyone out of jail and start over.

Pirate (or Monster) (ages 4+)

A keep-away game. Coaching points: concentrate on the player's close dribbling and screening techniques. Everybody inside a circle (center circle is fine) with a ball. One player without a ball is the Pirate. Everybody starts dribbling around. The Pirate player tries to steal a ball from any player and pass it out of the circle - now, the two players are Pirates and go after the others.....then three, then four. Finally only one player is left with a ball. He/she becomes the Pirate the next game.

Kick out (ages 4+)

Everyone dribbles and shields their ball within a circle while trying to kick everyone else's ball out, and simultaneously to protect their own. You can't kick someone else's ball out if your ball isn't in the circle. If your ball goes out you have to leave the circle it gets down to two kids in a duel. The coach may participate to keep the game from becoming too competitive, as the ones eliminated early may feel bad.

Egg Hunt (ages 4+)

Have more balls than players. Have the players line-up across one end of the field. Take their balls and spread them out around the field, these are the eggs. At the other end of the field is a goal called the "basket". Blow the whistle and turn them loose. The object of the game is to get all the "eggs" in the basket as quickly as possible. They are all on the same team, and aren't allowed to take a ball away from another player. Time them to see how fast they can accomplish the task. The kids really like this game. The more balls (eggs) the better. You should see them score, and turn right around and go back for more balls.

Just plain GAMES! (ages 4+)

For warm-ups, play games which are not soccer related, but promote physical activity and are a lot of fun. Simon says, freeze tag, team tag, take-away, etc. Remember that the kids aren't showing up to play soccer, they're showing up to have fun. Have fun with them.

Shark and minnows (ages 4+)

Teaches kids with the ball to shield it from an opponent and teaches kids without the ball how to take it away from an opponent. Use pylons to create a 15-yard square. One player, the shark, starts outside the square without a ball. All other players, the minnows, start inside the square with a ball. 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. When the coach yells, "Shark attack!" the shark enters the square and has 30 seconds to send as many balls as possible outside the square. When a ball leaves the square for any reason, the corresponding fish must leave the square and stay out until the coach gives the "Stop!" command at the end of the 30 seconds. A fish has done well if still alive. The shark has done well if few fish survived. Choose a new shark and play another round until every player has been the shark once.

Camp Town Races (ages 4+)

Line up all the players on one end of the field. They each have a ball. On the whistle, they all dribble to opposite end, shoot ball into goal, get ball out of goal, and run back and finish with a shot on opposite goal. The first one to finish is the winner. Ask them "Who is going to win the race?" They all learn to say "The player who can dribble it the straightest!" A variation is to start half at one end and half on the other. This really teaches them to try to do it fast while maintaining possession. This drill really helps players deal with the balls that pop out of the bunch.

Red Light/Green Light (ages 4+)

Each player with a ball lines up at one end of the penalty area. A coach stands at the other end and yells, "Green light," and turns his back to the players. The kids race across the penalty area to see who can reach the coach first. After a few seconds, the coach yells, "Red light." At that command, the players must stop and put a foot on top of the ball. The coach turns back around and looks for players whose ball is still moving. Those players must move a certain distance back to the starting line. Repeat calling red light/green light until someone wins the race. This game encourages fast dribbling while keeping the ball close.

Follow the leader (ages 4+)

Pick a leader and have him dribble anywhere on the field, encouraging him to make lots of turns, changing speed, etc. All other players have to follow the leader and do whatever that player does. Switch leaders often.

Get 'em (ages 4+)

All players must stay within a grid. Player 'A' is "It" and is the only player to start with a ball. Player 'A' dribbles and tries to hit the other players below the waist with the ball. When hit, that player gets a ball and joins player 'A'. The game is over when all of the players have been caught. The last player caught starts with the ball for the next game. If you think the task will be too difficult for the one player to get another at the start of the game, start with 2 players being "It". Encourage quick movements and sudden changes of direction to catch players off guard. Encourage deceptive passing of the ball: look one-way and pass the other; use the outside of the foot. Players not caught should run, jump, and use zig-zag movements.

Ride Your Bike (ages 4+)

Every player must keep moving and not run into anyone else.

When coach says "one" they must stop and put their right foot on the ball (never mind that most cannot yet tell right from left just tell the lefties to use their other right foot).

Ask what part of your foot you should use when dribbling, get lots of answers. Correct one is all parts (trick question). Show how to pull ball back with sole of foot. Ask them to try it after you say start. When they are dribbling around, say "ONE"; once they are all stopped, tell them that now when you say "TWO" they are to stop and sit on the ball. "START", "TWO", Now show some other dribbling technique, for instance cutting the ball across with the inside of the foot. "START", "ONE", Tell them to move faster and to keep their heads up. "START", "TWO". If they did go faster, they probably had some collisions. Ask them how to avoid them. (Right answer is just like cars on Route 1, go slower in traffic and speed up when no one is around and always pay attention to what the other drivers are doing.) Tell them when you say "THREE" to stop and put their nose on the ball. "START", "THREE", START, encourage them to find space on the field, help them say "there's space over here", "now its over in the other corner". etc. Do several of the stops and starts to get them a little silly and maybe introduce another dribbling move.

Tag (ages 4+)

This drill is based on the common kids' game of tag. Mark off a grid or circle. Everybody needs a ball. Whoever is "it" must dribble to another player and tag him. The other player avoids being tagged by dribbling away from "it." If the player being chased loses his ball outside the grid, dribbles out of the grid, or is tagged, he is "it" and the game continues.

Striker! (ages 6+)

Divide players into two teams. Station each team at a corner post of the goal, standing off, but facing the field. Place a keeper in goal facing the field. Coach/assistant stands behind the center of the goal with a supply of balls. Coach tosses a ball over the crossbar to about the penalty spot. A player from each team both sprint to the ball and attempt to control it, turn, and get a shot off. The second to the ball defends (if he then wins the ball, then he tries to shoot). When there is a score, save, or ball goes out of play, restart the same way with a different pair of players. May want to limit amount of time each pair has to attempt to score as some kids will dribble all over the field if you let them and everyone else gets bored. Limit the area that the combatants can "fight" in to the penalty area.

Numbers (ages 6+)

The exercise is good for 1 vs 1 dribbling skills. It is especially good on a hot day as the kids defending can rest a bit. Divide the kids into 2 groups. If you have ten kids, say, assign each kid a number between one and five. So each team has a number one, a number two, etc. Try to make sure the kids with the

same number are evenly matched. Set up two very wide "goals" with pylons. Spread the five kids on each side across each goal line. Call out one or more numbers, and those kids come out to play 1 vs 1, 2 vs 2, etc. and the rest of the kids stay spread across the goal line as defenders. Throw a ball from the sideline into the center and let them play it until a goal is scored, the defenders stop it, or it goes out of bounds. Variation: Colors. Use two each of different colored pinnies, armbands, or stickers to place on shirts, as younger kids will have trouble remembering numbers.

Monkey in the Middle (ages 6+)

All players form a circle and choose someone (the "Monkey") to be in its center. The players forming the circle pass one ball among them while the person in the center tries to gain control of the ball. When this happens, the person in the circle who last touched the ball goes to the center. Some level of competitiveness develops but never on an individual basis and the "losers" quickly gets a chance to redeem themselves.

Give and go (ages 6+)

This one is good for getting the kids to move after they make a pass. It is appropriate for kids a little older, who pass the ball but like to stop and really admire their better passes. Everyone spaces themselves around the center circle. Give the ball to one person and they call out someone's name and pass to them. They then run to the receiver's position in the circle. The receiver upon hearing their name called steps forward to receive the pass and yells "I got it!" The sequence is then repeated. Several things are accomplished besides getting them used to movement. The "I got it!" yell addresses the problem of nobody playing the ball in a game because they thought the other was going to play it. We all learn each other's names quickly.

Passing (ages 6+)

Have them find a partner, one ball per pair. This will take a little while so you might tell them to come back from the break with a partner and a ball before you dismiss them. First have them pass the ball back and forth while standing about 3 yards apart. They will look hopeless. Stop them and ask what part of foot to use for short accurate passes on the ground. (Answer is inside of foot, show them what you mean; that part of the foot between the heel and ball of foot.) Have them resume. Point out that a pass is no good if it can't be received by their teammate. Ask what that means (answers on ground, within reach, not too hard, not too soft, when it is expected, for example it does no good to pass to a teammate's back, or to one picking dandelions). Stop them ask them how to receive the ball (answer: cushion the ball so it slows and is left in front of you so you can step forward to pass it, Don't let them stop the ball under their foot, or so close that the ball is stuck between their feet and must be moved before it can be kicked, tell them the ball should be kept moving) Now you will also have to tell them to back up after they pass the ball or else, they will end up too close together. Resume. Stop and tell them to do two-touch passing (you probably will have to ask what Two-touch is and find a correct respondent). Resume. Stop tell them that you want to count the number of passes in a minute and to start on your command. Start and time for one minute. Ask each pair how many passes, repeat.

Shooting (ages 6+)

Players love to shoot and score. Almost anything that gets lots of shots in a short time is fine. With 6 or fewer, a simple line taking turns and retrieving the balls works fine. Have them stay out of the way of each others shots.

For more than 6, you need to keep the "standers" occupied some way. Having them serve a ball to the shooter, then move to the shooting line and the shooters retrieve ball and move to serving line. Easiest serves are those coming from behind and slightly to the side of the shooter, also ball must be on ground and in front of shooter. Shooter should be facing sideways so he can see both the ball coming and the goal at which she will shoot. Next easiest are serves coming from the goal on the ground back to the shooter who is facing the goal; hardest serves are those coming across the field from either side.

If a larger goal is available, a parent as keeper (preferably a totally inept keeper) is lots of fun. The youngest will be lousy servers and you will have to decide if it is "working" when you have them serve. If not simply change the activity.

One version of the setup: Line in front of goal about 15 yards out. First player in line has no ball. Second player in line pushes the ball from behind to in front of the first player so that the ball is rolling towards the goal. The first player catches up to the ball and takes a first time shot. First player retrieves ball and goes

to end of line, second player moves to front of line ... (You will have to instruct them about passing the ball slowly enough that the first player can reach it, but hard enough that it does get in front of him. One way to begin this is to have the first player facing the goal with his legs spread and the second player passes between the first players legs. That at least puts the ball between the player and the goal and as long as the pass is not too hard, the first player should be able to get a shot off.)

Other (ages 6+)

1v1: Have the players find someone of comparable ability. Use two pairs. Have one pair serve as "goals" standing with their legs spread apart and the other two compete to score. Tell them the goals must be scored by shooting on the ground. After one minute goals and players switch. If you have an odd number of pairs, use parents as "goals" .

Scrimmage (ages 6+)

Encourage the team with the ball (attackers) to spread out and to move to get open. Encourage the defenders(team without ball) to get between the ball and the goal (goal-side) (or between an attacker who is "up front" and the goal).

Don't worry about the finer points of throw-ins, offsides, etc. Do prohibit sliding tackles, encourage the attackers to shoot, defenders to get back as soon as they lose the ball.

Defenders are everyone on the team that doesn't have the ball. Attackers are everyone on the team that does have the ball. When no one has the ball, deciding whether you should act like a defender or an attacker is hard to determine, but the team that gets it right most often usually wins the game.

The scrimmage will likely look like a swarm around the ball. If the coach must engage in some tactical instruction, have one player play behind the swarm to collect any balls coming to him and play the ball forward to space in front of and to the side of the swarm. Later introduce players to the sides of the swarm to collect any balls to the side or passes from behind and then dribble forward and shoot or pass to the middle. Finally, add a player in front of the swarm to serve as a target. Now with 4 players outside the swarm, the remaining few players are just midfielders, the others are just in good supporting positions. Encourage the swarm to pass to any teammate outside the swarm, yes a pass back is good and should be tolerated, even if it is a bit risky for K-3 s. The players outside the swarm should be rotated frequently.

It will take K's all fall to get to the point where more than a couple will play outside the swarm. (except, for those who are really not playing at all and just standing with no clue as to what is going on, encourage those to get into the swarm. and get involved)

Do not relegate the only kid with a booming kick to stay back all the time. The point here is to learn and not to restrict the chances to learn in an effort to win or avoid an embarrassing loss.

Of course, there are lots of variations on all of these and you probably have your own favorite. With these guys silly games are not a bad idea. Just remember these little ones have trouble staying focussed on one activity for too long, so make lots of changes. If something isn't working, change after a very short time, especially if you don't have a clear way to make it easier or more fun to do.

Explode (ages 6+)

Every kid has a ball. You get them all around you dribbling their balls as close as they can get. Make sure they begin their dribbling using the insides of both feet...no toe balls at the first practice! Make them keep control of the ball....always within one step....and do not let them run into one another or dribble their ball into another ball or another player. Keep telling them to get their heads up and see the open spaces. Yell "Explode!" at which point they all run away (dribbling their balls) as fast as they can. First one to get to a boundary or cone "wins".

Flags (ages 6+)

Players start with a ball and 2 flags. A flag is a cloth strip about 2 inches wide and a foot long. Flags are stuck into the waistband of the players' pants at each side. A player is eliminated when he/she loses both flags and his/her ball. A ball is lost when it is kicked out of bounds (by another player with a ball) or stolen (by a player with at least one flag but no ball). You can only take someone's flag away when you have a

ball. The first flag usually goes pretty quick. The real fun comes when they learn to protect both the ball and the remaining flag by using the flagless side to shield

Dribble Relay (ages 6+)

Set up an 'obstacle-course' with cones as 'gates' - and team 'A' races team 'B'-they have to go out and back - if they lose control and miss a gate, they have to regain control and go through the gate. A variation is to have a small 'square' at the end. They have to stop the ball in the square, then sprint back and high-five the next player before he/she can take off. Another variation is to have several parents positioned at different places along the 'course' and have a different one hold up a number of fingers at random times during the race - and award points to the player that sees it and correctly yells out the number first. This gets the players heads up.

Freeze Tag (ages 6+)

Set up a large rectangle with cones and have the players dribble in the rectangle. After a short time, take the ball away from one or two players who then become "it." Any player whose ball is touched by an "it" player becomes frozen and has to stop dribbling, spread his legs apart, and hold his ball above his head. He is frozen in this position until another player dribbles his ball between the frozen players legs. Switch the "it" players often and make it a contest to see who can freeze the most at one time.

Simon Says (ages 6+)

Just like the common children's game, the coach gives instructions like "Simon says dribble with your left foot" or "Simon says switch balls with someone." The players only follow the instructions if they begin with "Simon says..." Anyone following instructions that do not start with "Simon says..." are knocked out. But the knocked out players should be doing something with the ball, not just watching the game continue. Continue the game until one player is left.

Dribbler's Alley (ages 6+)

Four or more players needed. Set up one less pair of cones (gates) than the number of players you have in a line. Each gate should be about 6 feet wide and have about 10 feet between each gate. Every player guards a gate and the remaining player tries to dribble through the gates.

Last Man Out (ages 6+)

Two players or more needed. All players stand at a cone about 20 feet from a group of balls. There is one less ball than the number of players. On the coach's command, the players run to the balls, get one and begin dribbling. The player who didn't get a ball tries to steal one from the others. The coach keeps time and after a preset period has passed, the coach stops the game. The player who, at that time does not have a ball, is out. Remove one ball from the group and repeat until there is only one person with a ball.

Ball Tag (ages 6+)

Everyone has a ball and dribbles in a confined area. The player who is "it" must pass his ball so that it hits another player's ball. The player whose ball was hit then becomes "it."

Musical Chairs (ages 6+)

One less ball than the number of players in the drill. Players run around in goal areas in a scramble until whistle is blown. Players race to get ball from center circle and dribble to score on goal. Player without ball help get balls to center, repeating this until only one player left. Make sure to keep things moving along, don't wait very long to blow the whistle. Once players have concept start adding in defenders. One more that may work for you is using a ball as the goal. Have players match up by ability. Throw one ball out as the goal. Throw a second out that the two players will try and possess and score. First player to ball is attacker, second defends goal (ball) and tries to gain possession of ball. If successful, roles reverse. Only run this for 30-45 sec depending on effort of the players. I usually have 2-3 pairs doing this at once each with their own goal (ball) and playing ball.

Line Soccer (ages 6+)

Start with two lines of players facing one another. Give each player a number and a "matching" player in the other line. Kick the ball between the two lines and call out a number. The two players with the corresponding number will play one on one while trying to kick the ball through the opposing line. This game teaches the players in the line not to chase after the ball since they have to defend their line in a limited area.

Circle Game (ages 6+)

Set up a 20x40 yard grid, make a center circle, and split players into teams that can be identified by a color. Have all the kids dribble their balls in the center circle. Call out a color. That team dribbles toward their goal. The other team leaves their ball and runs to slow the attackers down trying to get them to a sideline and to dribble out-of-bounds, or not get to their goal line before the coach counts to 7 or Award 1 point for each out-of-bounds and 1 point for each player "held" for the coach's count. Attackers get 1 point for each "goal". Play to 10 points.

Under Pressure (ages 6+)

Get all the kids dribbling around in a square area and then remove one, two, or three balls, depending on how much pressure needed. Then announce that whoever has possession of a ball after 1 minute is a winner. If they can chase someone out of bounds they automatically win that ball. Count down the last 10 seconds real loud to increase the activity. Kids without a ball have to do some token penance; a couple of pushups, make a weird face for the others, nothing real negative.

"Keep Your Yard Clean" (ages 6+)

Here is a game that involves kicking and is a good example of parallel play in that it involves all players on the team at one time, but, they are all acting as individuals during the game. This allows for individual differences in skill. The game is simple, fun, and easy to adapt to account for team size and experience. Create a 'neutral area' between the two teams where no player is allowed into. This area can be as small as one yard and as big as 10 yards wide. The width is determined by how far the players can kick the ball. Each player starts with a ball at his / her feet. On command, each team tries to keep their side of the game free of balls by kicking their ball over to the other teams side. After an appropriate amount of time (when the balls become too scattered, or, the players are losing focus), call the game and count which side has the most balls on their side. Distribute the balls evenly for another try if the players are still interested. After players have found some success with this basic game, try these variations:

- Players can only use their left foot.
- Throw the ball back. Punt the ball back.
- Dribble the ball around a cone that has been set up in the middle of their "yard", then, kick the ball back.

Tag (ages 6+)

Here is a game which involves both passing and dribbling that is fun and engages players quickly. Also, although primarily an individual exercise that allows for differences in ability level, if the players are ready, it can quickly become a cooperative game where players work together to solve a challenge. Each player will need a ball. Player 'A' is "It" and is the only player to start with a ball. All the other players around the outside of the gridded space.

Player 'A' dribbles and tries to hit the other players below the waist with the ball. When hit, that player gets a ball and joins player 'A'. The game is over when all of the players have been caught. The last player caught starts with the ball for the next game. If you think the task will be too difficult for the one player to get another at the start of the game, start with 2 players being "It". Encourage quick movements and sudden changes of direction to catch players off guard. Encourage deceptive passing of the ball: look one-way and pass the other; use the outside of the foot. Players not caught should run, jump, and use zig-zag movements.

Tag II (ages 6+)

Here is another game that emphasizes dribbling that is fun and challenging for players. Again, primarily, it is an individual game that could lend itself to small group cooperation if the players are ready. Each player will need a ball, except those that have been designated as "It". Players that are "It" need to carry a colored pinnie or flag in their hand. Players with a ball try to dribble without being tagged. If they are, they exchange places with the "tagger" (The "tagger" hands the pinnie to the dribbler and takes their ball). Dribblers are safe in one of the designated bases. Only one player is allowed in a base at a time. If a new player enters a base, the old player must leave the base.

Add "taggers" when the players find the game to be easy. It seems about right to have one base for every 3 players, but, this number can be adjusted either way to make the game constantly interesting. This game can also be played by only allowing the "tagger" to "get" someone by kicking their ball away, not just "tagging" the person.

Experiment with different combinations of "taggers" and bases to keep the players engaged.

Square Dance (ages 6+)

To start practice in a lively way with a fun warm-up that introduces and develops the fundamentals of dribbling.

Organization

- Mark a square approximately 15 yards by 15 yards, depending on numbers.
- Each player should have a ball.
- If not, use the "Change Soccer" principle: half the players inside the square, each with a ball, the remaining half outside the square, without a ball. Trade places when coach shouts "Change!"
- Three instructions are given to the players inside the square:
"STOP" Put foot on top of ball quickly and freeze like a statue.
"GO" Move right or left with the ball, fast, for three or four yards.
"TURN" Quickly turn 180 degrees with the ball, moving three or four yards.

Teaching Points

- Encourage players to keep the ball close to their feet.
- Occasionally insist on using left foot only or right foot only.
- Encourage players to keep their heads up while playing.
- See how many different ways they can turn with the ball.
- To avoid giving players too much information at once, introduce instructions one at a time and incorporate practice time between.

Later, incorporate your own ideas.

Target

- Stay in the area with the ball.
- No contact with other players or with other balls.

The Numbers Game (ages 6+)

To develop good attacking and defending skills in a "fun game" practice and to use 1 vs 1 and 2 vs 2 as the learning situation.

Organization

- Use the 3-a-side Micro Soccer® field
- Widen the goals.
- All players start on goal line.
- Each player on each team is given a number.
- Coach calls out number (e.g., "three") and rolls the ball into play.
- The two opposing number "three" players leave the goal line immediately and compete for possession for a maximum of 20 seconds.
- Coach keeps the ball by him and rolls another ball into play if one is kicked out.
- Call two numbers - "one" and "three" - to create 2 vs 2.
- Remaining players defend goal: without using hands, they must stay within one yard of goal line.
- If one player fails to respond to the number, a penalty - a free shot at open goal from half-way line - is called to keep players on their toes and make it fun.

Teaching Points

- If organization is working, let them play, enjoy the game and learn by trial and error.
- Encourage attackers to take on opponents and Go for the Goal!
- Defenders should stay on their feet as long as possible, rather than slide-tackling.
- Defenders must run back even when beaten.

Target

- To outscore opposing team.

Change Soccer (ages 6+)

To involve every player in a fun 2 vs 2 or 3 vs 3 game that emphasizes co-operation and skill development.

Organization

- Group is split into two; if odd number, coach joins in or plays the strongest squad a player short.
- In the example shown, three players from each team play a normal game.
- Three players on each team are collective goalkeepers; positioned no more than two yards off each goal line, they are not allowed to handle ball.
- Coach shouts "Change!" and on-field teams run back to goal line, without touching the ball again, to become the goalkeepers.
- Goalkeeping teams become the on-field teams and move quickly to win possession.

Coach shouts "Change!" at any time.

- Coach shouts "Change!" and on-field teams run back to goal line, without touching the ball again, to become the goalkeepers.
- Goalkeeping teams become the on-field teams and move quickly to win possession.
- Coach shouts "Change!" at any time.
- Make goals wide enough so that it's not too difficult to score.
- Any major infraction means a free shot from the half-way line, with no goalkeepers.

Teaching Points

- Encourage players to pass frequently in order to create scoring chances.
- Encourage goalkeeping team to move sideways together, as a wall.
- Defenders should help each other and stay on their feet as much as possible.

Player with the Ball (ages 6+)

Assuming the player in possession of the ball is not the goalkeeper and that the goalkeeper is giving rear support, the player should be encouraged to make decisions from the options normally presented:

1. "Go for Goal" - the player looks to score by dribbling and running past opponents
2. Shooting, if the opportunity is there
3. Combining with the supporting attacker on passing moves towards the goal

Exciting options for player with ball...

In 3-a-side, these options will be obvious and players should be encouraged - not criticized - if they make a choice that fails. A further option is to pass the ball back to the rear supporting player, normally the goalkeeper. This should be pointed out as a real option, but with greater encouragement to look for the more positive forward options first.

Children learn by doing. Let them do it, enjoy it and learn it through their own trial and error.

Game 1 (ages 6+)

A fun dribbling activity using four corners or target areas.

Game Rules

- * Eight players with a ball each dribble inside the marked area shown (20 yards by 20 yards).
- * Four additional areas are marked on the outside of each corner with frisbees or cones, and are designated as being the red, yellow, green and blue areas.
- * Each player tries to prevent the ball rolling into another player or another player's ball.
- * All players try to keep within the marked area at all times.
- * On the command "Stop!," the players freeze with one foot on top of the ball.
- * On the command, "Red!" or "Yellow!" or "Green!" or "Blue!," the players dribble quickly to the appropriate corner while trying to avoid other players.

Player Objectives

- * Maintain control of the ball, manipulating the ball to avoid collisions.
- * Develop changes of speed and direction.
- * Keep the head up to see the other players while looking down to see the ball.

Game 2 (ages 6+)

A fun dribbling game introducing the aspect of shielding the ball

Game Rules

- * Eight players with a ball each dribble inside the center circle.

- * Each player manipulates and protects the ball but also tries to kick other balls outside the circle.
- * If a player's ball is kicked out, player retrieves it quickly and continues with the game.
- * A player may only attempt to kick another player's ball when in possession of his or her own; if his or her ball has been kicked out of the circle, player may not kick another's ball.
- * A player is eliminated when the ball is kicked out of the circle three times.
- * The winner is the only player who does not have a ball kicked out three times.

Player Objectives

- * Shield the ball - keep the body between the ball and challenging players.
- * Keep control of the ball, turn with it and accelerate with it to avoid a challenge.
- * Keep the head up to see the other players while looking down to see the ball.

Game 3 (ages 6+)

A 1 vs 1 dribbling game with goal areas to attack and defend

Game Rules

- * Place five sets of goals (made with cones) around the center circle as shown in diagram.
- * Make each goal two yards wide.
- * Divide eight players into four pairs: one player of each pair with the ball, the other an opponent.
- * The player with the ball tries to maintain possession under pressure from the opponent and tries to score through any of the five sets of goals.
- * While the area outside the center circle may be used, a goal is scored from inside the area only.
- * To score, the player must dribble the ball through one of the goals (but may not pass the ball through) and successfully maintain possession.
- * A loss of possession occurs when the player: a) loses the ball to opponent; b) allows the ball to collide with any other ball in the playing area; c) collides with a goalpost while trying to score; d) passes the ball through a goal rather than dribbling.
- * The score is kept in each 1 vs 1 duel.
- * The game should be no longer than two minutes before allowing players to rest, because the 1 vs 1 nature of the game presents great physical demands. Quality of play deteriorates as players become fatigued. It is important they are given time to recover.

Player Objectives

- * Maintain control under the pressure of the opposition, keeping the body between the ball and the opponents.
- * Turn away from the opponent and not into the opponent.
- * Change direction and pace.
- * Keep an eye on the ball, but with head up to avoid collision and to see which goal is open.

Game 4 (ages 6+)

A passing, dribbling and shooting game where one side is given an extra player (2 vs 1)

Game Rules

- * Have substitute players to replace those who are playing.
- * One team has a single outfield player, the other has two, and both have a goalkeeper.
- * Several balls should be kept within each goal to keep a ball in play.
- * Make the goal four yards wide, and create a play area 25 yards by 15 yards.
- * Encourage both teams to score even though one has a manpower advantage.
- * When the ball is out of play, start the game at the goal line by the goalkeeper.
- * Keep score.

Player Objectives

- * Watch the ball but keep head up to observe opponents and the goal.

Team with two outfield players:

- * The player in possession has two options - pass the ball or keep it.
- * Pass to teammate with pace and accuracy, and use teamwork to score.
- * For the player not in possession, support teammate by being visible.

Team with one outfield player:

- * Player in possession keeps the ball until the angle to shoot exists, then tries to score.
- * Manipulate the ball, keeping body between opponents and the ball.
- * Change pace and direction.

Game 5 (ages 6+)

A 3-a-side game which emphasizes dribbling, passing and shooting

Game Rules

- * A normal 3-a-side game in an area approximately 30 yards by 20 yards, except that it is played around one goal rather than two.
- * Emphasize shooting at goal at the earliest opportunity.
- * Players combine to create goal-scoring opportunity.
- * Team in the dark uniforms can score only from the left side of the field, and team in white only from the right side.
- * Re-start game with a throw-in any time the ball goes out of bounds.
- * When goalkeeper makes a save from one team, he throws the ball into the opposing half of the field.

Player Objectives

- * To take early shots from within shooting distance of the goal.
- * To provide support for the player with the ball.

Game 6 (ages 6+)

A 1 vs 1 vs 1 game that induces the player in possession to create a shooting position

Game Rules

- * One ball for three players in the area shown in the diagram, approximately 15 yards square.
- * Each player plays against the other two players.
- * Each player tries to score in a goal four to five yards wide.
- * When the ball goes out of play, the coach puts another ball in play.
- * Goalkeeper making a save throws the ball to the coach.
- * After 10 balls are served, all three players and the goalkeeper are changed.
- * Keep score and play the winners against each other to name the champion.

Player Objectives

- * Control the ball from the coach.
- * Manipulate the ball to avoid challenges.
- * Shield the ball when necessary.
- * Change direction - turn with the ball.
- * Change pace.
- * Shoot at the earliest opportunity.

Game 7 (ages 6+)

A 3 vs 2 game where the attackers have to combine to create scoring chances

Game Rules

- * Divide the players into two teams.
- * Toss a coin to determine offensive team and defensive team.
- * All the play takes place within the area shown - 20 yards by 15 yards, with a goal five yards wide.
- * Keep a large supply of balls.
- * Play four minutes and then change to allow the defending team to attack and the attacking team to defend.
- * Keep score.
- * The coach starts the play by serving the ball to any of the three attackers at the front of a line.
- * The three combine to score a goal.
- * When the coach serves the ball, the two front defenders may leave their positions and try to prevent the attacking team from scoring.
- * When a goal is scored or the goalkeeper makes a save or the ball goes out of play, the five players leave the area quickly to allow five more players to play.

Player Objectives

Player with the ball:

- * Control the ball from the coach.
- * Manipulate the ball to avoid challenge.
- * Shoot at the earliest good opportunity.

Attacking players without the ball:

- * Support the player in possession of the ball.
- * Know where and when to run so that a pass from the player with the ball cannot be intercepted.

Game 8 (ages 6+)

A fun game which encourages good kicking technique and develops passing skills

Game Rules

- * Mark out an area approximately 15 yards by 10 yards with a goal three yards wide in the middle.
- * Each player remains behind his own line.
- * A shot can be played with the inside or outside of the foot through the goal.
- * The receiving player controls the ball behind his line and tries to pass the ball through the goal (if by lack of control the ball rebounds into the goal, it does not count).
- * As the players improve, increase the length of the area or decrease the size of the goal.
- * Limit the touches to three or, as players improve, to two.
- * Play the game for five minutes and have the players keep score.

Player Objectives

- * To control the ball and set up the pass.
- * To achieve pace and accuracy of passes.

Game 10 (ages 6+)

A fun circle game that develops combined passing and shooting

Game Rules

- * Make the goal one cone placed inside an area with a radius of approximately six yards.
- * If a liner is not available, the circumference can be marked out with frisbees, bibs or other cones.
- * The team in dark uniforms plays against the team in white.
- * A goal is scored when the ball is played from outside the area to knock over the cone.
- * All players are allowed to run through the circle but no player is allowed to touch the ball in the circle.
- * If any player touches the ball in the area, the opposing team has a free shot at the "goal" from the edge of the circle.
- * Keep score.

Player Objectives

Player in possession:

- * To keep an eye on the ball and keep the head up to observe teammates, opponents and the goal.
- * To maintain possession of the ball by keeping one's body between the ball and opponent.
- * To change direction, by turning with the ball, and to change pace.
- * To pass to teammates and choose which teammate is the better option.
- * To achieve pace and accuracy of pass.

Players not in possession:

- * To support the player with the ball.
- * To know where and when to run.
- * To know not to make the same run as other supporting players, or to crowd the player in possession of the ball.

NOTE: The game should be no longer than three minutes before allowing players to rest. The competitive 3-a-side nature of the game is physically demanding. Quality of play deteriorates as players become fatigued. It is important they have the opportunity to recover. With a group of 12, six play and six rest. Change frequently.

Bumper car dribble (ages 9+)

The whole team does this in a small grid. Try and match players of similar height. Have one player dribbling while another partner is trying to nudge them off the ball shoulder to shoulder. This teaches them to dribble under physical pressure and teaches the players that contact is a good and fun thing. Before games I have 2 players inside a circle formed by the rest of the team playing for possession of a ball, gets the players in the mode of fighting for the ball on the field (30 sec).

Game 11 (ages 9+)

A 3 vs 1 game to develop passing and support.

Game Rules:

Three attacking players against one defending player inside an area 10 yards by 10 yards.

Attacking team tries to keep possession as long as possible.

Defending team has one player inside the area and two players outside.

Attacking team loses possession if the ball goes outside the area or if the defending player makes a tackle or intercepts a pass.

At loss of possession, defending player is immediately replaced with a teammate.

Game is over when all defending players have been in the area.

Number of successful passes accumulated during the three phases is noted.

Attacking team and defending team change roles.

Winning team is one with greater number of passes.

Overall winner is team which first achieves five wins.

NOTE: The coach should have several balls to replace ones kicked out of area.

Player Objectives for Attacking Trio

Player in possession: to achieve pace, accuracy and timing passes.

Supporting players: to time runs to support the player with the ball, and to provide the correct supporting angles.

All players on offense: to use all of the available space in area.

Game 12 (ages 9+)

A game to develop heading technique.

Game Rules:

Set up game with four players.

Goal is 3 yards wide and distance between goal and dotted lines is 4 yards (dimensions may be varied according to age/ability of the players).

One team competes against the other, alternating as either Heading team or Goalkeeping team.

Coach serves ball gently from four yards in the air to alternating players who must head ball from behind respective lines and try to score.

Goalkeeper is changed after 10 head shots.

After 20 serves (10 to each player), teams change.

Winning team is one to score the most goals.

NOTE: The coach dictates the quality and variation of the service.

Player Objectives

To be light on feet and adjust to line of ball.

To watch ball at all times and "throw" the eyes toward it.

To head ball towards the goal.

Game 13 (ages 9+)

A 1 vs 1 game to encourage defending.

Game Rules

Set up game in area 10 x 15 yards.

Organize two teams of two or three players: one player from each team is in area.

Coach plays ball to the player in selected area, whose objective is to score by getting ball on line behind opponent.

Defending player's objective is to win ball and attack opposite line.

Either player may slide tackle if necessary to prevent opponent from scoring.

If ball goes out of bounds, coach immediately delivers another ball.

Game ends with a goal or after one minute (whichever is sooner).

Two new players enter game.

Winning team is first to score five goals.

Player Objectives

DEFENDER

To defend patiently, delaying the forward progress of opponent and ball.

To execute a well-timed tackle.

ATTACKER

To maintain ball possession under pressure.

NOTE: This is an excellent game for 1 vs 1 dribbling.

Game 14 (ages 9+)

A 2 vs 2 game to encourage players to create shooting positions.

Game Rules

2 vs 2 (plus a goalkeeper) inside area 20 x 20 yards.

Both teams try to score in same goal (six yards wide).

When ball goes out of play, coach delivers another ball.

If goalkeeper makes a save, ball goes to coach.

After five balls are served, outfield players leave playing area - keeping score.

Two more pairs enter area to compete, also keeping score.

Score is ongoing and winner is team with more goals after 10 or 15 minutes.

With a large group of players (e.g., 16) half of the players play small-sided game (4 vs 4) and then change groups.

Player Objectives

PLAYER WITH THE BALL:

To manipulate ball to avoid challenges and to open shooting positions.

To keep head up to observe teammate, opponents and goal.

To shoot when opportunity is there.

To change direction - turn with ball.

To shield ball when necessary.

To change pace.

PLAYER WITHOUT THE BALL:

To provide support to teammate.

Game 15 (ages 9+)

Practice to develop turning the ball.

Game Rules

Set up several identical areas, having groups of three players as shown.

Each playing area is 10 x 20 yards.

Play starts at one end.

Ball is played to middle player, who turns with ball and plays it to teammate.

End player may control ball or play it first time back to middle player, who turns and plays it to third player with no more than two touches.

End players must play ball from behind respective lines.

Each time ball returns to first end player, team scores one point: a point does not count if the ball goes over sidelines, or if it is not played from behind end lines.

Winning team is first to score 20 points.

Change middle player with one of the end players and repeat game.

NOTE: A key to success is the middle player's ability to turn quickly.

Player Objectives

To develop correct turning techniques.

To achieve pace and accuracy in passing.

Game 16 (ages 9+)

A 1 vs 1 game to develop correct shielding technique and passing opportunities from tight marking positions.

Game Rules

Set up game with four players, as shown, in area approximately 10 x 20 yards.

Two players compete within the area.

Two players behind end lines may move along their respective lines to create a passing angle for middle player in possession of ball.

Play starts with one of the end players.

Ball is played to one of the middle players, whose objective is to play ball to other end player.

Opponent tries to gain possession of ball.

Each time middle player passes to an end player a goal is scored and possession is retained.

Game is played for one minute: winner is player to score the most goals.

End players change with middle players and they compete to score goals.

Winner is the player to score most goals.

Player Objectives

To be in position for the ball.

To control ball successfully.

To shield ball from opponent.

To be patient and not give the ball away unnecessarily.

To create a passing angle.

To achieve pace and accuracy in passing.

Game 17 (ages 9+)

A 2 vs 2 game to encourage the wall pass.

Game Rules

Set up game with eight players in an area 20 x 30 yards.

2 vs 2 within area; other four players each stand on corner of the area.
Play starts with one of the corner players who passes the ball to one team. Each team must pass at least twice before playing to one of the corner target players within marked areas. If opponents win the ball, they must do the same. Each successful target pass scores one point.
Each successful wall pass scores 10 points.
Corner player returns pass to team, playing ball to him or her.
When ball goes out of bounds, re-start play with kick-in from which wall pass can be used.
Game is played for 2 minutes, then players change.
Combined total points should be kept; pair who has the most points after 10-15 minutes wins.
Player Objectives
To achieve pace and accuracy in passing.
To recognize the wall pass.
To execute the wall pass.
NOTE: The same game may be used to encourage takeovers instead of the wall pass, or both actions may be encouraged.

Game 18 (ages 9+)

A 2 vs 2 game to practice simple defending.

Game Rules

Set up the game in an area 20 x 30 yards with goals (3 yards wide) but no goalkeepers.
Players get in pairs and stand at opposite end lines.
Play starts when coach, at halfway line, plays ball towards one team; one pair from each team enters game.
Both teams compete to score goals.
If ball goes out of bounds or goal is scored, coach re-starts game with pass towards one team.
After two minutes, two more opposing pairs enter game.
Winner is the team with more goals after 10-20 minutes.

Player Objectives

DEFENDING PLAYERS:

To shut out opponents quickly
To "jockey" opponent correctly.
To time tackles.
To use the correct tackling technique.
To stay goal-side of opponents.
To provide defensive support.

NOTE: With a decreased area or an increased area, the game may be used for 1 vs 1 or 3 vs 3, respectively, with emphasis on correct defending.

Game 19 (ages 9+)

The 4-a-side game to practice the combining of players.

Game Rules

Game is played in area 25 x 35 yards.
Goals are 5 yards wide and 5 feet high (corner flag height).
Halfway line and six-yard lines are marked; cones or markers define lines.
Eight players maximum per team; four players within the area and four resting.
Goalkeeper designated by each team may use hands only within six-yard area.
Duration of each period is three minutes; after game all players leave field and are replaced by resting teammates.*
At the end of second three minute game, original teams enter playing area; teams change ends and goal teams must select a new goalkeeper.
Game has corner kicks and throw-ins. Goal kicks must be taken within one yard of goal line and travel over six-yard line to be in field of play.
After a goal, the team who did not score kicks off from center spot.
Duration of game is decided by coach.
Ongoing score may be kept; winning team scores the most goals.

* Although the game is physically demanding, be aware that off the field players are quickly rested and will become frustrated through inactivity. If in doubt, play two games simultaneously.

Player Objectives

OFFENSE:

To combine successfully and score goals.

DEFENSE:

To combine successfully and gain possession.

The Zone Game (ages 9+)

Objective

To develop combined offensive and defensive play in a 3 vs 3 game.

Organization

Area 30 x 20 yards, with additional five-yard zones at each end.

Normal 3 vs 3 - but the only way to score is by "touch down" of ball with foot in end zone.

If ball goes out of play over end zone line or at side of end zone, defending team re-starts game with "goal kick" or "dribble-in" from end line.

If ball goes out over side line (not including end zone) play is re-started by "pass-in" (or throw-in if coach prefers).

Condition game to disallow any side tackling.

Coaching Points

The only way to score is by dribbling or passing into end zone - both methods should be encouraged.

Players attempting to score should screen ball from opponent as he or she "touches down" - to protect both ball and player.

Defending team must work collectively to stop "dribbler," and at same time avoid being "blindsided" by pass.

Challenge

To outscore opposition.

The Four-Goal Game (ages 9+)

Objective

To encourage on-the-ball composure, awareness of teammates and team cooperation.

Organization

Area 30 x 30 yards.

Four goals are set-up by cones or markers five yards out from each corner. Goals are one yard wide.

Three players in possession combine to score in any of the four goals.

They can only score through front of goal and may dribble or pass through goal and still maintain possession.

When ball goes out of play, re-start with either a throw-in or pass-in.

Coaching Points

Encourage players to "switch" the play by passing, as three defending players can quickly mark three out of the four goals.

Encourage players to turn away with ball if one goal becomes "marked" by opponent.

If attacking teams are not having success, consider giving them a further option. Let the team in possession also score a goal by getting four consecutive passes.

Challenge

To outscore the opposition.

(If the 4 Pass scoring rule is also being used, the challenge for the coach is to keep the score - and count the passes!)

The Four-Goal Game (ages 9+)

Objective

To encourage on-the-ball composure, awareness of teammates and team cooperation.

Organization

Area 30 x 30 yards.

Four goals are set-up by cones or markers five yards out from each corner. Goals are one yard wide.

Three players in possession combine to score in any of the four goals.

They can only score through front of goal and may dribble or pass through goal and still maintain possession.

When ball goes out of play, re-start with either a throw-in or pass-in.

Coaching Points

Encourage players to "switch" the play by passing, as three defending players can quickly mark three out of the four goals.

Encourage players to turn away with ball if one goal becomes "marked" by opponent.

If attacking teams are not having success, consider giving them a further option. Let the team in possession also score a goal by getting four consecutive passes.

Challenge

To outscore the opposition.

(If the 4 Pass scoring rule is also being used, the challenge for the coach is to keep the score - and count the passes!)

Noah's Lark (ages 9+)

Objective

To combine the attack and defense in a challenging game with two players on each side.

Organization

Area 30 x 20 yards with goals eight yards wide.

6 vs 6, with partners assigned on each team: each partner given a number from 1 to 3.

Coach shouts number (1-3) and rolls ball into play.

The two pairs with that number come out of goal to compete against each other.

Remaining players must stay on goal line and defend goal without using hands.

Goal can only be scored below knee height.

When ball goes out of play, coach can immediately serve in another to same pairs - or allow pairs to go back to goal line.

Ball can be played back to "goalkeepers," who must play ball back with no more than two touches.

Do not let "goalkeepers" move off goal line. Penalty kick from six yards out if they do.

Coaching Points

When defending, one player should go to player with ball.

Supporting player must watch other attacker, mark the dangerous space and cover partner (see Simple Defending - 2 vs 2) all at the same time.

Coach should encourage dribbling, passing and shooting to the "team" in possession.

See section on techniques and skills.

Encourage "goalkeepers" to defend as a wall together, and to move as a unit to block shooting angle.

Challenge

One team vs the other, also pairs to keep a count of goals scored and conceded.

Square Pegs (ages 9+)

Objective

To improve ball control (also known as "touch") and to practice carefully-weighted chip volleys.

Organization

Using markers/grids, organize six-yard squares four yards apart.

To start practice, one player bounces ball by hand and volleys to partner in opposite square.

Organize squares to accommodate all players at practice. If odd number, rotate the third player among the pairs.

Player in square can have as many touches as desired, but ball can bounce only once before being returned.

Adjust size and distance of areas to ability of players (if necessary, allow two bounces in square).

Coaching Points

Don't juggle the ball. "First touch" on receiving ball should set-up ball for return volley.

Partners should consider one another and gauge their passes accordingly.

Give pass some height to allow partner time to adjust.

Use chest and thigh whenever possible to set up return volley.

Challenge

Which pair can make the highest number of consecutive passes.

"TEAM KNOCK OUT" (ages 9+)

Here is a game to use in the 'Small Group Activity' phase of the practice. It is an engaging game that is fun to play and challenges players in almost all aspects of the game.

THE GAME:

Divide the squad up into two teams. To start, each player on the team that is inside the field will need a ball. Those on the outside of the field do not need a ball. When ready, players on the outside run into the grid, attempt to steal any ball they can and put it through any one of the goals that are marked by the cones. Players with the ball attempt to keep the ball away from the defenders by dribbling or passing to a teammate that has lost their ball. If an attacking player loses a ball, they immediately try to 'steal' it back.

The game stops when all of the balls have been kicked through the goals. Then the two teams switch roles. Keep track of how long it takes each team to steal all of the balls. If a ball is kicked out of bounds it goes over to the other team for a throw-in. This game is good for teaching dribbling skills as players find themselves in situations where they have to dribble to keep possession as well as dribble to beat an opponent. Also, they find themselves in situations where they may have to pass to a teammate as well as find themselves playing defense as well. because there are so many balls, and so many goals, it is just a crazy enough game to be appreciated and enjoyed by a typical nine- year-old.

"END ZONE GAME" (ages 9+)

Here is a 4 v.4 game that is free flowing and gives players a lot of problems to solve. It is a good game to use towards the end of the session as it is very close to the 'real' thing. One particularly good thing about this game is that since teams end up attacking in two, different directions, it forces players to play in different positions. They are at the back of the team when their team attacks one end-zone, while they will find themselves at the top of the team when they attack in the other direction. This is great for their development.

THE GAME:

Set up the field as shown with a seven yard 'End-Zone' at each end. Score a goal by getting the ball from one 'End-Zone' to the other by passing or dribbling. Once a goal is scored, immediately attack going in the other direction. Do not give the ball to the other team. The 'End-Zones' are free, only the attacking team can enter these areas. This game also encourages players to "SPREAD OUT" and work together, which, players are starting to be able to do at this age. At first, players will be tempted to just kick the ball up the field instead of passing. With patience, and demonstration of what is possible, this game could have a dramatic impact on their ability to play attractive, skillful soccer.

'NUMBERS PASSING' (ages 11+)

Here is a good warm-up that will get players prepared for a session on passing and receiving skills. It is an example of how players can be challenged in an environment that is dynamic and can demand specific, targeted technique that has direct implications to the demands placed upon players during the real game. Since there is no pressure from an opponent, it is appropriate to use this activity during the warm-up.

THE GAME:

- Assign each player a number.
- Players pass the ball to the player with the # one higher than their own # (eg: 5 passes to 6, 11 to 1.)
- All balls travel through the entire team.
- After they pass a ball, they must run to a different spot on the field.
- Players are first allowed unlimited touches, then only two touches, then one touch if they are able.
- Ask the players not to let the ball stop, or to let their pass hit other players or balls.

TRY THESE VARIATIONS:

- Left foot only.
- Outside of foot only.
- No talking allowed.

ASK THE PLAYERS TO:

- Make eye contact with the person they are passing to.
- Perform good passing technique.
- Keep their body and vision open to the field of play.
- Keep the person they are passing to in their line of sight.
- Be active. Look like a soccer player.

'CORNER GOAL GAME' (ages 11+)

Here is a game that can be used in the middle phases of the training session. This game involves passing and receiving skills and is also a good activity for showing players the benefits of 'spreading out'. It is a dynamic game with a lot of running. It provides a lot of 'puzzles' for players to figure out and demands that they cooperate.

THE GAME:

- Set up the field as shown on approximately half-field, depending on how many players are on your team. (16 players shown. It is OK if one team has an extra player. If there is an odd # of players on the team, that gives the players a different puzzle to solve.)
- 10 yd. 'squares' are set up in each corner.
- Goals are scored when the ball is passed into the square and then out to a teammate.
- Each team can attack any one of the four goals.
- Whoever has the ball is on offense until they loose possession, or if they kick it out of bounds.
- Score can be kept.
- Play with two balls at once to make the game exciting. (This will actually make the game two, separate smaller games going on at the same time.)
- Ask the players to keep spread out and to try to attack the goal that is 'open'. Keep possession, make the other team earn the ball. See if the players can recognize where pressure is coming from.

