



## **UNDERSTANDING & COACHING THE U11 & U12 PLAYER**

Dear Coach,

We are pleased you have volunteered and agreed to coach a youth soccer team. Furthermore, we are especially pleased that you have taken time out of your busy schedule to review this manual. Your desire to improve will have a great impact on the players that you coach, as you serve as an important ambassador for the game of soccer in our country.

I encourage you to continue to grow as a coach by attending future coaching courses offered both within the club as well as those sponsored by the PHSA. Additional ways to improve as a coach are by watching games in person or on television, reading books, and watching coaching videos. All of these avenues will help you succeed as a coach, but always remember that ***THE GAME IS THE BEST TEACHER!***

In my role as Technical Director, I am here to be of service to you. Please feel free to contact me via email at [technicaldirector@miltonmagic.com](mailto:technicaldirector@miltonmagic.com). Once again, I thank you for volunteering to help in the development of our children and look forward to working with you soon!

**“A good teacher, like a good entertainer, first must hold his audience’s attention. Then he can teach his lesson.”**

**Psychomotor Development**-is the process of acquiring physical skills as related to mental ability to recognize cues and respond with the appropriate action.

- ☐ Coordination improves
- ☐ Flexibility training is key to prevention of injury
- ☐ Begin to develop abilities to sustain complex coordinated skill sequences
- ☐ As muscles mature in players, strength and power become a factor in their performance

### **Understanding Psychomotor Development as it relates to coaching soccer players**

- ☐ Increased coordination allows a player to perform technical skills with more confidence
- ☐ Physical speed is a major consideration for this age group
- ☐ Due to the larger playing field, a player has fewer opponents to beat when he receives the ball and can more easily move into spaces – an advantage for the speedier player

**Cognitive Development**-is mental development. This includes not only memorization, but also creativity and problem solving.

- ☐ Changes in thought process is the result in an increased ability to acquire and apply knowledge
- ☐ Begins to think in abstract terms and can address hypothetical situations
- ☐ A systematic approach to problem solving appears at this stage
- ☐ Players can be expected to be more thoughtful in meeting the demands of the game
- ☐ The idea that field space can be successfully covered by several small passes or one properly placed pass begins making sense to players
- ☐ Players are eager to learn

## **Understanding Cognitive Development as it relates to coaching soccer players**

- ☐ If training sessions present appropriate problems for players to solve, reasonable game results can be expected
- ☐ The nature of training sessions is crucial as it may either stimulate or stifle the learning process
- ☐ Positional play is now a factor
- ☐ The game of soccer must present the ability to think creatively and solve problems while moving
- ☐ Players should be continually reminded to play with their heads up. This enables the players to view the field and assists their decision making

**Psychosocial Development**-is the development of the sense of self in relation to others. It covers a range from individual awareness, to pairs (playmates), to small groups, to large groups.

- ☐ More TV, Less unstructured play
- ☐ Beginning to spend more time with friends and less with parents
- ☐ Popularity influences self-esteem
- ☐ Whether a child enters puberty early or late has important psychological implications
- ☐ Children are susceptible to conform to peer pressure
- ☐ Most children seek peers that are most like them in age, race sex, and socio-economic status, an opportunity to introduce the value of cultural diversity
- ☐ Developing a conscience, morality, and a scale of values

## **Understanding Psychosocial Development as it relates to coaching soccer players**

- ☐ Some players will arrive to practice and games with the newest soccer “gear” and some won’t. Be sensitive to socially sensitive comments regarding popularity and attempt to disrupt potential “cliques”
- ☐ Be sensitive to the need for attention and to be popular. Coaches can use this stage to discipline players as well as build up players who are not viewed as popular

# Basic Coaching Concepts for U11 and U12 Players

## Contacting the Ball

***How many ways can the player kick or dribble or control the ball?*** There are six surfaces (inside, outside, instep, sole, toe and heel) used for kicking, dribbling or controlling a soccer ball. The ball can also be driven, chipped, volleyed, half-volleyed, side-volleyed, curled and lofted. The U-11/12 player should be proficient in using a majority of surfaces with both feet, and be challenged to expand their ability to use different textures (weights and spins). The coach of the motivated U-11/12 player should intensify the refinement of these basic contacting skills through warm-up activities and tactically challenging practice games.

## Finishing

***How proficient is the player in front of goal?*** Shots can be placed, driven, chipped, curled, volleyed, half-volleyed, side-volleyed, or improvised using any other legal body part. Practice activities should refine these skills through individual, small group and small-sided activities.

### Vision and Ball Control

***How quickly does the player assess tactical options and execute ball control skills?*** Vision for “What next?” is a key element in the positive use of the “first touch,” and for improving speed of play. Coaches should challenge players to appreciate their immediate tactical situation as early, and as often, as possible by looking around and turning their bodies sideways-on to the game, whenever possible. The earlier a player decides what to do with the ball, the fewer touches they will take and the faster they will play. Practice activities should involve possession games and other live, competitive games in order to improve decision-making and speed of play.

## Dribbling

***Does the player have the skill and creativity to dribble out of pressure, or past an opponent?***

At the U-11/12 level, evading pressure and beating opponents are critical skills for complementing the passing game as team play emerges. Rapid and abrupt changes in speed and direction, and the use of the shoulders and hips to disguise intentions, become critical subtleties as dribbling sophistication responds to the improved skills of defenders.

***Does the player maintain vision while dribbling?*** Improving speed of play, through cleaner technique and faster reading of the game, is the primary role of the coach at this stage. Dribbling should now be considered very much a means to an end, with the balance between shooting, passing and dribbling (decision-making) related to time and space and position on the field.

## Heading

***How diverse are the player's heading skills?***

Heading to goal and heading away from goal are basic applications of this technique. In addition, the use of heading as a passing technique and as a response to crossing situations should also be stressed as viable applications of this difficult skill. The timing of heading techniques, relative to the balls' pace, trajectory and time of flight, is the critical "next level" for most players of age eleven and beyond. Soccer balls should be kicked in the air over varying distances, whenever possible, to approximate realistic match situations, with hand-serves utilized as seldom as possible. It should also be stressed that there is NO medical evidence supporting the claim that heading a soccer ball is dangerous to the participants.

## Tackling

***How competent is the player in applying sliding techniques?*** In addition to tackling for the ball, sliding skills can be used to keep balls in play, to reach wayward passes, to cross balls from the goal line, and to extend reach. Players should be instructed in tackling techniques with both the inside and outside legs (relative to a defender), and in sliding to maintain possession, pass, or clear.

**Combination Play: Support and Movement with the Game**

***Does the player move with the game and combine with others?***

At the U-10 level, an increase in the speed of ball circulation, coupled with a more controlled rhythm of play are common features of play. At the U-11/12 level, those qualities can be taken a step further with the expectation of more formal combination play. At eleven, take-overs, wall passes and double passes are much more universal, and up-back-through combinations can be developed over

time. Because of their still growing appreciation for midfield width and rhythm of play in large numbers, overlaps are still much less probable. All other combinations (passes to feet, passes to space, dribbling, and one-three's) are already established at this age, meaning that eleven and twelve becomes the period when most of the combining elements in the game can be performed for the first time.

## Use of Space

### ***Does the player move with the game when not in possession?***

In general, attacking players try to open up the field in order to create possibilities for small-group play, while defenders try to limit the amount of time and space available for the attackers to either penetrate by passing or dribbling, or change the point of attack to a more open area. In both cases, individual players have responsibilities to move with the game relative to their position. Attacking players should be instructed how to play with their immediate small group or stay away from the ball, and defenders should be instructed how to move as a defensive block. The attacking concepts of width, depth, support and mobility are critical applications of spatial awareness, as are the defensive concepts of cover, balance and compactness.

### ***Playing with "Back to Goal" Is the player more comfortable when facing the opponent's goal than when playing with their back to the opponent's goal?***

Many young players are uncomfortable checking and receiving the ball with their back to goal; however, 8v8 games provide many opportunities to expose young players to this important and difficult skill within a positional structure. To play effectively with back to goal, players must be aware of the tactical possibilities for receiving the ball to feet or into open space; they must learn to identify passing lanes or open spaces; they must learn to judge when and how to run for the ball; they must learn how to lay the ball off to a supporting player or turn with the ball; and they must learn how to disguise their movements and intentions. Playing with back to goal is an important concept for both midfielders and forwards and it is a disservice to encourage kickball, or exclusively direct soccer at this age.

## Defending

***Does the player understand basic defensive concepts?*** When the ball is lost, a defender's first instinct should be to try to win it back. If this is not possible, they should either look to recover goal-side behind the ball, or take up a new position for any counter-attacking possibilities. Individual decisionmaking in defense follows a basic hierarchy of thinking. First, try to win the ball and keep possession when it is passed to an immediate opponent. Second, try to knock

the ball away from the immediate opponent. Third, try to deny the immediate opponent space to turn with the ball. Fourth, try to keep the immediate attacker running towards a sideline or into other defenders. Finally, when not in position to achieve any of the above, recover behind the ball and help the team defend.

## Transition

***Does the player mentally transition after a change in possession?*** At all levels, speed of transition is often a critical element in the scoring and preventing of goals. With that said, it is beneficial to use live practice activities that incorporate transition to and from goal. The issue of vision is closely related to transition in that a player's first attacking thought should be to score a goal; if that is not possible, passing to the furthest player possible is the next best option.

## Decision-Making

By U-11, many players can read the game with some degree of sophistication and can be helped to identify the "best" option for play, based on the following hierarchy. First, can the player shoot at goal?

Second, can the player dribble into position to shoot at goal? Third, can the player pass to someone who can score a goal? Fourth, can the player pass the ball forward to a teammate to maintain possession? Fifth, can the player pass the ball sideways or backwards to a teammate to maintain possession? Fifth, is the player under enough pressure to warrant a clearance?

## Creativity

**What is a creative team player?** Three elements impact creativity. The first is technique, the second is tactical awareness, and the third is self-confidence. Players who have the audacity to think and act out of the ordinary may be future stars of the game and their willingness to take risks must be nurtured at every level. As players move towards the teen years, a critical paradox enters the coaching challenge. Creative players are necessary for making teams unpredictable and creative players are often frustrating to coach and play with because they rarely conform to standard team concepts. Creative players are not always the easiest individuals to coach, but creative players are worth their weight in gold and America has yet to produce a creative genius.



# Playing and Training Issues for Goalkeepers

All children will develop at different rates, based on their genetic timetable and the influence of adults, siblings and friends. It is also true that two children of the same chronological age can be almost a full year apart in terms of biological and social development. The following developmental outline should therefore be taken as a continuum, rather than an absolute.

## **Eleven and Twelve Year-olds**

Eleven and twelve year-old goalkeepers are capable of looking, acting and performing in mature ways, with only physical limitations and game experience constraining their rate of progress. The coaching emphases should continue to refine basic techniques for catching, collecting, smothering and diving, with crossing situations becoming much more relevant. Tactically, eleven and twelve year-olds have much greater range in performing their supporting functions behind the defense and in dealing with crosses, and their willingness to communicate with defenders should be encouraged. The U-11/12 goalkeeper will likely have difficulty with crosses and high balls played into the area, particularly in traffic, and their appreciation of how to organize a defense in crossing situations will prove to be a challenge. The need to circulate the ball across the back of the team to change the point of attack brings the goalkeeper's foot skills into prominence, as does the enforcement of the pass back rule.

As with field players, the skills and abilities of U-11/12 goalkeepers will be highly varied. Specialist trainers are recommended for this group to ensure that a sound balance is maintained between skill refinement and fitness. A major concern with the layman goalkeeper coach is that anaerobic fitness activities are often coated as goalkeeper "development," and that high intensity training activities are often lauded as meeting the long-term needs of this population. While some fitness enhancement is expected from regular goalkeeper training, skill refinement is more likely to be achieved from lower intensity activities.

While technical and physical development will remain staples of the young goalkeeper's practice diet, a key emphasis in training goalkeepers at the U-11/12 level is the expansion of tactical awareness, particularly with the offside rule becoming a challenging new feature of play. The goalkeeping basics of getting into line and cutting down the shooting angle also require constant refinement and reinforcement, especially as field players become more adept at disguising their shots and striking the ball with increased pace and spin. Facing live practice situations in small-sided and large-sided games is important for young goalkeepers as they learn to relate their choice of technique to the tactical demands of the game.

# Coaching Team Tactics for U11's & U12's In Possession Systems of Play

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

With any system, the main coaching challenge is to explain the roles and responsibilities of each player relative to the team as a whole. Team “shape” is a term often used when referring to a formation, implying which players do “what” and “when” and “with whom.” It is often surprising for inexperienced coaches to learn that even professional soccer is essentially concerned with which small group of players is actively involved in the play at any one time; a decision cued by starting positions and the location of the ball. The position and movement of the ball also dictates how the other players should move in order to either help change the point of attack (close support) or create space for others (far support). Changing the point of attack brings a new small group into the action, with central players in particular making natural connections to different small groups as the ball changes from area to area.

## **Internal Balance Within and Between the “Lines”**

The chosen system of play (x-y-z) is a static, lifeless description of a very fluid activity. Systems are often represented on TV, books and videos with players organized in straight lines across the field. Nothing is more damaging to a system of play than a rigid formation. The internal balance of a team refers to two basic concepts: The first is balance within the lines; the second is balance between the lines. First, balance within the lines. When a player has moved forward, the remaining players in the line must adjust their positions to help support the attack and cover the space left open. For example, if the left back moves forward from a formation, the center back and the right back should both shade towards the left side of the field. This is important for two reasons. First, if the opponents deny penetration, the ball can be circulated backwards to change the point of attack. Secondly, if the ball is turned over, the back line must be positioned to begin defending as early as possible.

The relative positions of the midfielders can also indicate different problems relating to balance within a line. If a team is organized with three in midfield, the internal balance is poor when all three players are separated across the width of the field and at the same depth from the goal. This arrangement leaves the line with poor supporting angles and distances. The exception to this problem is during the build-up (see below). Similarly, the balance within the line is also poor when all three players are grouped together in the center of the field, leaving the midfield devoid of either width or depth. The second concept is balance between the lines, with the primary issue being the number of players available to support or defend in each third of the field. In both examples above, if too many defenders or midfielders move forward at the same time, the team would lack the support necessary to circulate the ball or change the point of attack; in addition,

the team would be highly vulnerable to counter-attacks. If the basic purpose of any U-11/12 system is to evenly distribute players over the length and breadth of the field, having too many players in one area at the same time presents obvious problems. The choice between the number of forwards presents a final aspect of balance. When a coach chooses to play with only one forward, the opportunity to build an attack is very difficult and often results in kickball. This arrangement also places an excessive burden on one player to cover a very large area. Finally, U-11/12 is an important stage for young forwards to begin to appreciate the skills and possibilities involved in a “striking partnership,” rendering one-striker systems as poor choices for U-11/12’s.

### **The Build-up**

The build-up takes place in the defensive and midfield thirds of the field. When attempting to build out of the back, it is important for the midfielders and forwards to create space for the defenders and goalkeeper to start circulating the ball. The simplest approach is to push the forwards as far away from goal as the offside rule will permit, and for the midfielders to move out behind them. This will leave the goalkeeper with time and space to safely connect short passes with teammates, unless the opposition is positioned to high pressure the ball, in which case a punt or throw may be better options.

In a three-player midfield, the flank players will move wide and downfield, leaving the central player with operating room to help the fullbacks and goalkeeper build the ball into the middle third of the field. At times during the initial part of the build-up, the midfield may become “flat” across the width of the field, but this will change as players check backwards to “show” for the ball.

When building out of the back, flank midfielders should not be restricted to only showing for passes down the sideline. In a two player midfield (3-2-2), both players will operate in the central channel and move in opposition to each other (one up-one back, one left-one right) to provide internal balance. In the case of a three-player midfield, the flank midfielders provide the team’s width during the build-up; in the case of a two-player midfield, the outside backs will provide the team’s width. The first responsibility of the forwards during the build-up is to create space in the defensive and midfield thirds by drawing opponents away from the ball. Their secondary responsibility is to provide long support for forward passes. Given the passing range of most eleven and twelve year-olds, it is unrealistic to expect long passes to be consistently played over defenders’ heads, so learning to play with their backs to goal is a critical skill for forwards during the period. When passed to, the primary role of the forwards during the build-up is to secure possession of the ball and pass to midfielders or defenders supporting from behind.

### **The Attack**

When the ball is played into or through the midfield area and the opponents have begun to retreat against the threat of a through pass, the build-up has been successful and the attacking phase of play has begun. In the attacking phase, the team is trying to create scoring chances. Chances can be created from the

flanks or through the center of the field. Chances can also be created through individual initiative, by simple passes, or by players interchanging positions and combining passes. The ability to recognize a scoring opportunity and the willingness to take risks are critical dimensions of attacking play.

Against organized defenses, the ball must often be circulated in the attacking half of the field in order to find an opening to challenge the goal. It is during this phase of play that a team's ability to possess the ball requires the support of players from the back line. The ability of players, and therefore teams, to create scoring chances or possess the ball in the attacking area of the field is the most difficult aspect of soccer at all levels, and it is here that all the lessons of youth either flourish or perish.

### **Direct Play**

It is sometimes noted that "Attractive teams die in beauty." This comment refers to the practical necessity of direct play as a natural complement to possession soccer. When passes can be connected to strikers at the front of the team, that option is generally preferred because opponents are placed on the wrong side of the ball and therefore out of the game. Similarly, when players develop the strength and ability to play longer passes into space behind defenses, that capability should also become integral to the team's style of play. However, as with most good things, balance and moderation are key factors. Teams that play very direct, very predictable soccer rarely have much to fall back on when the game is not going to plan. In contrast, the team that can vary their style to better match an opponent, or the score, or the weather or field conditions, or the match situation, or even the mood of the players, are a much more difficult and dangerous opponent to face. Direct play is a vital weapon in America's soccer arsenal, but it must not be championed as our primary or sole strategy.

### **Counter-Attacking**

A team is most vulnerable to a counter-attack at the moment when it has just lost possession. This is because players are more spread out when their team is attacking. The decision to counter-attack is based on numbers and location. In general, if the defending team is caught with even numbers or numbers down, the counter is on, unless the turnover occurs so far from goal that there is no real advantage to be gained by going forward. In this case, a new build-up would begin. A turnover in the center of the field often creates better counter possibilities than a turnover on the flank, because more space and better passing angles are often available. In either case, however, the key to a successful counter is the ability of players to quickly read the situation and utilize the available space and the available or arriving support.

As basic rules of thumb for counter-attacking, the ball should be played forward to feet or space as early and as quickly as possible, with support anticipated from those teammates closest to the action. If no

forward support is available, the ball should be dribbled forward at speed, with the decision to continue the thrust based on the possibility of teammates arriving into good supporting positions. In all counter-attack situations, two basic principles should be held constant. First, when a technical or tactical breakdown causes the counter-attack to stall, the ball should be possessed and circulated, not forced forward. Second, it is a mistake of epic proportions to be countered following a counter-attack because the remaining players did not adjust their positions to balance for those who ventured forward. It is the responsibility of the remaining players to organize the defense while a counter is taking place.

### **Out of Possession Zonal Defending**

Conceptually, zonal defending can be thought of as “block” defending, with the players moving as a group to deny penetration and win possession.

It is tactically naïve to defend man-for-man on a team basis, for the simple reason that players cannot easily help each other defend. The more efficient approach is to organize players zonally, with players near the ball defending opponents man-to-man, and players away from the ball moving backwards or forwards and centrally or laterally to provide teammates with cover and balance. If a team is lined up to play 3-2-2, for example, the team will also defend in that shape, except when a counter-attack forces emergency action. Two considerations are foundational to good zonal defending. One is compactness; the other is balance. With regard to compactness, when the forward line is pressuring the ball, the midfield and defensive lines should push up to limit the space available to the opponents between the three lines. If the lines do not move together, two problems can emerge. First, space will be available between the forwards and the midfielders or between the midfielders and the defenders for the attackers to pass to teammates in relatively open space; second, the three lines will not be well placed to help each other defend from the front and back of the opponents. The final piece of a good compact defensive organization is the position of the goalkeeper. Provided the goalkeeper moves forward to help defend any long passes behind the defense, the team will have achieved a compact shape from front to back. A team is well balanced when the players furthest from the ball move towards the middle of the field to close open spaces and help teammates defend. Just as compactness refers to the defensive spread of players up and down the field, balance refers to the defensive spread of players from side to side. When

a team is well balanced, the attacking space conceded to the opponents is on the weak (far) side of the field, if the ball is on a flank; and towards either sideline, if the ball is in the middle of the field. One final, but important point about zonal defending is the tactical cue for balancing and compacting. As a basic rule of play, un-pressured opponents have better vision of the field and therefore more time and space to play long passes. The timing and the extent to which back players and weak side players squeeze towards the ball must be based on the level of pressure on the ball and the technical range of

the opponent. If an un-pressured opponent can kick the ball directly over or across the “block,” the team has over-committed.

### **Pressing and Dropping**

All good teams vary the point at which they begin to defend, based on established team tactics and the match situation. As a rule of thumb, team defending should begin as soon as the opponents can be put under pressure. This opportunity may arise as soon as the ball is lost, or may occur further downfield when an attacker can be channeled (harried) towards a sideline or into an area where they are outnumbered by defenders. The decision to “press,” or “drop off” and defend further from goal, should be based on the probability of winning possession and the ability of the other team to play through pressure.

### **Recovering**

If the opponent is building their attack or countering, any defenders played out of the game must recover towards their own goal. The marker for any recovery runs in the center of the field is generally the penalty spot, while the near post is the marker when recovering from the flank. Forwards should generally only recover far enough to re-establish their position within the zone, while midfield players and defenders should recover to their original positions, unless a teammate has exchanged positions during the previous attack. It is important that recovering players be encouraged to “double down” from behind on any opponent being delayed by a defender. In extreme situations when the team is recovering against a counter-attack, or against an attacker running unopposed towards goal, the closest player, regardless of position, must take responsibility for recovering far enough to pressure the ball.

### **Transition To Attack**

A team is most vulnerable to counter-attack goals when it loses possession with players spread out in an attacking shape. The tactical mindset of any player coming into possession should therefore be a) goal, b) assist, c) forward pass. When a goal cannot be scored and a counter-attack is not possible, the team should start to build their attack. This is achieved by players not in immediate support moving away from the ball and creating space for the team to maintain possession and circulate the ball. The most common mistake of inexperienced players is to begin building an attack from the close quarters of a defensive shape.

### **To Defense**

The best defense against the counter-attack is to immediately pressure the ball before it can be played or dribbled forward, and any passes or dribbles forced backwards or sideways will buy time for teammates to recover behind the ball. If the pressing action of one player provides an opportunity for the team to press as a group, they should do so. If the pressing

action of one player simply negates the possibility of a counter-attack, the general rule of thumb is to only recover as deep as required to re-establish an organized defensive shape.

### **Restarts**

Coaching should address the attacking and defending tactics of corner kicks, goal kicks, place kicks, throw-ins, indirect free kicks and direct free kicks; even drop balls and penalty kicks will be common features of play. From a developmental perspective, restarts, at the U-11/12 level, are a low teaching priority; however, players can and should be helped to explore creative solutions to dealing with these game situations.

### **Fitness**

The basic elements of soccer fitness encompass speed, acceleration, agility, balance, power, strength, coordination and flexibility. In particular, the expansion of anaerobic capacity and recovery from anaerobic activity are critical to the demands of modern soccer. In those situations where a team practices only once or twice each week, activities designed to enhance performance in specific fitness areas are impractical. At the U-11/12 level, competitive small-sided games and individual technical activities with the ball are viable and efficient alternatives for developing the fitness and motor patterns specific to soccer.

# **SAMPLE TRAINING SESSIONS AND ACTIVITIES**

## **NUMBER TOUCHES**

*Warm-up or -down activity.*

*Each player has a ball. Coach calls out a number, "25", the players must get that number of touches (dribbles) as fast as possible.*

**COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Encourage players to keep eyes up.*
- 2. Encourage small steps and fast footwork.*
- 3. Make sure players keep moving.*
- 4. Encourage changes of direction.*
- 5. Encourage touches with all and different parts of the foot.*

**TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

- 1. Only use right foot, left.*
- 2. Only use inside of foot.*
- 3. Only use outside of foot*

## **PROTECT THE CONE**

*Define a rectangular space. Each player starts with a ball and a cone. Each player must protect their own cone while trying to attack and kick over other cones. Player must keep the ball under control while defending and attacking. When defending try to block attackers by keeping your ball and body between the cone and the attacker. On attack try to maneuver around defenders while controlling your ball to get a clear kick at their cone. If your cone is kicked over you can set it up again after you do an exercise, dribbling move, or juggling of the soccer ball.*

**COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. This game allows players to stay included by doing some remedial exercise. Choose activities that can be performed quickly so players can get back involved.*
- 2. Vary the activity to include exercises like pushups, sit-ups, cartwheels and also dribbling; pull backs, stepovers, touches on ball, hopping over ball etc.*
- 3. Make sure players control the ball while defending and attacking.*
- 4. Watch for players who DEFEND or ATTACK more often.*
- 5. Watch and help players determine when to attack and leave the cone, also when to defend and stay at home around the cone.*
- 6. Help players remember to keep their body and the soccer ball between their cone and the attacker.*
- 7. Explosive, quick move will help attackers maneuver around defender.*



## **BIG SQUARE LITTLE SQUARE DRIBBLING**

*Define two squares, one large and a second smaller but within the big one. Assign two or three defenders to the little square, without soccer balls, the rest of the team on the outside of the little square but inside the big square, dribbling their soccer balls. On command the players dribbling must try to get through the little square without the defenders stealing the ball. One point each time players get the ball across the square. If defenders win the ball they become the dribbler and the player from whom ball was taken becomes the defender. Defenders must stay in the small square.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

*1. Players must control the ball while dribbling across the square. No points should be awarded for ball kicked across.*

*2. Defenders must win the ball to get out. Three consecutive touches.*

*3. Watch which players directly confront defenders.*

*4. Watch for players who avoid defenders and try to sneak across.*

### **TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

*1. Let players decide when to go across. First player to get 10 points is the winner.*

*2. Use visual cues. When John starts across all players must go across. This is player controlled and other players will have to keep their eyes up and off the ball to look for John.*

*3. Work your defenders as a group: They stay in until they collectively win 5 points. Then assign a new group.*

## **SCHEMER PASSING**

*Groups of four or five with one ball per group. Start out with players moving and passing the ball. After a few minutes, designate a schemer in each group. This player should have a different color or pinnie on. All instructions now go through this player. Schemer gives each player in the group a number. Players must pass in sequence, but each pass must come back to the schemer. For example, schemer passes to #1, who passes back to schemer, who passes to #2, who passes back to schemer, etc. Have several contests on who can finish the cycle first.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

*1. Demand quality passes, both pace and accuracy to the player's feet.*

*2. All passes should be a distance of at least 15 yards. The schemer can control this by not passing if player is too close.*

*3. Players should start their runs just before their number is due. Run should be to the ball, not away.*

*4. Players whose number is not up should move away to create space, then come in hard when their number is due.*

*5. Ball should be driven hard over long distances, but on the ground.*

### **TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

*1. Schemer unlimited touches, all others one touch.*

*2. Schemer must pass with outside of foot, others inside push pass.*

- 3. Within the space allocated, make the biggest possible passes.*
- 4. Play only with the weak foot.*
- 5. Play only with the strong foot.*

## **SCHOOL PASSING**

*Each player should start with a ball. The activity leader calls out a number. The players must react by forming groups of that number and passing one ball per group. Then give the players problems to solve, such as,  $2+3=?$  or how many quarters in a dollar? or the number of letters in the word candy.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Players must respond quickly to form groups.*
- 2. When passing make sure they pass to their teammates feet.*
- 3. Watch to make sure different groups of players are being formed.*
- 4. Make problems that leave odd numbers out: they then try to make a group closest to that number.*

## **STRIKE OUT SHOOTING**

*One ball for two players. Players start five yards apart. Every step back after kicking gradually increases the distance between the players to 20 yards. When the receiving player cannot get to the ball in two steps, both players start again at five yard apart.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Players contact ball on their laces.*
- 2. Eyes should be on the ball.*
- 3. Non-kicking foot should be pointed at target player.*
- 4. Ball should stay on the ground.*
- 1. As distance increases, players must kick the ball harder.*

## **HEADING UP**

*Players move around a defined space freely, one ball per player. While moving, players toss the ball in the air with their hands, then head it up in the air. Players try get the ball under control within one bounce and dribble away. Repeat.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Use the forehead to contact ball.*
- 2. Hit on the underside of the ball to drive it into the air.*
- 3. Use legs to spring up at the ball.*
- 4. After players get the feel encourage them to head it hard and get it as high in the air as possible.*

**TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

- 1. Same as above except head the ball down. Now players must use forehead and contact the top half of the ball to make it go down.*
- 2. Toss, head twice: first low, then high and away.*
- 3. Partners, toss the ball to partner who tries to head it back over the tosser's head.*

## **HEADING GAME**

*Start with 2vs2 on a 20 x 10 yard grid. Make sure the goals are large enough so players succeed. Then make them smaller as the drill progresses. Have enough balls ready at each goal so game is not interrupted by chasing balls. One team advances the ball by tossing it back and forth. When they get to an area near the goal, one player tries to head it in the goal. After the head, both players on that team run back and defend their goal line. Defenders can use only body and head to prevent goals (no hands), and must stay on their goal line. Play for a limited time, or to a score, then match up different teams.*

**COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Encourage players to attack and defend quickly.*
- 2. When heading for goals, players should head the ball down, toward the goal line with a hard, aggressive shot. This can be accomplished by contacting on the top of the ball. Players may have to jump, get the body in the line of flight, then attack with a snapping motion, uncoiling the neck and back.*
- 3. As the players get better, try to catch the defending team backing up with a quick head over the top and toward the goal. This can be done by contacting the ball on the bottom.*

**TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

- 1. Must be a head, head to score.*
- 2. Must contact ball while jumping (both feet must be off the ground).*
- 3. Encourage players to throw from different angles.*
- 4. Head, then volley.*

## **THREE GOAL SHOOTING**

*Start with two teams of equal number. Each team has three goals to defend and three to score in. Each team has one keeper who must try to defend all three goals. Play regular soccer rules.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Attacking team should try to change the point of attack away from the keeper, then proceed to get a quick shot off.*
- 2. Defending team must try to force the attackers in one direction so their keeper knows which goal to defend.*

# Coaching Methodology

- ☐ “If you aren’t 15 minutes early, you are 15 minutes late”

## **No-No’s**

- ☐ don’t allow your players to pick their own teams
- ☐ false praise
- ☐ prolonged stoppages
- ☐ associating fitness with punishment

## **Yeses**

- ☐ Incorporate games that players are already familiar with, into your training session (playground games, physical education games, etc.)
- ☐ Stretching, and selecting certain players to lead stretches, are chances to develop leadership in your players
- ☐ Do you refer to what you worked on in your last practice before your next game?
- ☐ Federal Express / UPS Stoppages
- ☐ Coach the positive!
- ☐ Encourage decision making and problem solving by allowing groups to “strategize” before beginning and in between activities
- ☐ Send them away with “soccer homework”

## **Principles and Methodology of Coaching**

- ☐ Developmentally appropriate
- ☐ Clear, concise, and correct information: Brevity – Clarity – Relevance  
Simple to complex: there should be a flow that is appropriate to the age of the players and the topic of the practice – in some instances this will proceed from a warm-up to individual activities to small group activities to large group activities (THE GAME) – While the progression may vary, every practice should start with a warm-up and end with “The Game.”

## **Designing a Training Session**

- ☐ Helpful questions to ask yourself when planning a training session
  - are the activities fun?
  - are the activities organized?
  - are all of the players involved in all of the activities?
  - is creativity and decision making being used?
  - are the spaces being used appropriate?
  - is the coach’s feedback appropriate?
  - are there implications for the game?

***Variations, Restrictions, and Alterations to keep you players excited about training:***

- ☐ Number of balls
- ☐ Number of teams (instead of the traditional 2 teams, why not play with three!)
- ☐ Size of field (short in length and wide in width and vice versa)
- ☐ Number of goals
- ☐ Size of goals
- ☐ Various ways of scoring a goal (passing, shooting, dribbling, etc.)
- ☐ Size of balls
- ☐ Touch restrictions (maximums and minimums)

# Coaching Comments and Their Messages

Much of what players hear from the sidelines reinforces the “fear-soccer” of the direct style and moves them farther away from the playing habits that will help them grow as intelligent soccer players. There are some simple and obvious reasons why our average player in Canada has never developed the competence to enjoy the game and play into adulthood. Evolving a culture will be a slow group effort, involving educated coaches and parents. What follows, is a sample of typical comments heard at soccer games, and the underlying messages that are being subtly relayed to the players about their significant adults’ respect for, and understanding of the game.

**Comments:** *Get it out of here! / Great kick! / Get rid of it! / Boot it long! / Don’t pass it backwards, you might lose it! / Don’t ever pass the ball across the field!*

**Message:** Don’t take any chances in trying to keep possession. You are going to be under pressure, so get the ball as far downfield as early as possible so that the ball is away from our goal. Don’t take the time to look for a teammate and don’t worry where the ball ends up. Just make sure you don’t lose possession and risk conceding a goal.

**Style conflict:** If we never ask young players to take risks and try to play constructive soccer at an age when results don’t matter, when will they ever develop the skills, insights and confidence to play in control, at speed, and under pressure?

**Comments:** *Don’t play with it! / Too many touches! / Don’t hold onto the ball!*

**Message:** You don’t have the skill to dribble the ball to create space or buy time for a pass, and we might lose a goal if you are dispossessed. Better to play safe and clear the ball forward out of our end.

**Style conflict:** Dribbling is the most important skill a young player can learn because they will never have another chance to become a creative player.

**Comment:** *Never kick the ball like that! Always use the inside of your foot.*

**Message:** There is only one correct way to kick the ball and that is not the right way. I have all the answers and you must follow my direction because I am the coach and I am in charge. If you don’t do as I say, you will sit on the bench.

**Style conflict:** Creative players solve problems in novel ways. They do the unexpected and use whatever insights they possess to arrive at solutions. A good pass, for example, is one that arrives at its target and can be used to the teams’ advantage, regardless of how it was delivered. When we tell players they “cannot” use technique in a unique way, we are chipping away at their ability to

think for themselves and perpetuating a culture where players have limited skills and no creativity.

**Comment:** *Always play the way you're facing.*

**Message:** I heard this maxim somewhere and I haven't thought through what it means, but you were just caught in possession when trying to turn up field and this seems like the time to make a coaching point.

**Style conflict:** This is a coaching contradiction. Players are often asked to receive the ball with their back to goal and turn against pressure. The most difficult opponents are unpredictable in their ability to receive passes and attack space behind and beside defenders. It is a difficult, yet necessary skill for forwards and midfield players. If we always ask players to pass the way they are facing, we make play too predictable and devalue the skills and insight necessary to recognize the opportunity to turn a defender or receive the ball into an open space. The most common reason why players lose possession is that they have no vision of the field behind them before trying to turn.

**Comment:** *Always look to pass the ball "Short-Short-Long."*

**Message:** I saw a coach demonstrate this drill at a coaching clinic once, but I haven't thought through what it actually means, other than you should play two short passes and then make a long pass.

**Style conflict:** Another coaching contradiction usually featured in warm-up drills. In the real world of soccer, passes should be played short or long based on the position of defenders and teammates and the skill level of the player in possession. In the real world of soccer, players are never required to play the ball long after a number of short passes, or vice versa. A more reasonable coaching comment would be to play short passes until there is a tactical advantage in playing a longer pass to a teammate in space.

**Comments:** *That's a card, Ref! / Offside! / Hey Ref, call it both ways! / Unintentional Ref; that's not a foul! / That's a handball! / Didn't you see that, Ref? / Ref, you suck! / What game are you watching, Ref?*

**Message:** "I know everything about the interpretation of the rules, and the referee, players and parents need to know it." By attacking the credibility of the official, we send the message to the players and the parents that referee abuse is acceptable. When we serve as a negative example, or condone a vocal parent or player's negative outbursts by not rebuking them, we are demonstrating disrespect for the game. We also send a strong message to the players that appealing decisions and questioning the authority of the official is an acceptable part of a soccer education.

**Style conflict:** Refereeing is a matter of opinion and many new referees are just learning to understand the nuances of officiating what can be a very fluid game. There are good and bad referees, good and bad players, and good and bad coaches. Everyone makes mistakes and everyone should be allowed to learn



their craft without undue abuse. Coaching players to react to any call by taking a quick restart or by organizing the defense is a much more proactive and productive approach to dealing with refereeing decisions. Without a playing background, a refereeing license, and years of experience in soccer, questioning calls is usually the last action an inexperienced coach should undertake. Coaches, who truly work from a developmental bias, view positive and negative refereeing decisions as an integral part of the game, and which present valuable learning opportunities for their players. Life is not always fair!

In summary, the safety-first, fear-driven, direct, approach to youth soccer develops players who are uncomfortable and, probably, incapable of playing constructive soccer. Only through more focused, less pressured coaching, and more appropriate small-sided games, can we provide an environment where our young players have the opportunity to play soccer as adults in our national style.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[www.socceronline.com](http://www.socceronline.com)  
[www.soccercoaching.net](http://www.soccercoaching.net)  
[www.eteams.com/soccer/](http://www.eteams.com/soccer/)  
[www.soccerperformance.org](http://www.soccerperformance.org)  
[www.worldclasscoaching.com](http://www.worldclasscoaching.com)  
[www.mnyouthsoccer.com/coaches/articles.cfm](http://www.mnyouthsoccer.com/coaches/articles.cfm)  
[www.successinsoccer.com](http://www.successinsoccer.com)  
[www.worldclasscoaching.com](http://www.worldclasscoaching.com)  
[www.the-fa.org](http://www.the-fa.org)  
[www.uefa.com](http://www.uefa.com)  
[www.soccerclinics.com](http://www.soccerclinics.com)  
[www.socceracademy.com](http://www.socceracademy.com)  
[www.soccerclub.com](http://www.soccerclub.com)  
[www.decatursports.com](http://www.decatursports.com)  
[www.betersoccermorefun.com](http://www.betersoccermorefun.com)  
[www.worldofsoccer.com](http://www.worldofsoccer.com)  
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