



U10
Player Development
Handbook
(for age groups U9 & U10)



INTRODUCTION

This U10 development handbook is geared towards coaches of U9 & U10 players. Its aim is to provide coaches of these age groups with the following:

- What to expect in terms of player psychological development and behavior.
- How to teach soccer techniques.
- Basic techniques and skills to teach at this age.
- Drills and exercises to use during practices.
- Resources.

Information contained in this handbook came from a variety of sources. Five that were used extensively:

- Hopkinton Youth Soccer Association
- Jeff Pill, U-14 Region 1 Director of Coaching for USSF.
- Washington State Youth Soccer Association
- Oregon Youth Soccer Association
- Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association



Youth Soccer Player Development



The following ideas about player development are offered to youth coaches to help you identify age-appropriate aims. For each two-year age grouping, proposed guidelines are contained in the major elements of the game: technical, tactical, psychological or mental, and physical or fitness-related. We have also suggested some ideas about the practice environment and listed some resources for coaches of each age grouping.

Our purpose is to suggest a framework for the coherent introduction of soccer's techniques, tactical ideas, and fitness components. These ideas and guidelines, this framework,- these suggestions are directed to you coaches to help you to plan a helpful progression of practice plans and intentions for your season.

Please remember:

- These ideas are general. Every child is different: each has her or his own physique, mentality, motivation, cultural situation, etc. Some eight year olds are athletic and have played soccer for three years and love to compete; other eight year olds are not so athletic, are just beginning soccer, and are playing because their best friends are.
- Kids learn and develop and grow at different rates! There are precocious kids, late bloomers, erratic learners, etc.
- Patience is vital.

One way to consider this outline is as a source of simple, seasonal objectives. These objectives should always be considered in relation to long term outcomes and the players' needs - not the coaches' needs.

These ideas are not intended as final objectives or "end results" even though objectives are given. Objectives rather should be used as structure for your planning. Player development is a long never-ending process to be undertaken patiently by both players and coaches. Also, there are many intangible qualities which lead to success on the soccer field which are not discussed here: imagination, fantasy, tenacity, concentration, and others. An abundance of any of these intangibles - persistence, fighting power, creative flair, for example - can enhance a player's technique or tactical sense or compensate for deficiencies in these.

We urge you to avoid trying, to "get ahead" of the ideas in this framework, but not to avoid reviewing and consolidating. Keep focusing on re-visiting past skills and ideas to ensure players have a very solid technical basis. Hesitate to go ahead, but don't hesitate to go back!

It is impossible to quantify the elements of soccer which are discussed here. These guidelines are intended to express in a general, global way what it is reasonable to expose players to at each age. Some players may exceed expectations; others may struggle to reach them. For example, one nine year old may receive a ball during a scrimmage, see that she can play it ahead, and turn up the field, balanced and with fluid technique. Another nine year old may have no idea about



what to do when the ball arrives, be tense and rather clumsy as she tries to control it, and be indifferent to your suggestions when you approach her.



Few players will “master” all these elements at a given age, and their performance will almost certainly be inconsistent as they grow through pre-adolescence and puberty. Some players are more “technical”, some more insightful and intuitive, some more physically gifted. *A coach’s challenge is to help each player achieve the most enjoyment and fulfillment at each age.*

There are some parts of soccer involvement which are universal and consistent. All players of any age should reflect them: respect for the game, teammates, opponents, coaches, etc.; punctuality, responsibility, sporting attitudes.

Ultimately, all players must learn how to attack and how to defend by themselves, as part of a group, and as part of a team. A reasonable aim for players at each age level, in relation to the techniques and tactical issues listed here:

- Technically - solid, stable skills, under pressure and at speed.
- Tactically - recognition and understanding of situations and decisive action or reaction in response to them.

There is an implicit challenge to all of us coaches! We must all commit ourselves to learning as much as we can about children, technique, tactics, and physical preparation.

In considering these ideas, coaches -should not lose sight of the most important element of youth soccer development: FUN!

The two big words are FUN and PLAY!



PLAYERS: U9 & U10 AGE GROUPS

Characteristics

- 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, and balls.
- More inclined towards wanting to play instead of being told to play. Will initiate play more.

Things You Can Expect

Some coaches say that the U9 and U10 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 lose, 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.

Coaching Rational

Some of the players that are playing as U-10's are seasoned veterans of the youth soccer scene. Some of them may have already been involved in traveling to play in tournaments. 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 U-10 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 'losing' 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.

TEACHING SOCCER TECHNIQUES

Soccer players do not automatically know how to execute the various techniques (skills) associated with the game. Even after learning the basic skills, players need instruction on how and when to use the techniques they have learned in a game situation.

Fundamentals

Our job as coaches is to teach our players the basic techniques and give them the knowledge of the game and confidence in themselves that will help them reach their full potential as soccer players. Here are some tips to help you teach the fundamentals to your players:

- Explain the importance of the technique ... keep it short, keep it simple. The players are more apt to learn if you tell them how and when the technique fits into a game setting.
- Give 3 or 4 key points to help the players perform the technique.
- Demonstrate the technique. If you are unable to do it, ask one of your better players to do it for you.
- Organize the team into small groups. The smaller the better, depending upon the technique and the amount of help you have.
- Practice the technique. Observe the players trying to do the technique.
- Make corrections as necessary. Be POSITIVE and try to point out when the technique is being done well; however, you must correct technique that is being done wrong. You can do this without directing your corrections at any particular player. If none of your players can perform the technique, you need to reconsider whether it is appropriate for their age and experience level.
- Practice under match conditions. In order to tell if the players can do the technique in a game situation, increase the difficulty by adding a defender, making their space smaller, or by speeding up the pace of the activity. Small-sided games work well to show whether a technique has been learned.



Technical Guidelines

- Turning with the ball through 180 degrees, continued, with soles of feet, insides, and outsides now, “More speed, bend your knees more, get your head up, don’t get the ball stuck under you!”
- Practice changes of speed and direction with the ball. Guiding the ball at a 45 degree angle off a straight line: the technical rudiments of beating an opponent with a dribble.
- Perhaps some “Coerver training”: Dribbling and feinting moves and these moves practiced under pressure.
- Stronger and more accurate instep kicks over 15 to 20 yards.
- The essentials of heading are introduced, but very little time spent on heading.
- Continuing to master receiving ground balls with the insides and outsides of the feet. With an accurate “first touch” getting into a running stride to dribble, or setting up a pass or a shot. Should be comfortable with the insides and outsides of both feet.
- “Driving” or “cruising” with the ball: running fast with the ball, generally in straight lines.
- Shielding the ball effectively, “sideways on” to the defender.
- Continuing to coordinate the nervous system and the muscles. Shooting accurately - keeping the ball in the frame of the goal - with the insides of the feet and the insteps.
- Front block tackle.

Tactical Guidelines

- Positioning goal side of attackers when you lose the ball: cutting off the path to the goal. Marking opponents tightly.
- Elemental idea of support: helping the player with the ball. “Form a pair” with the player on the ball; other players should stay away and make the field big.
- Don’t wait for the ball - go to it!
- Play away from pressure when you receive a ball - and move it at a new angle.
- Getting free of markers: “checking off” and creating space for yourself. “Make an area of green grass around you!”
- Wall pass, the give-and-go, the 1 - 2. Beginning to build up options for the two attackers in a two versus one situation.
- Lots of 1 v 1 confrontations to perfect timing in attack and defense. Continued emphasis on the “three main moments of soccer”.
- Building up an aggressive attitude about shooting. Recognizing when you’re under pressure and when you’re not under pressure when you receive a pass. Beginning to establish a vocabulary of communication. Players should be looking up and around and away from the ball, on both attack and defense.
- No “ball watching”.

Practice Environment

- Reliance on the idea that “The game is the greatest teacher”: Virtually no coaching. Letting the kids play! Perhaps a 20 second comment every four or five minutes.
- High tolerance for mistakes and trial and error.
- No specializing by position. Practice is “Play Time”. These years are all about coordinating the nervous system and the muscles.
- #3 or #4 ball, small goals

The way to have successful practices is to plan. The two main objectives for any soccer practice are (1) to have fun, and (2) to learn to become better soccer players. In order to achieve the second objective, it is important that you develop teaching goals for the season before you start. Use the list of age appropriate skills given below as a guideline for things to teach during the season.



Be realistic in selecting your objectives! Consider the age and experience of your players. Decide on your priorities - what are the most important things you want to cover. If you have doubts about whether your team is ready for a new tactic, skill or concept, introduce it after you have seen it used by some of your players.



Have a written plan for each practice. You cannot have a good practice if you do not have an idea of what you want to accomplish during that practice. The plan may be written out in detail or it may just be notes jotted on the back of an envelope, but it really should be written. Writing down your plan will help you think through the equipment and setup you will need for the topics to be covered. Save these plans as a record of performance and to help develop a progressive program for the season.

As you plan your practices with the help of the information that follows, remember these tips to keep players' interest and avoid boredom:

- Minimize the amount of talking that you do.
- Get all of the players involved.
- Turn "drills" into games.
 - Keep score. A little competition focuses players.
 - Give players many touches on the ball.
 - Give players many chances to shoot and score.
- Let the kids PLAY!

Keep the practice focused. If you are trying to teach new skills, your practice should concentrate on a single major topic (e.g. passing), rather than on many different topics.

Practices should follow a progression: warm-up, stretch, drills, scrimmage, and cool down.

Plan warm-ups so that each player uses a ball. Incorporate games and exercises that emphasize a lot of touches and dribbling. If possible, use or create conditioning exercises that require the players to work with a ball rather than just running; the kids will have more fun and they will learn more soccer skills!

Be sure to include stretching at the end of the warm-ups. Younger players don't need a lot of stretching, but you should start the habit early. Try to use stretching exercises that require a ball; again, the kids will enjoy it more and it increases their familiarity with the ball.

Drills should be appropriate for the skills you are teaching. Limit the number of drills in a given practice, and don't spend too long on any one drill. Remember that a child's attention span is limited!

Keep it varied and interesting with a minimum of oral instruction (don't lecture!). Demonstrate as much as possible. If you feel uncomfortable demonstrating techniques, don't hesitate to enlist your more skillful players, or perhaps older soccer players, to help you. Depending on the level you are coaching, junior high or high school players may be useful for this purpose. MAXIMIZE the number of touches for each player by running drills with several small groups at the same time; no child likes to stand in line waiting!

Small-sided games (e.g. 3 v 3) are an excellent practice tool. They help keep everyone involved and, by reducing the size of each playing field, you can have two games going at the same time.

Drills should be organized to progress into controlled scrimmages (e.g. no shots until at least four consecutive passes have been made). Follow up a controlled scrimmage with an open scrimmage. Remember that the kids signed up to play soccer!

Using Progressions

The basic idea in teaching soccer techniques is to start simple and increase the level of difficulty.

- Start with the simplest elements of the technique. Let the players learn initially without any pressure.
- Gradually add more elements of the skill.
 - Gradually increase the difficulty level of the activity. Increase difficulty (pressure) by:



- Increasing the number of players executing the skill in a limited area.
- Reducing the space available for executing the drill.
- Specifying the direction the player must move.
- Adding a passive defender ("shadow defense").
- Adding an active defender.
- Perform the skill in the way it would be used in a game.

U9 & U10 AGE APPROPRIATE SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

Skills

Further development of skills taught at lower levels plus the following.

Technical - Field Play

- Controlling air balls with the chest.
- Basic heading.
- Basic juggling.
- "Block" tackling.
- Shooting of falling (bouncing) balls (volley).
- Dribbling for speed.
- Passing chipped and cross balls.
- Instep pass for power.
- Special moves:
 - 180-degree drag back turn played with either foot.
 - Single scissors feint executed to the right or left.

Technical - Goalkeeping

- Catching high balls.
- Diving from the ready position.
- Collecting balls from the attacking player's feet.

Tactical - Field Play

- Wall pass (also know as give and go or 1-2).
- Importance of the first touch.
- Immediate transition from defense to offense or vice versa.
- Role of the second defender (cover).
- Width in the attack.
- Player movement on throw-ins.
- Penalty kicks.

Tactical - Goalkeeping

- Calling for the ball when receiving with defending players near.
- Volley kick (punting) for ball distribution.

Basic Techniques

Focus your attention on the listed points for each technique as you observe your players. It is important for your players to learn to practice techniques properly, but remember that this may take some time - more for some techniques than others, and more for some players than others. Again, be patient and be encouraging!



Practice all foot skills with both right and left feet.

Dribbling

- Small controlled steps.
- Ball should be kept close (approximately 2-3 feet) in front of you.
- Strike the ball with either the instep - toes pointed down, the inside of the foot - toes pointed up, contact ball midway in foot or outside of the foot - toes pointed down.
- Look up frequently to establish eye contact.
- Change speed and direction.

Dribbling to Beat an Opponent

- Keep the ball close and dribble straight at the opponent.
- Use sudden movements of shoulders or fakes of body to get opponent to lean to one side.
- Immediately take the ball in the other direction and sprint past.
- Once past, look up to take a shot or pass.

Dribbling for Speed

- Play the ball well out in front.
- Keep your head up.
- Play the ball with your instep.
- Take a few long touches.

Inside of the Foot Pass

- Ankle locked.
- Foot slightly up at the toe.
- Thigh turned outward.
- Look up to establish eye contact.
- Connect with the middle of the ball just before the instep.
- Follow through (contributes to direction and pace of the pass).

Outside of the Foot Pass

- Ankle locked.
- Foot pointing slightly downward at the toe.
- Leg swings across the ball.
- Ball should spin when kicked.

Instep Pass

- Non-kicking foot next to ball pointing in direction of pass.
- Point toes down to make contact with laces.
- Hit ball in center.
- Follow through with toes still pointed down.

Chip Pass

- Using the instep, approach the ball on a 45 degree angle.
- Strike the lower part of the ball.
- Kick underneath the ball.
- As the ball is hit, hold back on the follow through.



- Ball will back spin as it lofts into the air.



Controlling a Pass

- Move toward the ball (don't wait for it to come to you).
- Inside or outside of the foot used most often.
- Foot surface first touching the ball should be withdrawn slightly on contact to take the momentum out of the ball ("cushioning").
- Ball should not be stopped completely, but under close control.
- Redirect ball in front or to the side in anticipation of moving in that direction to pass or dribble.

Controlling Air Balls

- Controlling the ball using any legal part of the body (NO HANDS unless you are the goalie).
- The controlling surface must "give" on contact to cushion the ball.
- Ball should stay close to the player (not bounce away).

Controlling Air Balls using the Instep

- Meet the ball in the air with the instep.
- Let the ball land on the laces.
- As the ball makes contact, pull foot and ball to ground ("cushioning").

Controlling Air Balls using the Thigh

- Meet the ball in midair with the thigh.
- Let the ball land midway between the knee and top of the thigh.
- Withdraw the thigh on contact, cushioning the ball and allowing it to drop to the ground.

Shooting

- Head down.
- Ankle locked with foot pointing downward at the toe.
- Strike the ball with the laces of the shoe.
- Accuracy before power (avoid shooting directly at the goalkeeper).

Instep Volley

- As the ball comes towards you, face it and point the standing foot towards the ball.
- Point the toes down and keep the ankle locked.
- Meet the ball with the laces.
- Kick through the center of the ball. Follow through.

Shielding

- Make the body as wide as possible.
- Bend the knees and keep the legs apart.
- Keep arms at the sides.
- Keep your back or one side to the opponent.
- Keep the ball close.
- Move in the same direction as the opponent, keeping the body between the opponent and the ball.

Ball Juggling

- Start by holding the ball in your hands and dropping it onto the instep.
- Point the toes so the instep is level.
- Kick the ball back up into the hands.



- See how many times you can hit the ball before catching it. Try both feet.
- Once this has been mastered, try using the thigh or the head.



Heading

- Keep the feet shoulder width apart. Bend the knees and arch the back from the hips.
- Keep your eyes on the ball.
- Make contact with the ball, with your forehead, just below the hairline.
- As the ball approaches, whip your body forward to strike the ball.
- Use your arms for balance and power.

Throw-ins

- Ball **MUST** go directly over the head.
- Both hands must remain on the ball (R and L thumbs meet behind the ball; thumbs and fingers of both hands form a W).
- Both feet must be on the ground (not necessarily flat; it is permissible to drag the toe of the trailing foot).
- As soon as ball is released, player should get back onto the field (often to receive a return pass).

Block Tackling

- Approach the ball when opponent “offers” it to you
- Low center of balance, knee bent, toe up, ankle locked.
- Block tackle the ball **HARD** using the ankle by forming a block, or rigid wall with the leg against the ball
- If done correctly the tackles can be hard, and will make a ‘thud’ against the ball as the opposing player’s foot pushes on the ball from the other side.

Coaching Points

Dribbling

- Keep on toes all the time.
- Touch ball after every step (keep ball close).
- Look up after every touch (vision).
- Find space.
- Contact (inside, laces, outside) will depend on the direction player wants to go.
- Concentrate on balance.
- Change speed.
- Change direction. Accelerate after change of direction.
- Work on different types of deception (feints).
- Keep body between ball and opponent.

Passing

- Keep on toes all the time (be ready).
- Look up and take ‘snapshot’.
- Make decision who to pass to, then head down and keep eye on ball, ankle locked with toe up, swing leg in straight plane, follow through center of ball.

Receiving

- Keep on toes all the time (be ready).
- Get body behind line of ball; look up take ‘snapshot’.
- Make decision where to turn when ball is controlled (away from pressure), then keep eye on ball, offer largest area of contact to ball, cushion ball by giving slightly on contact, trap towards the ground, push ball



out to side 1-2 yards (away from pressure) to enable to take in stride.



Basic Tactics

As the players mature, and the concept of team play begins to develop, the tactical elements can be introduced. Listed below are some basic guidelines for the coach, which fall into the realm of tactics.

General

- Play positions (the various roles can be understood even as players rotate positions).
- Get open and call for the ball.
- Look and listen for passing opportunities.
- Pass and move to space and/or to support.
- Work to build and maintain triangles - the basic structure for passing and support.
- Always support the player with the ball (forward and rear support within passing distance).

Team Offense

- Maintain possession of the ball.
- Keep the offense wide in order to spread (and weaken) the opponents' defense and to create space for scoring opportunities.
- Penetrate as deeply as possible with every pass, without unduly risking loss of possession.
- Finish attacks with shots on goal.

Team Defense

- Support and communication are critical.
- Pressure opponents to decrease their "comfort zone".
- Delay opponents' attack when your team first loses possession of the ball to permit defense to regroup.
- Mark "goal-side" to defend against shots on goal.
- Mark "ball-side" to defend against easy passes.
- Maintain defensive balance on the field; guard against reversing the ball (crossing passes).
- Mark tighter as you get closer to your goal.
- Concentrate defense in front of the goal as the ball approaches your goal (limiting space available for goal shots) and direct ball away from goal.

Kickoff

- Short pass and dribble.
- Short pass and pass back (triangle).
- Note, that the "long boot" is not encouraged !

Throw-in

- Throw to an open teammate if possible (first look for the farthest unmarked player).
- Throw toward the other team's goal.
- Throw down the touchline.
- Throw to your goalkeeper (this is not considered an illegal pass back).
- Take throw-ins quickly (before the defense can set up) but always under control.
- Throw the ball so that it can be controlled in the air.
- Thrower should re-enter the field quickly to be open for a return pass.



Goal kicks

- Big kick up the side of the field.
- Avoid kicking the ball across the front of your goal.
- Consider having a defender take goal kicks while the goalkeeper maintains position to guard goal.

Free kick

- Close to goal, direct -shoot!
- Close to goal, indirect -short pass and shoot.
- Far from goal -big kick toward the front of the opponents' goal.

Corner kick

- Big kick into the opponents' goal area.
- Short pass and dribble or cross.

DRILLS & GAMES

Drills (Skill Games) - General Guidelines

There are countless drills and many books and videos are available. You don't need 100 drills. Pick a few drills (say, 10) and work at them.

- Explain the drill (why it is done, how it is done).
- Demonstrate the drill (slowly, step-by-step).
- Execute the drill.
- Figure out what went wrong (it's often the instructions); fix it, and start over !
- Remember: showing is better than talking.

Some drills will not work well at first. Maybe they need a small adjustment (e.g. too many players, or players standing too close or too far apart).

Repetition of drills builds skills. It can also be boring. So use variations of drills, and don't repeat the same drill too often. If your players are not enjoying and not learning from a particular drill, find another that focuses on the same skills.

Start a drill simply and progress to the harder stuff. For example, begin with a simple passing triangle; then introduce a chaser.

Play with the kids! Sometimes you should join in the drill as a participant rather than as a coach. Not only will the kids enjoy it, but you will gain a better appreciation of the skills you are asking them to master. Call a parent from the sidelines to be goalkeeper for a shooting drill. Experiment! Don't be afraid to try new ideas.

Split the team into small groups for you and your assistants to teach a drill; then rotate. This keeps more players busy and allows more individual attention.

When organizing the kids into small groups, consider their abilities. For example, in some dribbling or passing drills it might be best to have pairs with similar abilities. Conversely, in competition (e.g. 2v2) you might pair stronger



and weaker players for balance.

Start a drill slowly. WALK through it first, then do it at half speed, and finally at full speed.



Dribbling

Beehive

Mark off a 10 yd. x 10 yd. square with cones. Each player has a ball. Players dribble inside the grid using correct techniques and avoiding other players. Now impose restrictions to encourage players to work on particular skills. Provide new instructions every 30 to 60 seconds. Try these variations:

- Vary speed ("1st gear", "2nd gear", etc.);
- Right or left foot only;
- Cones - put as many cones around the square as there are players; on command everyone must find an unoccupied cone and dribble to it (or try it with one less cone than the number of players - the player who is left without a cone receives a fun "penalty", such as a "leaper" [jumping high in the air and trying to pull both knees to the chest]);
- Obstacle course - 6 to 12 cones placed randomly within the square; players concentrate on dribbling without knocking over the cones;
- Shark - players must turn, change speed and direction to avoid the shark (the coach or a player); if caught, the player must freeze and count slowly to 10 before resuming his or her dribble.

Now invent your own restrictions - the possibilities are endless!

Bridges

Scatter half of the team widely around the field with instructions to stand with legs spread apart (they are the "bridges"). The remaining players, each with a ball, dribble to a bridge, pass their ball under it, retrieve the ball and advance to another bridge. Players may not pass under the same bridge twice in a row. Players keep track of the number of bridges they can negotiate in 1 minute, then switch bridges and dribblers and repeat.

Cone Dribble

Set up a number of cones arranged in two straight lines. Split the team into two groups and have them weave through the cones by dribbling. Start out slowly then turn it into a race. Dribblers can be restricted in how they dribble – right foot only, inside of feet only, etc.

Get Your Ball

Divide your team into two groups, one at each end of the practice field. On the midline place two fewer balls than there are players. On command all players sprint to the midline and try to get a ball. The object is to retrieve a ball and dribble it back over the endline from which you started. Players without a ball challenge the dribblers and try to kick their ball away.

King of the Ring

Provide a 10 yd. x 10 yd. grid where each player has a ball. One player or the coach is "it" without a ball. Players start to dribble in the grid while trying to avoid having their ball kicked out of the grid by the player who is "it". Players can reenter the grid after retrieving their ball and completing some type of small skill penalty activity, like juggling the ball twice on their feet or knees or dribbling around a nearby tree before returning to the grid.

Pacman

Two players are selected to be pacmen and stand outside the grid until the game begins. All other players dribble a ball inside the grid. Pacmen try to tag players who are dribbling the balls. If tagged, the player is frozen until another player passes a ball through the frozen player's legs. Game ends when all players are frozen.



Pass, Sprint and Dribble

Players in pairs face each other about 5 yd. apart; one player with a ball, the other standing with legs spread apart. The player with the ball passes it with the inside of the foot through the legs of his partner. As soon as the ball passes between his legs, the partner turns, sprints to catch up with the ball, turns it 180 degrees back to his starting position; he is now the passer.

Shielding

Use of body position. Play 1 v 1 in an open area. Player A has the ball at his feet and has to keep possession for a specified time, say 15 seconds. Player B tries to take the ball away from A by getting a toe to the ball. The idea is for player A to keep his body between player B and the ball, keeping the boxer's stance with both feet in line with the ball and player B's feet, with his knees slightly bent for flexibility and a low center of gravity. After each player has taken a turn at shielding, increase the time he must shield the ball to score a point. Try these variations:

- Get player B to play the ball to player A to start the game (realistic restart)
- Restrict the area used
- Limit the player on the ball to his weaker foot
- Have player on ball look up after every touch on ball
- Get the player on the ball to feel for the marker with his arm - this will allow the player with the ball to anticipate his markers movement, while still keeping an eye on the ball.

1 v 1 with Direction

Play 1 v 1 in a 10 x 15 yard grid. Provide direction by giving player A two target players (on corner cones) at one end of the grid and player B two target players at the opposite end. One of the end players plays the ball to player A who has to dribble past player B in order to make space to pass the ball to one of his target players. If he does so successfully he scores a point, retreats to his end line and then becomes the defender. Swap pairs in middle frequently.

Coerver feints/moves

For the coaches who have not seen or heard of Wiel Coerver, he is an ex-professional player and coach from the Netherlands who introduced a program emphasizing 1 v 1 moves to beat an opponent. His videos and books break down each move and explain it in simple terms. You will be amazed at what the under 8 player in Holland can do with the ball! The great thing about these moves is that you can practice them inside on a rainy day, because you don't need a ball to quicken foot speed. Try faking the dog or cat out! Here are a couple of the moves explained:

The Scissors

Standing behind the ball, swing your left foot around the front of the ball from left to right, put toes on ground, bend the left knee, drop the left shoulder, then quickly move the right foot to the left side of the ball and push it forward diagonally with the outside of the right foot. Remember that the first 3 steps after a move have got to be at pace so the defender does not catch you! Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.

The Roll-Over

Standing behind the ball, roll the ball across the body with the inside of the right foot so ball is moving, then swing the right leg back around the front of the ball from left to right, bending right knee and dropping shoulder, then take ball away with the outside of the left foot. Again, remember that after the move, the player on the ball has got to get away quickly.



The Matthews

Move the ball with the inside of your right foot to your left side and then fake to go to your left by leaning to the left. Bend your knees and move your right foot quickly behind the ball. Accelerate away with your right foot to push the ball forward and past the marker. Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.

American Football (Dribbling)

Create a playing field of 15 x 30 yards, but make the last 5 yards of each end an end zone. A touch down is scored by keeping possession and creating an opportunity to dribble into the end zone. If this is done with the ball under control, then a touch down is scored

Turning

Changing direction is an important skill that young players need to know. Here are six basic turns that are used at the highest levels of soccer. Each turn will take many hours of practice to master, but once learned will greatly improve his/her game. For the younger players, the Stop Turn and the Drag Back should be taught. Older age players should master all the turns.

Stop Turn

Move the ball in one direction. Stop the ball with the sole of the right foot. Continue past the ball. Turn quickly, play the ball with the same foot in the opposite direction. Bend your knees. Accelerate away after the turn. Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.

Drag Back

Move the ball in one direction. Turn the ball under the body by dragging the ball in the opposite direction with the sole of your right foot. Turn quickly, play the ball with the same foot in the opposite direction. Bend your knees. Accelerate away after the turn. Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.

Inside Hook

Move the ball in one direction. Reach and hook the ball with the inside of your right foot and move in the opposite direction. Bend your knees. Accelerate away after the turn. Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.

Outside Hook

Move the ball in one direction. Reach and hook the ball with the outside of your right foot and move in the opposite direction. Bend your knees. Accelerate away after the turn. Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.

Step Over

Move the ball in one direction. Step over the ball low and quickly with your right foot. Swivel your hips and play the ball in the opposite direction with the inside of your other foot. Bend your knees. Accelerate away after the turn. Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.



The Cryuff

Move the ball in one direction. Fake a kick with the right foot. Turn your right foot inward with your toe down and push the ball behind and away from you in the opposite direction. Turn quickly and play the ball in the opposite direction with the opposite foot. Bend your knees. Accelerate away after the turn. Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.

Passing

Keep Away Circle

Players pair up and stand across from each other around a circle of cones. One player or the coach stands inside the circle and tries to intercept passes made between the players. Passes completed between partners count as goals. Change the player inside the circle after a pass is intercepted or after a short time interval.

Cone Game

Players pair up and stand across from each other around a circle. Set up 6 or 8 cones in the middle of the circle as targets. Partners try and knock over the cones in the middle with accurate passes.

Triangle Pass

Set up a three-player triangle. Each group has one ball. Players pass to each other around the triangle shape. Make sure they reverse the direction of their passes from time to time. After a certain level of proficiency is reached, add a defender to the center of the triangle who will try to intercept the ball.

Four Corner Pass

Set up a 10 yd. x 10 yd. grid with cones at each of the four corners. Four players work with one ball, one player on each side of the grid. A fifth player defends inside the grid. Players may only run between the cones on their side of the grid as they attempt to pass the ball across the grid. Change the middle player often to keep the play crisp and fast.

Pass and Run to the Cone

Place cones at the corners of a large square; 3 players and 1 ball per square. Position the players at 3 of the corners. The player with the ball passes to either of her teammates, then runs to the empty cone. The player receiving the ball controls it, passes to her remaining teammate, and runs to the new empty cone. Repeat this cycle for 3 or 4 minutes, then switch feet or exchange players. The kids should work on passing accurately and moving after making a pass, rather than standing and watching the ball.

Pass and Receive

Position the players in two lines, single-file, facing each other about 5-10 yd. apart. The first player in line A serves the ball to the first player in line B, then runs in a wide arc to the end of line B. The first player in line B controls the serve, passes crisply back to the next player in line A, then runs in a wide arc to the end of line A. Repeat for several minutes. Vary the serve (with the hands, with the feet, high, low, rolling, bouncing, etc.). (Tip: it is important that the players run wide to the end of the opposite line so as not to interfere with the next pass).



Keep-Away

This is an excellent exercise for warming up. Instead of having players standing around in a line waiting to shoot at goal before a game, have them gently warm up playing 3 v 1, or 5 v 2 keep-away for 15-30 second intervals. This gives players a lot more touches on the ball and produces a good feel for the particular playing surface, while alternating aerobic and anaerobic exercise. When an opposing coach sees this happen, he knows that the other coach knows what he is doing and begins to worry!

Possession Game (4 v 2)

Set up 2 adjacent squares of 15 x 15 yards and pick two teams of four players. Start with 4 v 2 in one of the squares, with the other 2 staying in the adjacent square. The 4 try to keep possession in their area. If one of the 2 wins the ball they play the ball into the adjacent square to their teammates and then join them in the square to keep possession. When the transition takes place, the nearest two opposing players also move across the center line to become the 2 trying to win the ball back from the 4. Play continues.

Wall Pass (2 v 1)

In a 10 x 15 yard grid play 2 v 0 to get the feel of a one-touch wall pass. Then, add one defender into the grid, and make the offensive pair play 2 v 1 and produce a wall pass to beat the defender and score by stopping the ball on the end line under control. The players with the ball turn round and repeat the exercise, trying to score as many times as possible by utilizing the wall pass. Get player A with the ball to dribble at speed at the defender to start the move. Player B then must read the visual cue and create an appropriate angle to either side of the defender in order to allow the opportunity for the wall pass. As the players get better technically, and more used to the players around them, the coach should point out further visual cues. For Example, if Player A wants to play a wall pass to the left, then he may want to run to the right of the defender (as he faces him). This will not only open up space on that side by drawing the defender away, but it can also be read as a cue for a teammate to create an angle for a wall pass on that side.

Overlaps (2 v 1)

In a similar vein, overlaps can be created down the flanks. In an open space, practice Player A dribbling at an opponent, with player B making an overlap from behind the player with the ball. He must communicate which way he is coming from to the player with the ball who cannot see him. In a game situation, communication of direction is probably unnecessary as the player will be running towards the nearest touch-line to the ball, but communication that the player with the ball has a player open on the flank is still vitally important. Again, as the players get better technically, and more used to the players around them, the coach should point out further visual cues. For instance, if Player A wants to play an overlap pass to the left, then he may want to run to the right (as he faces him). This will not only open up space on that side by drawing the defender away, but it can also be read as a cue for a teammate to create the overlap on that side.

American Football (Passing)

Create a playing field of 15 x 30 yards, but make the last 5 yards of each end an end zone. A touch down is scored by keeping possession and creating an opportunity to pass to a teammate in the end zone. If this is done with the ball under control, then a touch down is scored. Once the players have the hang of the game, introduce a 3-second rule, i.e. a player running into the end zone can stay in there a maximum of three seconds and then has to get out.

Shooting

Four Goal Game

Set up four cone goals about two yards wide in each corner of a 20 yd. x 30 yd. grid, Divide players into two equal teams. Players may score at any of the four goals. This game encourages teamwork and results in lots of shooting.



Shoot Between Cones

Set up a cone row with cones spaced 3 to 5 yards apart. Pair up players and position one player on each side of the cone row facing the cones and each other. Players should start close to the row of cones at first, striking the ball between the cones. The partner receives the ball and strikes it back between the cones. Move players farther away from the cones as their technique and accuracy improve.

Go For Goal

Players form two lines on either side of the coach who is standing about 18 to 20 yards from a goal of any size. The coach serves the ball toward the goal while one player from each line races to win the ball and shoot. As skills progress, add a goalkeeper. The coach should encourage correct shooting technique and a good first touch on the ball.

Dribble Cones and Shoot

Set up two cone lines for a dribble weave about 30 yards long with a 2 yard goal at the end. Divide players into two lines or teams. Players must dribble through the cones and score at the goal at the end before the next player in line starts.

Turn and Shoot

Divide the team into two groups; have an assistant work with one half of the team while you work with the other half. Position the players with their backs to the goal (about 20 yd. away) and their legs spread apart. Each player places her ball between her feet. Go down the line stopping briefly in front of each player. When you tap the ball between the player's legs, the player turns, sprints to the ball, and shoots on goal. Repeat the process with each player in succession. The players shag their ball and circle wide to return to the line. Switch the position of the players periodically so that they are attacking the goal from a different angle. Increase the pace on the ball as you tap it to make it more challenging. The game can also be played with a keeper in goal.

First to the Ball

Players line up on opposite sides of the goal post. Each line is a team. The goalkeeper serves the ball into the field 15 to 20 yards from the goal. When the ball is served, the two players at the front of the line race to the ball. Both players try to win the ball from each other and score on the same goal. Keep score. This is a great game -it becomes very competitive !

Three Shots

A line of attackers forms at least 25 yards out from the goal. Two servers are positioned on either side of the goal posts with a supply of balls. The player at the front of the line starts with a ball, dribbles a few yards, then shoots on goal. After the shot, the player receives a pass from the first server. After the shot, the player receives a pass from the second server.

Variations: 1) play with a goalkeeper. 2) vary the type of serves. 3) limit the number of touches the player has.



SCRIMMAGES

General Guidelines

- Not the best for improving skills (many players, only one ball). But the kids love scrimmage and it's great fun for them. So allow plenty of time for scrimmage during every practice, but don't make it the only activity.
- Excellent for learning positions and game simulation.
- Good way to teach the rules (you are the referee!), but try not to stop play too often.

Small-sided Scrimmage

- Fewer players, thus each player gets more touches on the ball.
- Small field and small goal requires more control and passing.
- Small goal encourages accuracy.
- HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IN PRACTICE FOR ALL AGES !
- If you have a large team and sufficient space, run two games simultaneously.

Scrimmage with Conditions

- Maximum 5 touches: to encourage passing.
- Minimum 2 touches: to encourage control (no one-touch "passes").
- Minimum 5 touches: to encourage dribbling.
- Must pass 3 times before allowed to shoot: rewards passing and good spacing.

Uneven Scrimmage

- 5 v 2 with no goals: forces passing. (The larger team counts passes.)

Offense vs. Defense

- Good to practice action at the mouth of the goal.
- Good to work on set plays (goal kicks, corner kicks, free kicks).
- Have 2 or 3 extra players on offense to keep the action around the goal.
- Give defenders two small goals near the touchline at midfield.

Freeze

- Blow the whistle and call "freeze".
- All players must stop where they are.
- Coach makes observation, e.g. players open on right flank.
- Excellent teaching tool (if not used too often).

Open Scrimmage

- Full game simulation.
- All players, one game.
- Enforce rules more strictly to encourage fair play; it also gives players free kick practices.
- Play another team occasionally, if possible; practice subs and positions.



RESOURCES

U5 & U6

- Coaching 6, 7, and 8 Year Olds - Tony Waiters and Bobby Howe
- Micro Soccer (video) - Tony Waiters
- FUNdamental Soccer Guide FUNdamental Soccer Practice - Karl Dewazien
- Hey Coach - This Game is Fun! - Ric Granryd

U7 & U8

- Coaching 6, 7, and 8 Year Olds - Tony Waiters and Bobby Howe
- Micro Soccer (video) - Tony Waiters
- FUNdamental Soccer Guide FUNdamental Soccer Practice - Karl Dewazien
- Hey Coach - This Game is Fun! - Ric Granryd
- The Dutch 4 v 4 Training Method (video) - The Royal Dutch Soccer Association

U9 & U10

- Coaching 9, 10 and 11 Year Olds - Tony Waiters and Bobby Howe
- FUNdamental Soccer Guide, FUNdamental Soccer Practice, FUNdamental Soccer Tactics - Karl Dewazien
- The Dutch 4 v 4 Training Method (video) - The Royal Dutch Soccer Association