



U8
Player Development
Handbook
(for age groups U7 & U8)



INTRODUCTION

This U8 development handbook is geared towards coaches of U7 & U8 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: U7 & U8 AGE GROUPS

Characteristics

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

Things You Can Expect

7 and 8-year-old players are a bit more compliant than their U6 counterparts. They will be able to follow 2 or 3 step instructions and are starting to have a good understanding about what it means to play a “game”. They are also starting to cooperate more with their teammates. In fact, they now will recognize that they even have teammates by the fact that they occasionally, and I mean occasionally, will pass the ball to a teammate on purpose. Often, they will repeat the phrase “I can’t do that!”, but, will quickly run to show you that they can, even when they only think they can. Some other things that you can expect to happen during a season with this age group.

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

Coaching Rational

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

- Small-sided soccer is the best option for these players. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but, it is an easier game to understand.



- Because of rapid growth spurts during this age, players will go through times when they seem to have lost control of their body. What they could easily do 2 weeks ago now seems unattainable. Be patient.
- Passing is not an important part of their game, no matter how much anybody yells at them to do otherwise, it is much more fun to dribble and shoot. Let them.
- Training once or twice a week is plenty, and should not last longer than one hour and fifteen minutes.
- Each player should bring his or her own size #4 ball to training. Learning how to control it should be the main objective. They need to touch it as many times as possible during fun activities that will engage them.
- Challenge them to get better by practicing on their own. There is no rule which states that they can't learn by themselves, no matter how important we think we are.
- Incidental things are important. They are forming the habits that will impact their future participation. Ask them to take care of their equipment (water bottle included), cooperate, listen, behave, and try hard. Realize, however, that they often forget and will need to be reminded often.
- Ask them to work with others to solve a particular challenge. Start them with just one partner and work from there.

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

- Continuing to become “friends with the ball”: maximum ball touches and repetitions in footwork activities.
- Starting and stopping with the ball; changing direction with the insides and outsides of both feet.
- Turning through 180 degrees with the ball with the soles of the feet and the insides and outsides of the feet: Emphasis on balance.
- Controlling rolling balls (passes) with the insides and outsides of the feet: Beginning to develop good “first touch” with ground balls.
- Accurate passes over 10 to 15 yards and beginning to kick with the instep, and players are beginning to consider the “weight” of passes.
- “Your choice of techniques depends on the situation: you must figure out how best to solve the problem.”



Tactical Guidelines

- Beginning to get a sense of the game and its demands and possibilities; beginning to see soccer in terms of teamwork.
- Learning to relax with the ball and to protect it: “Try to get your body between the ball and that opponent who wants to take it from you!”
- An aggressive attitude about individual defending: “Press the ball when you lose it! Really hassle the ball possessor!”
- Spreading out and making the field big when your team has the ball. When your team does not have the ball, getting together a little, trying to protect the middle of the field and the space in front of your goal.
- Introduction of the concept of the “three main moments of soccer”: our team has the ball, our team does not have the ball, and the transition between possession and loss of possession and the reverse.
- Players are cultivating a “What if?” or “What’s next?” mentality.

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.

U5 & U6 AGE APPROPRIATE SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

Skills – U6 (Review)

Technical - Field Play

- Inside of foot dribbling, using either foot.
- Outside of foot dribbling using either foot.
- Inside of foot pass, up to 5 yards, using either foot.
- Controlling a pass, using either foot.

Tactical - Field Play

- Get involved.
- Shoot whenever possible.



Skills - U7

Further development of skills taught at U6 plus the following

Technical - Field Play

- Shooting with the top of the foot or “laces”, using either foot.
- Dribbling for speed.
- Shielding.
- Kickoffs.
- Throw-ins.
- Goal kicks.

Technical - Goalkeeping

- Kicking goal kicks.
- The ready (starting) position.
- Underarm roll for ball distribution.
- Gathering ground balls.

Tactical - Field Play

- Positions - attackers and defenders.
- Defend between the ball and goal.

Tactical - Goalkeeping

- Look for an unmarked player to distribute the ball to.

Skills - U8

Further development of skills taught at lower levels plus the following

Technical - Field Play

- Inside of the foot passing, up to 15 yards, using either foot.
- Outside of the foot passing, up to 15 yards, using either foot.
- Controlling a pass with outside of either foot.
- Controlling air balls with either foot or either thigh.
- One-touch shooting.
- Special moves:
 - 180 degree turns with the inside of the foot, using either foot.
 - 180 degree turns with the outside of the foot, using either foot.

Technical - Goalkeeping

- Catching balls below the waist.
- Over-hand throw for ball distribution.

Tactical - Field Play

- Spreading out, side-to-side and end-to-end.
- Role of the first defender (immediate pressure).
- Tackling.
- Shooting to the far post.



Tactical - Goalkeeping

- Distributing balls to the side of the field away from immediate play.
Advancing to collect through balls without pressure from an attacking player.

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.

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).

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.

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 players 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.

Block Tackling

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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.

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!

Bingo

A number of cones are distributed throughout the field. Two players are the "replacers;" each of the others has a ball. The players with balls try to knock down as many cones as possible with their balls. The "replacers" (all players take turns in this role) set up the cones as fast as they're knocked down. When a player knocks down a cone, they yell "Bingo!" (this adds to the excitement). Who can score the most "Bingos?"

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.

Clean up your Field

Divide the field in half with a line of flat cones. Players are divided into two teams one in each half. There are about half as many balls as players. Each team tries to keep its own half "clean" by shooting all the balls into the other half as fast as possible. Players may not cross the centerline (shooting line). From time to time the coach whistles; all



players freeze and the balls are counted. The team with fewer balls in its half scores one point (up to five points).



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.

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.

“Ka-boom” – The Block Tackling Drill

To drill this have two players stand across from each other as they would to shake hands. Players may want to start with a hand on their partners shoulder. Place a ball between them. Starting with the right foot first, players count “1,2,3” in unison to develop a rhythm then both try to tackle the ball, striking it at the same time. If done correctly the tackles can be hard, the ball will make a “thud” but will remain in essentially the same spot. Do 5 repetitions each foot per set. Complete two sets. Coaching points include: Low center of balance, knee bent, toe up, ankle locked. Tackle/block the ball using the stiffened ankle.

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 end line from which you started. Players without a ball challenge the dribblers and try to kick their ball away.

Great Wall of China

Each player has a ball. The "Great Wall" is the coach, who moves back and forth along the centerline. A small goal is marked on each end line using cones. Each player tries to dribble from one goal to the other, while the coach moves back and forth, trying to keep everyone from crossing. Players must wait for a hole and "scoot" through. Each goal scores one point, but if the coach touches a player's ball, that player loses a point. Who can score the most points in a given time?

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.

Red Light - Green Light

Every player has a ball and lines up along one end of the field. The coach stands at the other end and calls the



command “red light” and “green light”. Players can dribble towards the coach on “green light” but must stop quickly on “red light” because the coach spins around to spot any moving players. Players seen moving are sent back to the start. Players try to get past the coach without being spotted.



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.

Simon Says

Have all players in a small grid with a ball. Begin dribbling and instruct players to move in various directions, stop or speed up, slow down, use right or left foot only by saying Simon Says or not. Players that do not obey the command must do something silly – be creative! To add more fun have the players stop the ball with a body part – foot, elbow, knee, nose. The goofier the better.

Spiderman

Provide a 15 yd. x 15 yd. grid. Each player should have a ball. The coach starts as the first spider. The players dribble around the grid while trying to avoid the tag of the spider. When the coach tags a player, they join hands and go after new prey. Each successive tagged player makes the web of the spider grow bigger, but, alas, less organized. Young players will request this game constantly.

Star Wars

This classic game is very exciting for younger players! Set up a 10 yd. x 20 yd. grid. Have all the players line up at one end prepared to run to the other end. The coach or a player stands just outside the grid at midway with several balls at the ready. On command the players attempt to run to the end line while evading balls kicked at them by the coach. All shots should be kept below waist level. Players hit by the balls become new additional shooters until only one runner is left.

Tunnel Soccer

Each player has a ball. The coach has no ball, but moves about the field with the players. While moving around the field, from time to time the coach stops and spreads his legs to form a "tunnel." Enlist other coaches or parents to be additional tunnels. The players dribble after him and try to shoot through the tunnel whenever he stops. After three shots, the coach moves on again. Who can score the most points in 5 minutes?

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.

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

Five and Six Year Olds

- 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

Seven and Eight Year Olds

- 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