III. SOCCER PROGRAM

Intro

SCORES encourages young players to enjoy the game of soccer. Through non-competitive play, students are freed from the fear of failure and the pressure to win. The focus is on fun and improvement.

Coaches should create a structured and supportive atmosphere that encourages players to participate and express themselves.

Hey Coach! Before You Start

Whether you’ve coached for twenty years or this is your first season, you should think about your goals for the season ahead. What is the big picture? What do you want to accomplish with your team and how will you accomplish it?

Successful coaching breaks down into five categories: Safety, Positive Relationships, Youth Participation, Skill Building, and Physical Activity. 1

Safety
Promoting emotional and physical safety builds the foundation for young people to take risks and learn through their successes and failures. When young people feel safe, they trust their coaches to protect them from physical harm and they know that they will be accepted and supported by their teammates.

Positive Relationships
Developing positive and caring relationships between adult instructors and youth, and between youth and their peers, helps young people build a support network that supports their learning and growth. Young people know they can depend on and confide in their instructors and learn critical teamwork skills with their peers.

Youth Participation
When young people are listened to and encouraged to voice their opinions, they know that they matter and are important. It is a key youth development practice to create opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making and develop leadership skills.

Skill Building
When young people learn new skills they build self-confidence, learn to break down difficult tasks into manageable pieces, and develop physical coordination and agility. Sports also offers an important opportunity to not only teach young people concrete sports skills, but also to teach them life lessons about determination, success, and failure.

Physical Activity
Young people’s physical development is an essential component of their overall healthy development. Physical activity helps young people build strong bones, muscles and hearts. It also helps prevent chronic diseases associated with sedentary lifestyles. Fun and engaging sports programs keep kids interested and help them develop lifelong healthy habits.

Note: Before starting the season you should think about what you can do to accomplish these goals. What will you do on a daily basis and throughout the season? This guide is here to help you along the way.

1. Team-Up For Youth. Five Star Coaching Guide. 2009
From Go, Establish the Rules

To create a safe practice environment you need to establish some ground rules. Doing so at the start of the season will help prevent behavior problems before they happen. Keep in mind that first and second graders have short attention spans. You should keep your rules simple and to the point.

SCORES relies on values that you can use to create the rules of your team. Each value is followed by some ways that you can translate the value into rules for your players follow.

Commitment: I’m Always Here
• Attend every soccer practice and writing workshop.
• Work hard and try your best, for your sake and for the sake of the team.
• Remember that it is a privilege to represent your school and community.
• “Try your best.”

Sportsmanship: I Will Play Fair
• Play for fun.
• Congratulate each other when we win or lose.
• Respect your opponent, each other, the referee, and your coach.
• “It’s OK to make mistakes. Play on.”

Leadership: I’ll Take You There
• Set a good example for the other players on the team.
• “Be a model.”

Teamwork: Because We Care
• We will help each other up when we fall.
• Help your teammates when they need it.
• “We’re stronger together.”
Structuring Practice

As a coach, you will spend the majority of your time with your team at practice. Make this time count by coming to practice prepared. Planning your practices is essential to having a positive and productive impact on your team.

In this booklet, we’ve outlined over 30 activities (warm-ups, skill games, and fun soccer games) designed for U8 players in urban spaces. They are fun, easy-to-run, and proven to work.

Establish Routine

Establishing routine gives your practices strong organization and momentum. It helps to limit chaos by giving your practices repetition and familiarity. Routine helps your players feel safe and comfortable at practice.

We recommend starting with a group check-in and warm-up before moving to the core activities of practice (games and a scrimmage) and then finishing with a brief team meeting.

Group Check-In (5 minutes)
Checking in with your players at the start of practice gives you a chance to engage right away. As they arrive, ask them about their days. See how they’re feeling. This helps you create positive relationships with your players that you can build on throughout the season. Also, it gives you a chance to gauge how certain players are feeling on any given day. You might notice which players on your team are feeling down or might need some extra attention during practice.

Warm-Up (5 minutes)
A good warm up gets players focused and ready for the practice ahead. The nature of the warm-up is up to you. Some coaches like to go through the same dynamic warm-up at the start of every practice. This gets players hearts pumping and can give individual players the chance to take rewarding leadership roles like leading the warm-up or stretching afterwards. Other coaches like to get their team running around and having fun immediately with a goofy tag or team-building game.

Games (25 minutes)
Young players have short attention spans. They will get bored with skill drills that don’t involve a lot of interaction. The solution: play games! Working with six and seven year olds, you should spend the majority of practice time playing games. You may have to introduce a skill or a concept, but you should get your players moving, interacting, playing, and having fun as quickly as possible. In 25 minutes, try to play two or three games. Aim to keep game length under 10 minutes.

Scrimmage (20 minutes)
Every practice should end with a scrimmage, or by letting your players play soccer. Trust the game. You shouldn’t need to offer much instruction. Let the players figure things out on their own. Scrimmaging serves as the best way to teach the rules of the game, teach skills, and have fun.

Team Meeting / Cool Down (5 minutes)
Ending your practice in a routine way, with a cool down or debrief, lets you review and reaffirm what your players learned at practice. This also lets players give feedback on the day’s practice. What did they like most? What did you learn? Encourage them to share this knowledge with their parents and teachers. Use this time to make brief announcements about upcoming games or permission slips. This can help improve team solidarity and organization.
Tips for Running a Successful Practice

Flow
You want your practices to have flow, or momentum from one activity to the next. The best way to do this is to prepare. You can also help the flow of practice by using efficient attention getters, transitions, and grouping strategies.

Set-Up
Try to plan practices in which you don’t need to spend much time altering the set-up of your activities. For example, play a series of games that require a square grid of the same size. This will help you move smoothly from one activity to another.

Handing Out Soccer Balls
Getting a soccer ball can be overly exciting for first and second graders. Channel this excitement to earn behavior that you want to see. For example, “players that are quiet and listening will receive a ball first.” Also, tell your players exactly what behavior you want them to exhibit after they get their ball. For example, “when you get a ball, make a ‘soccerhat’ by putting the ball on your head.” Or, “when you get a ball, dribble around in the grid.” This will keep your players attentive and ready for instructions.

Collecting Balls
Create a routine for collecting soccer balls after a game. For example, “Hector is the ball collector today. Everyone dribble their balls to Hector and put them in the bag.”

Attention Getters
An attention getter is a great way to gain attention when you want to begin activities or transition between them. Use the same attention getters consistently so that your players are familiar with them and know when to focus.

Some example attention getters:
- Coach: “1, 2, 3 eyes on me!” Players: “1, 2, eyes on you.”
- “If you can hear my voice, clap once; if you can hear my voice, clap twice…”
- “Everyone in front of me in five, four, three, two…”

Transitions
Use transitions to help you move from one activity to another with little wasted time or lost energy. For example, use short water breaks to give your players rest while you set up the next activity. Also, pay attention to the way you tell players to finish an activity. Try to do so in a way that helps you set up the next one. For example: “Everyone dribble over to the center circle and leave your balls there before you get a drink.” Transitions also present small opportunities to give your players leadership roles and responsibilities. For example, “David and Sofia, can you help me pick up cones before you get a drink.”

Variation
Turn one game into two by using a simple variation. Making one adjustment to the game’s rules can change the nature and difficulty of a game. It can provide a new challenge for players, keeping them engaged, and keeping your practice moving.

Grouping Strategies
Grouping strategies help you divide your team into groups for different activities. You should prepare a few different grouping strategies to help you make quick transitions between activities.

Example Grouping Strategies:
- Count off by number. “Bobby, One. Over by that goal. Suzie, Two. Over By that goal…”
- “Find a partner. Decide which one of you wants to be the cheetah and which one wants to be the antelope. All the cheetahs over by that post. All the antelopes by that post.”
- Give pennies to all the players on one team, or to the “sharks,” “alligators,” etc.
Communicate
Using good communication with players and parents will help you manage your practices and your overall program.

Clear Instructions
Keep your instructions to activities clear and short. You don’t want to give confusing directions or lose the attention of young children. Use simple words and communicate one point at a time. Instructions for games should take no longer than one minute.

Stay Positive
Compliment your players’ behavior whenever possible. This encourages improvement by keeping players involved and excited about their effort. Try to compliment each player at every practice even if you need to invent compliments. For example, say, “Jamal, nice pass,” even if Jamal didn’t intend to make a pass. Also use positive criticism whenever possible. Make your criticisms into suggestions. And try to sandwich your suggestions between two compliments. For example, instead of saying, “Don’t do that,” say, “Laura, I like how you’re always trying to score. If you want to kick it more accurately, try kicking it with this part of your foot. Keep up the good work.”

Talk to Parents
Building relationships with parents will help you manage your team and your practices. Whenever possible, you should talk to parents about the program and their child’s progress. This will give parents good reason to trust you and support your work. They will want to help you and the team. Let them help to make your job easier. Get them involved by assigning small but important duties like bringing snacks or drinks to games.

Parents can also present some difficult problems with team management. If you have a problem with a parent hurting your ability to coach, for example by shouting at a game, then talk to the parent. Tell them that you value their feedback but that it’s confusing your players and hurting your control of the team. They should appreciate your honesty and your situation.
Engage

Keep them Moving
If you keep your players active and moving then they won’t have time to get bored or misbehave. Run games that keep them out of lines. Encourage effort. And stop games that lag or lose your player’s attention; move onto something else. Stopping a game at its peak excitement or frenzy leaves your players hungry for more.

Adjust for Success
Success increases the sense of joy and fulfillment that players experience at practice. Success breeds self-confidence and visa versa. If an activity proves too difficult, players can become frustrated and discouraged.

How do you create success? Choose drills and games with objectives that players can accomplish. And be prepared to adjust a drill so that players can succeed. For example, you may have to make goals larger so that players score more goals.

But be careful. Your players will have a variety of skill levels. An activity that challenges one player may be easy for another one. It’s up to you to challenge your players. Try to split groups in a way that will make games fair and competitive. Whenever possible, make games harder for your better players. For example, serve them more difficult balls to control.

Be Creative
First and second graders respond well to imaginative and quirky games. So let loose! If a game seems bland, spice it up with imagery or pretend actions. Use animals and lava pits and desert islands and space ships. If you think you’re hip enough, incorporate popular cartoon characters into your games. Using an element of creativity can help a young child engage with any game, even if you’re only picking up balls or running laps.
Age-Appropriate Coaching

You are coaching a team of six to eight year olds. Kids at this age act and learn very differently than older elementary school kids. You should be aware of the developmental traits of these children so that you can run your team effectively.

What you should know about 5 and 6 year olds:
- Enjoy playing, not watching. They learn by seeing and doing.
- Have active imaginations.
- Are egocentric. They are unable to see the world from another perspective and just beginning to care about others’ feelings. The concept of a team does not exist at this age. Instead of 3 vs. 3, it is really 1 vs. 5.
- Focus on the present. They struggle to think about future payoffs or what they learned in the past.
- Have short attention spans. Generally, they show attention for 10-15 seconds for listening and 10-15 minutes while engaged in an activity. This is even lower when in an environment with distractions.
- Have trouble understanding boundaries, or sidelines.
- Are unable to think abstractly or understand spatial relationships. They tend to play “blob soccer.”
- Look for adult approval. They do not like criticism or failure, and have a strong need for love and attention.
- Have two speeds: extremely fast and stopped.
- Express emotion through behavior; unable to label emotions. But feeling upset only lasts a short time.
- See things in black or white, yes or no terms.
- Like to be helpful; excited about responsibility.
- Prefer individual achievements over comparison to others.
- Prefer same-sex groups.
- Learning words, letters; know time of day and week; know right from left.

What you should know about 7 and 8 year olds (That’s different from 5 and 6 year olds):
- Play well in pairs.
- Can begin to take another’s perspective and understand peer perceptions.
- Still can’t think abstractly.
- Attention span about 15 seconds for listening, 20 minutes to engage in an activity.
- Start to understand time and sequence. For example, they can remember an order of actions.
- Less active imaginations than younger kids, but still active compared to adults.

What you can do to give good age-appropriate instruction:
- Be aware of your players’ limits and abilities.
- Be positive. Constantly encourage good behavior.
- Be creative with your instructions and descriptions.
- Simplify directions. Give one point at a time.
- Show kindness and patience.
- Set clear limits and discipline the kids in clear and consistent ways.
- Give kids small responsibilities.
Relay

Set Up: Divide your team into groups of four to six with each team standing in a single-file line. Place a cone about 15-20 yards in front of each line.

Description: The first player in each line runs out to his/her cone and performs a specific activity such as jumping jacks, spins, a dance move, etc. Once the activity is completed, the player runs back and tags the hand of the next runner. The first team to complete the relay and sit down in a straight line wins.

Coaching Points:
- Create fun actions for the players to perform during the relay.

Variation:
- Play with a soccer ball. Have players dribble the ball out to the cone, perform their assigned task, then dribble back to the next person in line.

Over-Under Relay

Set Up: Create two parallel lines with players standing an arms distance behind the person in front of them. One ball at the front of each line.

Description: The first person in each line starts with a ball in his/her hands. On “GO”, that player passes the ball OVER his/her head to the next person in line; that player takes the ball and passes it UNDER (between his/her legs) to the next person behind him/her. The ball must pass through the entire line, OVER, then UNDER. When the last player in line gets the ball, that player the ball on the ground and dribbles to the front of the line to start the relay again. The first team to complete the rotation wins.

Coaching Points:
- This is a great team-building game to use at the start of practice. But this is probably not a game you will want to use repeatedly throughout the season.

Variation:
- Create smaller teams to make the relay faster.
- Require a different passing pattern. For example: Under, Under, Over. Or, Around the back, Under, Over.
Electricity

Set Up: Divide the team in half. Two teams create parallel lines. It helps to have two coaches for this game, but isn’t necessary. One coach stands at the head of both lines, in between them, and one coach stands at the end of the lines while holding a jersey.

Description: Teams close their eyes and hold hands with their teammates. Tell the first player from each team to open his/her eyes. Tell the team that you are going to flip a coin and the first player on each team will see it. If the coin shows heads, the first player will squeeze the hand of the person next to him/her. That person squeezes the hand of the next person, and the squeezing travels on down the line. When the last person in line feels the squeeze, he/she can grab the jersey that the coach at the end of the line is holding. If the coin lands as tails, then the first player shouldn’t squeeze. If he/she does squeeze and the last player grabs the jersey, that team gets a negative point. Play a few rounds by rotating the lines. Make it competitive.

Variation:
• If you are the only coach, then you can have the last player in each line run up to the front and slap your hand when he/she feels the final pulse. Or, have the last player sit down at the end.

Octopus Tag

Set Up: Set up a rectangular grid, about 20 by 15 yards, with two safe “end zones” or “homes.” One “It” player, the King or Queen Octopus, roams the middle of the grid. The rest of the players, the guppies or shrimp, line up in one safe zone.

Description: On “Swim!” players try to get from one safe zone to another while avoiding the octopus. When tagged, players turn into additional octopuses that try to tag the rest of the players. As new octopuses, players stay rooted to the ground where they get tagged. They can pivot on one foot when trying to tag other players, but CANNOT move. Run swimming rounds until only one or two champion guppies remain. Alternate the Queen Octopus.

Coaching Points:
• Have fun with the actions of an octopus. Have players flail and wave their arms.
• “It” players should tag lightly. Try using “butterfly” tags with two fingers.

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Chicken Thief

Set Up: Players line up in a horizontal line about 20 yards from the coach. Place an object like a ball or stuffed animal about two yards away from you, between yourself and the players. This object is the “chicken.” Explain that the players are trying to steal the chicken when you’re not looking.

Description: Players try to steal the chicken and bring it back to the line without getting caught. The game starts when you turn your back to the players, so you can no longer see the players or the chicken. Count to four. While you count, players can move. On “four” turn around to face players. All players must freeze. Anyone you catch moving must start over and return to the starting line. The game continues until a thief is caught or the chicken is successfully stolen and brought back across the starting line. Players can pass the object as long as the coach does not see it.

Coaching Points:
• It may take a few attempts at this game before players succeed. Players tend to give themselves away at first, making it easy for you to guess the thief.
• Players should learn that the game is not about being the one with the object, but about supporting the thief so the whole team succeeds.
• After a few rounds ask players, “How do you think I know who has it?” “What strategies should you use to confuse me?” Encourage the team to work together to fool you.

Big Wind Blows

Set Up: Make circle with cones. As with musical chairs, set up one less cone than there are players. One player, “The Big Wind,” stands in the center of the circle. Everyone else stands next to a cone.

Description: The Big Wind in the center circle raises both arms and spins around, while saying, “The Big Wind Blows for __________.” The blank should be filled with a true statement about himself or herself, such as, “The Big Wind blows for everyone who has a brother.” Any of the players who share this characteristic, including the Big Wind, must run and find a new cone to stand next to. The Big Wind can also simply shout “Hurricane!” and all players must change spots. No moving player is allowed to stand by the same cone or a cone directly adjacent to his or her previous one.

Coaching Points:
• This is a good icebreaker. Encourage players to share embarrassing facts about themselves, such as “The Big Wind Blows for everyone who hasn’t showered in three days.”

Progression:
• Add soccer balls to this game by having every player dribble to a new cone.
Barn Yard

Set Up: Players form a line. They approach you one at a time and you secretly give each player an animal that they will act out for the game. There should be groups of three to five players who have the same animal but don’t know who else is in their group. To save time, you could pass out pre-made note cards with names of animals written on them.

Description: Players act out their secret animal and try to form a group with everyone else who has the same animal. A group wins when it is the first to find everyone with the same animal and get in a circle while continuing to act it out.

Coaching Points:
- This is a great warm-up to get everyone laughing and having fun.

Progression:
- Have players try the same game while dribbling soccer balls.

Jedi Numbers

Set Up: Arrange players in a circle. Tell them that they will have to read each others’ minds to complete the challenge at hand.

Description: The team must count in order as high as they can. But only one person may speak at a time. If two players call out a number at the same time, the whole team must start over. You can start by saying “zero” and waiting to see which player says “one.” If two players say “one” or any other number at the same time, you should restart the game by saying “zero” again. Players are not allowed to discuss their strategy or say anything other than numbers.

Coaching Points:
- Players should realize that the way to beat the record is to develop a pattern. But they are not allowed to talk to develop the pattern. It should happen naturally over time, and they may remember that certain people always say certain numbers.
- Trying to set the counting record for the season is a great way to keep kids occupied during transitions or down time.
Ro Sham Bo Rally

Set Up: Make sure players know a consistent way of playing Ro Sham Bo, i.e.: “throw on Bo.” Set up a grid to contain the players.

Description: On “Go!” players run around and face off in one vs. one battles of Ro Sham Bo. The winner goes on to face another opponent. The loser starts a line or a chain behind the winning player, grabbing onto his or her shoulders. The head players from each “Rally Car” continue to play Ro Sham Bo against one another. The losing line links to the back of the winning line. Play until there’s one line with one champion “Rally Driver.”

Coaching Points:
- Have players pretend to be vehicles of their choice: sports car, fire truck, police car, ice cream truck. Have them make the sound of their vehicle, then the sound of the vehicle they must “get in.”

Progression:
- Play with soccer balls. Players now dribble around the grid. When they knock their ball into another players’ ball, those two players play Ro Sham Bo. Losing players pick up their balls and join the back of the line.

Scream Machine

Set Up: Arrange kids in a circle and tell them that they have just created the “Scream Machine!” Have everyone scream to start out the game and get excited.

Description: Players start the game with their heads facing the ground. When you count to three all players look up and stare at a random person across the circle. If two people are staring at each other they must scream as loud as they can and exit the circle. The last two players remaining are the Scream Machine champions.

Coaching Points:
- Stress that players must look at someone else. They cannot stare into space.
- Also stress that screaming means that the player is out. They must sit silently outside the circle.

Variation:
- Instead of eliminating players from the Scream Machine, you give them another exercise to outside of the circle.
Coaching Dribbling

Dribbling is the core skill of soccer. Dribbling means controlling the ball with your feet. Players push, tap, or drag the ball to move up the field or to change direction. Players can use all parts of the foot (top, inside, outside, sole) to dribble.

When introducing dribbling, you need to introduce how to stop the ball. At your first practice you may want to teach your players the “footbreak”, or stopping the ball with the sole of their foot.

Beginner players should play lots of dribbling games. Players become comfortable with the ball and the basic movements of the game. They should learn to love the ball and love the game! Dribbling lets players express themselves.

Keep in mind that young players might have trouble controlling the ball. Give them some room for error by making your grids large enough for them to dribble without the ball constantly going out of bounds.

Coaching Points

- Teach your players to stop the ball with the “footbreak.”
- Keep the ball close. This will help you keep control of the ball.
- Keep your body over the ball.
- Use different parts of the foot: inside, outside, bottom (sole), top (laces).
- Keep the ball moving.
- If possible, change speed and direction. This will help you avoid defenders.
- Try some fakes!
- While dribbling, try to look around you to stay aware of the players around you and open spaces.

Dribbling Games

Body Part Dribble

Set Up: All players dribble ball in grid.

Description: When coach yells out the name of a body part, players must stop the ball with their foot and then touch that body part to the ball as quickly as possible. To help the players control the ball, you can yell “freeze” or “footbreak” before calling out a body part. You should vary the body parts and the rate at which you call them out. At times, call out body parts consecutively (i.e. tummy, nose, elbow) during one stoppage or call out two body parts at once (i.e. both hands or both feet).

Coaching Points:
- Show players how to stop the ball with the sole of the foot. The ball should be still.
- This game should be fun and silly. Come up with quirky combinations of body parts for players to try.
- See who can do it the fastest.
- This is a great game to start teaching players to get comfortable with the ball.
Bug Buzz Tag

Set Up: Every player with a ball in a grid or circle. Players are the bugs. Have players choose their bug identity, i.e.: bee, dragonfly, mosquito. Encourage them to make the sound of their insect.

Description: Every player dribbles a ball while trying to tag, or “bite,” other players with their hand. Players cannot leave their own ball. Have them count how many other bugs they have tagged. If playing more than one game, challenge players to bite more bugs than they did in the first game.

Coaching Points:
• “Tag gently.” Encourage players to tag using just two fingers. This is a “butterfly tag.”
• “Keep balls close.”
• “Keep your head up.” Players should try to keep their heads up while dribbling. They should try to stay aware of who is around them and where they are in the area.

Variations:
• Players now try to tag a named body part of other players. Try “backs” or “knees” or “arms.”

Hospital Tag

Set Up: Every player dribbling in grid.

Description: Players try to tag each other with their hands. When tagged, players place a hand on the spot on their body where they get tagged. If tagged a third time, players have no more hands to cover those spots, so they must go to the hospital to see the doctor. The coach acts as the doctor and performs a magical task to heal the injuries of all the little soccer players so they can continue playing the game.

Coaching Points:
• “Keep your head up.” Players should try to keep their heads up while dribbling. They should try to stay aware of who is around them and where they are in the area.
• “Keep balls close.”

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Tail Steal Tag (Raccoon Tag)

**Set Up:** All players tuck a penny into the side of their shorts to give themselves a tail. Every player with ball in a small grid or circle.

**Description:** All players dribble around the grid trying to pluck the tails of other players while trying to make sure their own tails do not get plucked. Players who have their tails plucked do ten toe-touches and can then re-enter the game by re-attaching their tail. See who can go the longest without getting their tail plucked. See who can snatch the most tails.

**Coaching Points:**
- “Keep your head up.”
- “Keep balls close.”
- Encourage craftiness.
- Encourage players to practice “shielding,” or keeping their body between the ball and the defender. This game naturally favors those that do this well.

**Note:** This can be a fun warm-up game without a ball. Players who get their tails plucked leave their tail on the ground and wait outside the square. Surviving players can hand these tails to players waiting on the outside so that players can re-enter the game.

Freeze Tag

**Set Up:** Everyone with ball. Coach chooses one or two players to be “Freeze Monsters.”

**Description:** Freeze Monsters, with ball, try to dribble around and tag other players, also dribbling. Players that are tagged are frozen. Frozen players must stand still holding their ball over their head. Players can become unfrozen if the coach comes over and unfreezes them OR the coach can have free players unfreeze teammates through touch. If all players are frozen, game ends and the coach can have new Freeze Monsters.

**Variations:**
- Freeze Monsters can now try to freeze (tag) the other players by kicking their soccer ball at someone else’s soccer ball or at their feet.
- Coach can be the Freeze Monster and try to tag all the players; players can unfreeze each other. If your players are advanced enough, have them unfreeze each other by dribbling the ball through the legs of a frozen teammate.

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**Snake Tag (Blob Tag)**

**Set Up:** In a grid, all players have a ball except for two or three, who form the snake.

**Description:** The snake players hold hands or lock arms and work together to tag the other players. The dribbling players try to avoid getting tagged by the snake. If they are tagged, or if their ball goes out of bounds, they join hands or lock arms with the snake. The snake grows until all players are part of the snake. The snake must work together and stay connected. Players in the snake cannot break into little parts. Encourage players to make the hissing sounds of a snake.

**Coaching Points:**
- The members of the snake should communicate to decide where they are going and who they are going after.
- Remind players to go for the ball, not other players’ shins.

**Red Light, Green Light**

**Set Up:** All players have a ball. They start at one end of a grid, about 30 by 20 yards, dribbling toward the coach.

**Description:** When the coach says “red light,” players must stop ball and put foot on top of ball. When coach says “yellow light,” players must dribble very slowly. When coach says “green light,” players dribble fast. Coach controls this game with the frequency of “light” changes and variety of changes.

**Coaching Points:**
- Players should keep the ball close, always ready to stop and control it or push forward with speed.

**Variation:**
- Once players catch on to this game, add other color lights and affix different actions to them (i.e. purple light = hop back and forth over ball, orange light = run around the ball, black light = dance, blue light = hide behind the ball etc.).
**Alligator Swamp**

**Set Up:** Create a rectangular grid, about 20 by 15 yards. One group of two to four players are the “alligators,” who occupy the middle of the grid without balls. The rest of the players are “turtles” or “fish” on dry land. These players have balls and line up outside of one side of the grid.

**Description:** Players with balls try to dribble safely across the swamp, from one end of the grid to the other. Alligators try to kick the balls outside of the swamp. If a player’s ball leaves the swamp, that player becomes an alligator for the next round. Players stop dribbling when they reach the end of the grid, or dry land. Once all players have tried to cross the swamp, repeat the game going the other direction. The last player dribbling is the winner.

**Coaching Points:**
- Stay away from the alligators. Find space behind an alligator.

**Variations:**
- Vary the width and/or length of the grid. A narrower grid makes it more difficult for dribblers.
- If possible (ie. safe), have alligators, or “crabs,” take a four-legged position in the swamp. They can only move around on four legs. This makes it easier for the dribblers.

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**Sharks and Minnows Circle**

**Set Up:** In a circle or a grid, about 15 by 15 yards, every player has a ball except for one “shark.”

**Description:** On “Swim!” the minnows dribble around the grid. When the coach yells “Shark Attack!” the shark is loosed and tries to kick the minnows’ balls outside the area. If a minnow’s ball goes outside the boundary, then that player needs to complete an action (ie. 10 toe taps) before they re-enter the playing field. Play 1 minute games and rotate sharks. See how many minnows each shark can eat!

**Coaching Points:**
- Keep the ball close.
- Stay away from the shark.
- Watch out for the boundaries.

**Variations:**
- Play an elimination game! Play one minute games in which players cannot re-enter the field after eliminated. See if the shark can eliminate all minnows.
- Play a game in which everyone is both a shark and minnow. Every player gets a ball. Players protect their own balls while trying to knock others’ balls out of the grid.
- If the game is getting too rough or crazy, change the shark to an “electric eel.” The eel only needs to touch other players balls to eliminate them from the circle.
Pirate Ship

Set Up: Set up a grid, the “pirate ship,” about 20 by 20 yards. Create a smaller grid, about six by six yards, in one of the corners of the large grid. This is the “safe shark zone.”

Description: Coach leads players through different dribbling motions connected to pirate terms. For example, on “Scrub-the-deck,” players move the ball only with the sole of their foot. On “Walk-the-plank,” players do toe touches on the ball. On “hoist the sail,” players knock the ball back and forth between their feet. When coach yells “shark attack!” all players need to dribble their balls to the safe shark cage. You can play the shark. After yelling “Shark attack,” drop your ball and chase players around the grid.

Coaching Points:
- Have players keep heads up while dribbling to keep an eye out for the shark.
- When the shark attacks players should dribble quickly away, but they should also maintain control of the ball to get it safely back into the “safe shark cage.”

Wizard and Elves

Set Up: Every player, except one, starts in a grid or circle with a ball. The one lone player stands outside the grid with the coach. This player is the “Wizard.”

Description: Players dribble their balls around the grid. When the “Wizard” yells out a magic word, like “broccoli,” every player must leave their ball and find a new one. The wizard then runs into the grid and finds a free ball. A new wizard, or player without a ball, will emerge. Players should use a “footbreak” when they hear the magic word so balls stay still.

Coaching Points:
- Have players keep heads up while dribbling so they don’t run into each other.
- Encourage the wizard to wait a little while before saying the magic word to catch players off guard.

Variation:
- Have players try different dribbling techniques between switches. For example, you can have players dribble only with their right foot, with the outside of the foot, inside, etc.
Coaching Passing

Passing is the best way to get the ball from one player to another. This skill comes slowly to young players. Don’t force it. And don’t worry if you’re players aren’t getting the concepts of spacing and sharing.

Use fun games to work on passing technique. Also, be sure to celebrate a successful pass whenever it occurs in a game. This will encourage your players to pass more often.

Coaching Points

• Use the inside of the foot to strike the ball.
• Keep the inside of the kicking foot facing forward
• Lock the ankle of the kicking foot.
• Point your non-kicking foot in the direction you want to pass the ball.
• Follow through the kicking motion with a full swing in the direction of the pass (for accuracy and power)

Passing Games

Passing Partners

Set Up: Set up a grid about 20 by 20 yards. Set up a series of “gates,” or small goals, with cones. Every player gets a partner with one ball per pair.

Description: Have players start by dribbling around the grid and passing to their partner. Pairs need to stay aware of others to complete passes. When ready, have pairs try to score goals by completing a pass through a grid. Play one minute games to see which pair can complete the most passes without using the same gate twice in a row.

Coaching Points:

• Practice passing with the inside of the foot, striking the ball with pace and accuracy.
Pin the Tail

**Set Up:** All players with a ball in a circle or grid, about 15 by 15 yards. Coach prepares to be a moving donkey.

**Description:** The coach is the donkey. Players try to hit the donkey with a ball. Play until you can’t run anymore. Find nearby parents to be donkeys.

**Progression:**
- Players use left foot only to move and kick the ball.
- Players must hit coach with inside of the foot pass, on the ground.

**Coaching Points:**
- Keep passes low, on the ground only.
- Keep the ball close. Dribble to set up a shot.
- Don’t kick and run.
- Be dramatic! Roll around on the grass when hit. Allow beginner players to get close and hit you.

Team Handball

**Set Up:** Two teams in a grid with one ball.

**Description:** Teams pass the ball around using their hands. Players with the ball can only take one step in any direction. Teams score points by completing three passes, in the air, in a row. If the ball touches the ground, or gets intercepted, the opposing team gains possession.

**Coaching Points:**
- Emphasize spacing. Get your players to spread out, away from defenders, so that they can get the ball.
- Players should learn to move without the ball.

**Variation**
- Play with “End Zones” at either end of a grid. Now teams have to complete a pass over the endline for a point.
- Now play soccer, with the ball on the ground. Teams need to complete three ground passes for a point.
- To make the game easier for the team with the ball, play a “keep away” game with more attackers than defenders. For example, play 8 vs. 3.

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**KEY**

- Players = X, ○
- Room = –
- Pass/Shot = –
- Tall cones = △
**Star Wars**

**Organization:** Two teams in a field, 20 by 20 yards, with a distinct midline. Set up 5–10 cones (or other object as a target) in a line on either side of the center-line. Every player with a ball.

**Description:** Players try to hit other team’s cones by passing soccer balls. All balls are in play at the same time. Players move freely in their half of the field. If a player hits one of the opponents’ cones with a ball, the player who hit it is allowed to cross line, retrieve the cone, and place it on their side. The team to get the most cones to their side wins.

**Variation**
- Play without retrieving cones. Team wins when all the opponents’ cones have been knocked over by soccer balls (when the “starship” has been destroyed).
- Play without the midline. Players can go anywhere.
- Play as shooting game, emphasizing shooting technique.

**Coaching Points:**
- Keep balls low, on the ground only.
- Use the proper passing form.
- Encourage players to go on attack, not guard cones.

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**Pac Man Soccer**

**Set Up:** Circle or grid, about 15 by 15 yards. Two players, the “Pac Men,” have balls.

**Description:** The Pac Men try to hit the other players below the knee with the ball. Any player that gets hit becomes a new Pac Man and trades places with the player that hit him/her. Balls must be passed along the ground with the INSIDE of the foot. No air balls!

**Coaching Points:**
- Practice passing the ball for accuracy.

**Variation:**
- Play an elimination game! Now the Pac Men can grow in numbers. Any player that gets hit gets a new ball from outside the area and becomes a Pac Man. See who is the last player standing.
Coaching Shooting

The purpose of soccer is to score goals. To score, players need to learn to shoot.

Young players should learn the basic techniques involved in shooting. As with passing, they should learn what it takes to kick the ball with power and accuracy. Playing scrimmages and games to goal is an easy way to get players excited about shooting the ball and scoring goals.

Coaching Points

- Keep your head down.
- The non-kicking foot (plant foot) should be next to the ball, pointing in the direction of the shot.
- Keep the knee of the kicking leg over the ball.
- Upper body should lean over the ball.
- The toe of the kicking foot should point toward the ground.
- Keep the ankle of the kicking foot locked.
- Contact the ball with the instep of the foot, or the laces.
- The kicking foot should follow through with a full swing in the direction of the kick.
- Aim your shots low and towards the corners of the goal.

Shooting Games

Rapid Fire Shoot

Set Up: Set up cones in a semi-circle about 8 yards away from a goal. Every player gets a ball and stands next to a cone, prepared to shoot on goal. The coach plays goalkeeper.

Description: On “Fire!” players take turns taking shots on goal. Move down the line from left to right. See how many goals the team can score. See if they can improve in later rounds.

Coaching Points:

- Go over proper shooting technique.

Variation:

- Give players different numbers. Players shoot on your command, when you yell out their number.

KEY:

- Players = X, O
- Coach = C
- Ball = ●
- Dribble = →
- Run = ————
- Pass/Shot = ————
- Tall cones = △
- Flat cone = ▲
**Shoot the Bacon**

**Set Up:** Field 15 by 10 yards with small two yard goal on each endline. The coach stands on a sideline, at midfield, with all of the soccer balls. Split players into two teams. Give numbers, colors, or goofy names to individual players on each team (ie. one team is animals and the other team is fish). Each team lines up on a side of the coach, outside the field boundary. Each team defends a goal.

**Description:** The coach sends a ball out into the field and then calls out the names or numbers of corresponding players, one from each team. Those players rush onto the field and try to score. Encourage players to shoot. Celebrate goals!

**Variations:**
- When they get the hang of it, add more players to the mix. Call out two players from each team, or create a mis-match by calling out three from one team and two from another.
- Vary service of ball. Sometimes play it to one player, sometimes toss the ball up in the air.

**Coaching Points:**
- Work on technique. Get players plenty of shots to practice shooting.

**Shooting Technique Drill**

**Set Up:** Split team into two groups, shooters and goalkeepers. The shooters line up on one side of a goal; the goalkeepers line up on the other. Place one cone that the shooters need to run to and circle before they take a shot. Place another cone, closer to goal, which the goalkeepers need to circle before they tend goal. The coach stands off to the side with a pile of balls.

**Description:** On “Go!” the first shooter runs around the cone and prepares for a shot. At the same time, the first goalkeeper runs around his/her cone and prepares for a save. Serve a ball to the shooter that he/she strikes on goal. Have kids celebrate their goals or saves after making them. Try creating a “Celebration Zone” where players can celebrate with goofy dances after a success. Make the game competitive by tallying points for each team. Give both groups a chance to shoot and goalkeep.

**Coaching Points:**
- Work on technique. Get players plenty of shots to practice shooting.

**Variations:**
- Alternate the difficulty of your services, making the drill challenging for better shooters.
- Alterate the runs that each group makes. For example, you can require players to do a 360 around a cone, or put their nose to a cone, or do a "star jump" etc.
Scrimmage!

**Set Up:** Make a small field, about 30 by 20 yards, with goals. We recommend playing 4 vs. 4 games so that players get lots of time on or near the ball. If necessary, create two games of 4 vs. 4 and oversee both of them. Use cones to create goals that are about 18 feet wide or smaller.

**Description:** Let your players play! Your practices should build toward a scrimmage. You may want to review basic rules of the game like what happens when the ball goes out of bounds. During scrimmages, your main function is as a moderator and referee. You should stop play only when necessary, for example when players don’t know what to do, or when a player commits a foul. Otherwise, try to let the game flow.

**Coaching tips:**
- Before starting, have all the players walk around the field on the sidelines and endlines so that they begin to understand the field boundaries.
- Encourage players to dribble and shoot the ball at the goal.
- Encourage players not to take the ball away from their teammates.
- Commend a good play or a nice move. You can stop or “freeze” play to point out something wonderful that a player did. Recreate the play in 15 seconds or less, then let the game continue.
- Don’t overcoach. They’ll get the hang of it if you give them time to play. They’ll learn through experience and by watching each other.

The Laws of the Game

You should use scrimmages to teach players about the laws of the game. Here are the most important rules to review:

**Kickoff:** The kickoff occurs in the middle of the field. The offensive team puts the ball into play to start the game. The defending team must stand five yards back from the ball. Kickoffs also occur after a goal is scored. When a goal is scored, the defending team kicks off.

**Out of Bounds:** A ball is out of bounds when the entire ball crosses the line.

**Goal Kick:** A goal kick is awarded to the defensive team when the offensive team kicks the ball out of bounds over the endline, outside of the goal posts. The kicker places the ball on the ground, near the goal, and kicks the ball back into play. Defenders must stand at least five yards away.

**Corner Kick:** A corner kick is awarded to the offensive team when the defensive team kicks the ball out of bounds over the endline, outside the goalposts. The kick is taken from the corner of the field, on the same side that the ball went out of bounds. Defenders must stand at least five yards away.

**Throw-in:** A throw-in is awarded to the defensive team when the offensive team puts the ball over the sideline. Players throw the ball back into play with two hands, starting with the ball behind their head, with both feet on the ground.

**Fouls:** No pushing, tripping, holding, or kicking an opponent. And no touching the ball with hands. Every foul results in a Direct Free Kick, which means that the kicker can score a goal directly from the kick. When a foul occurs, players should wait for the referee’s whistle before restarting play.
Coaching At Game Days

Game Days are the players’ chances to shine, to show what they’ve learned during practice. Don’t spoil the fun! During game days, coaches should moderate and cheerlead; Save the coaching and instruction for practice. Your coaching points should be positive ones.

Coach’s Game Day To-Do List:
- Make sure all players are wearing a jersey, shinguards, and proper footwear.
- Keep games non-competitive. Do not keep score or discuss who won or lost. The safety, fun, and improvement of your players is much more important than the score of the game.
- Make sure players are getting equal playing time.
- Give positive recognition to individual players. Don’t shout instructions from the sidelines. Parents should live by the same rule.
- Help referee for both teams. Help players understand the rules and stop dangerous play before it starts.
- Help players demonstrate good sportsmanship. Encourage them to pick each other up when they fall.
- Encourage parents to bring healthy snacks and drinks for after the game.
- Use Game Days to reinforce the importance of the Literary Curriculum.
Sample Practice #1 (Intro to Dribbling)

Warm-up (5 min): Warm up with a quick tag game, like ‘hospital tag’ or ‘toilet tag’ (pg. 9) using a grid.

Dribbling Game (10 min): Using the same circle grid from the tag game, play the Big Wind Blows” (pg. 12) so players learn about their teammates on the first practice. You may want to try one round without soccer balls before introducing dribbling techniques.

Water Break (2 min): Tell your players to get some water and meet you back in the center circle in 1 minute.

Dribbling Game (10 min): Building on the dribbling skills introduced in Big Wind Blows play a game of Body Part Dribble (pg. 15)

Dribbling Game (10 min): Play Wizards and Elves (pg. 21), which requires the same set up as the previous game.

Water Break (2 min): During this break, you can set up the field for a scrimmage.

Competitive Game (10 min): After the break play a game of Sharks and Minnows (pg. 20). Emphasize that this is a chance to use the dribbling skills learned earlier in a real soccer environment.

Cool Down: Get your players together and review what they learned. Finish with a team cheer and make the cool down a ritual for the rest of the season.

Note: If this is the first soccer experience for many of your players, it may be best to avoid a scrimmage in the first few practices.

Sample Practice #2 (Improving Dribbling)

Warm-up (5 min): Play a goofy warm-up game like Ro Sham Bo Rally (pg. 14)

Dribbling Game (10 min): Play a game of Red Light, Green Light (pg. 18) and quickly review dribbling and “foot brake” techniques.

Water Break (2 min): Tell your players to get some water and meet you back in the grid for the next game.

Game (10 min): Play Border Control (pg. 19), which involves a similar set up to the previous game and involves dribbling goals similar to a real soccer game.

Water Break (2 min): During this break, you can set up the field for a scrimmage.

Scrimmage (20 min): Let them play (see page 27). For many players this will be their first real soccer game. An easy way to make sure everyone is included is to give everyone a chance to take goal kicks or throw-ins.
Sample Passing Practice

Warm-up (5 min): Play a goofy warm-up game like “Scream Machine” (pg. 14)

Passing Skill Game (10 min): You should have this drill set up before the warm-up. Introduce your team to passing. Demonstrate proper passing technique. Run the “Pass and Move Drill” (pg. 23). If your players are struggling with this drill, move onto the next game. If they are getting the hang of it, try running a relay race between a few different teams.

Water Break (2 min): Tell your players to get some water and meet back in the center circle in 1 minute. While they’re hydrating, set up the next game, which requires a similar set up.

Game (10 min): Split players into two teams and play “Silver Bullet” (pg. 24). This game should move quickly so you’ll be able to play a few rounds.

Water Break (2 min): During this break, you can set up the field for a scrimmage.

Scrimmage (20 min): Because this is a “passing practice,” you can try to incorporate the skill into the scrimmage.Require each team to complete a pass before they score a goal.

Note: This is a good practice to use in the middle of the season, after your team has learned some skills. Coaching passing can be difficult, so don’t worry if your players struggle with the idea. Try to make it fun. And praise good passes and good technique whenever possible.

Sample Shooting Practice

Warm-up (5 min): Play “Barn Yard” (pg. )

Dribbling Game (10 min): You should have this drill set up before starting the warm-up. “Rapid Fire Shoot” (pg. ).

Water Break (2 min): During the break, set up a grid for the next game.

Game (10 min): Play “Steal the Bacon” (pg. ) Encourage shooting and goals.

Water Break (2 min): During this break, you can set up the field for a scrimmage.

Scrimmage (20 min): Let them play!

Sources

- Team Up For Youth.
- Coach-Smart.com.