5 Steps for a Quality Soccer Practice

**TEAM CHECK-IN (2-5 minutes)**
Get your team together in a circle, in a tight huddle, or sitting down. Tell them the theme for practice (the skill you are focusing on) and talk about the *Nutrition Topic* for the day. This is also a good time to check-in with your players about their day at school and get a sense of how they are feeling.

**WARM-UP (5-10 minutes)**
Get your players physically active (running, jumping jacks, stretching and strengthening) and at the start of practice. Warming up at the beginning of practice creates a team routine and it provides leadership opportunities for team captains to lead the warm-up.

**SKILL-BUILDING ACTIVITIES OR GAMES (20-25 minutes)**
Teach your team the basic soccer skills. Young players need to touch the ball (with their feet) as much as possible to help them develop their skills. Increase the difficulty level from the easy to more challenging to help beginners get repetitions with the basics and enable more experienced players work on their technique.

Skill-building activities typically have no pressure from defenders, but games have defenders and/or involve some type of healthy competition. Games and activities should be fun and engaging.

- **Adjust the size** of the playing space if necessary. Bigger spaces allow for more creativity and keeps players from “bunching up” or bumping into each other
- **Adjust the teams** when appropriate so games and activities are fair and fun.
- **Change the rules** if something isn’t working right.

**SCRIMMAGE (10-15 minutes)**
Playing a soccer scrimmage is a valuable teaching tool because scrimmages allow players to use the skills learned in practice to a real soccer game situation.

- **Give your players goals and objectives** - give them some instructions (attacking players have different objectives than midfielders and attackers).
- **Change players’ positions often.** It is important that players learn to play ALL positions.
- **Create special rules.** For example, if dribbling is the theme of the day, make a rule that the ball has to be dribbled through a big goal rather than kicked in. If passing is the theme of the day, make a rule that each team needs to complete 2 passes before shooting (this number can be adjusted according to the skill level of the team).
- **Allow some time at the end for free play.** When the time is right, remove the special rules and let them play soccer!
- **Positively reinforce your coaching points.** Stop play and let them know when they have done something well; don’t only focus on when they make mistakes.

**TEAM CHECK-OUT (2 minutes)**
Review the skill of the day and reinforce the *Nutrition Topic*. This is the time to talk about the importance of health, nutrition, and healthy habits. It is also a perfect time to talk about the America SCORES poetry, service-learning, team-time, or Jr SCORES writing program and remind your team about the Game Day schedule.