



COAXING the FUNdamentals

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Eighth Edition**

Portions of this Manual were prepared by
Neil Sedgwick & Joel MacDonald (Third Edition: May 1997)

Welcome:

Warning! Exciting job ahead. I hope that you are up for the challenge. **All that is required of you is the ability to live out your second childhood and PLAY, PLAY, PLAY!** Perhaps you are saying that you don't know much about soccer? Don't worry, this handbook and game cards will do a lot of it for you. Perhaps you have played and coached for a very long time and you already have your season planned. Well this handbook may provide you with one or two new ideas to add to your repertoire. You will find this handbook divided into three parts. First, the 'FUNdamental Technical Objectives' will provide you with a skeleton of the exercises which we will run through in our practical, hands-on (feet-on) session. Second, the 'Coaxing with FUNdamental Games' will give you a number of training sessions and games designed for your use. Third, 'Bits and Bites on FUNdamentals' will give you a few thoughts on development and coaching practices. These three combined should provide you with a running start to your season's practice sessions.

For the first time we have also added cards that can be cut out and used at your sessions. Each card includes a guideline to games. You can cut them out and use them to match the sessions that we have designed for you, or you may mix and match them to fit your players' desires.

What should you do with the players this season? Well, think about the characteristics of the player you are going to be working with. They are becoming more and **more coordinated** in their movements (for some, adding a soccer ball to control may make it more difficult). Some are very accustomed to having a soccer ball at their foot. Regardless of their level of coordination at present, we are concerned with players learning to both control their bodies and the soccer ball. They are still very **egocentric or self-centered** and are beginning to expand their understanding of concepts like **cooperation or competition**. It is vital that the players continue to learn to cooperate by working with a partner or in small groups (2 or 3 others). They are **highly creative, imaginative and great at imitating**. The activities should be geared towards games that are structured very informally. In other words, PLAY, and this is where you can jump in and have just as much fun as your students!

This last point is key to the success of the program. What do children do when they are not in school or sleeping? They are playing and creating games. This is how they learn about their world. Like other players, elementary soccer players do not learn soccer skills by standing in long lines doing structured drills and receiving formal coaching. Elementary soccer players learn best when the coach sets up a game, then stands back (or even better joins in) and lets the learning happen naturally.

Introduce Them To A New Toy And Let Them Play With It.

What is this toy? It is the ball of course.

Children take toys and they explore with them. They create different worlds. They create new ways of using the toy. Isn't this what we want with the soccer ball. We want them to explore, create and take themselves into new worlds – perhaps even imagine themselves in the World Cup Final scoring the winning goal.

Like their other toys, we can make suggestions as to how they use it, but really, they are most interested in their toys when they are creating their own uses and their own worlds.



COAXING the FUNdamentals**Goals of the FUNdamental Program:**

The goal of this program is grounded in individual games and creative play. The majority of activities centre on learning movement concepts (running, jumping, kicking, catching, etc.) as they relate specifically to soccer. Emphasis is also placed on play in small groups. The games are simple, easily taught and not demanding of skills. As children mature, they enjoy participation in running, tag and ball games. That is what this handbook provides. Few team activities are included and the ball games require the skills of throwing, catching, dribbling, passing and shooting.

The amount of learning that will take place and the level of stress encountered by the players will hinge on their abilities to treat the practice environment you have set up like play. **The more structured, formal and organized you make the training, the harder it becomes for the players to stay relaxed, have fun and learn.**

“But I Only Coach Players That Are Elementary School Age!”

You are just as important as every other coach within the developmental process. If a child starts soccer at six and plays to adulthood, that gives roughly fifteen years of development which has to be planned in order to ensure each player receives the greatest benefits from organized youth soccer. It's like a big puzzle in which you are one piece. You may be a big piece or a small piece. You may be the first piece or the last. Whatever your role and position, you are important to the long-term development of each player. Without your piece, the puzzle of soccer development is incomplete. So ask yourself, “What is my role in the development of each player?”

It is important to understand that each coach makes a special contribution to the developing soccer player. In this handbook, I have simply tried to acknowledge this special contribution that you are making by outlining the things that a coach should be looking to help his/her players learn.

Season Objectives:

The MicroStriker coach's piece of the player development puzzle can be spelled out in the season objectives that are to be achieved by the players at this level. Keep these objectives in mind every time you spend a game or practice with your team. When you ask yourself what your contribution to these players is, just look over the season objectives to remind yourself. You should periodically monitor these objectives throughout the season to see if players are on the right track and making progress.

Locomotor Skills - Players will show improvement in running, sliding (side stepping), leaping, jumping, starting and stopping.

Stability Skills - Players will show improvements in balance (both static and dynamic) and dodging.

Social Skills - Players will show improvements in their interaction with other children of the same age within a structured learning environment that stresses play and imagination.

Dribbling - Players will attempt to use both feet and improve balance and coordination (not trip over the ball as much). In Advanced sessions, players will dribble at various speeds and be able to identify open space.

Shooting - Players will attempt to shoot the ball using the instep (laces) of both right and left feet.

Passing - Players will attempt to pass the ball using the inside of both right and left feet.

Controlling - Players will attempt to control the ball first before passing it (do not let players simply kick it and chase it)

Heading - Players will make an effort and attempt to head the ball (will not be as afraid and shy away). The heading should be in their control (from their hands) and they will determine how high to toss).

Catching - Players, as goalkeepers, will be able to catch a ball rolled or thrown towards them as well as a ball thrown directly above them.



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Rolling - Players, as goalkeepers, will be able to roll the ball to the feet of another player over short distances. Perhaps, with patience you can even teach them to roll themselves into small balls and do forward or backward rolls in the grass.

Scrimmage - Players will attempt to use all the general space (spread out instead of swarm around the ball) and begin to appreciate and understand the basic rules and boundaries necessary to play soccer. Players will also begin to understand the concept of cooperation and attempt making passes to teammates

Affective - Players will have **fun**, develop self-confidence and intrinsic motivation towards the game of soccer.



FUNdamental Technical Objectives



Individual Techniques

Free Dribble

Allow the players to dribble freely within a defined area. Encourage them to show you tricks, especially those that the team has practiced in previous practices.

Skipping

Players are encouraged to move with a ball inside of defined area. The players assume a stance behind the ball with one foot forward and one foot back. They rock/skip back and forth from front foot to back foot without touching the ball. They then begin to move around their area while touching the ball as they skip forward with the inside and outside of the front foot. It is important that they touch the ball every time they place their front foot on the ground. Ask the player to make the ball move from side to side by getting their foot around either side of the ball.

Running with the Ball

Running with the ball is similar to dribbling as it is a single player moving with the ball. It is dissimilar to dribbling, in that the player runs with the ball quickly into open space and often without changing direction until they come across a defender or the goalkeeper. When running with the ball, encourage players to use the top or front of the foot and to lengthen their strides, still touching the ball every step.

Turns

Stop Turn (Whoop Turn):



The player places the foot on top of the ball (stopping it) as they continue moving to the other side of the ball. They then turn and dribble back in the opposite direction.

Using the inside of the foot, the player reaches forward, hooking the inside of their foot around the front of the ball. This should stop the ball and move it back into the area that the player was originally dribbled from.

Inside Hook or Twist Off:



Outside Hook or Twist Off:

Using the outside of the foot, the player reaches forward, hooking the outside of their foot around the front of the ball. This should stop the ball and move it back into the area that the player was originally dribbled from.

Cruyff Turn:

Stepping in front of the ball with one foot, the player uses the inside of the foot to hook the ball backwards behind the foot they are standing on. The player dribbles back into the area that they originally dribbled from.



Beating on Opponent One versus One

Matthew's Move

As the player dribbles forward, they jump to one side of the ball onto one foot. They then push the ball in the opposite direction with the outside of the other foot (as shown on the side).

Scissors / Step Over

As the player dribbles forward, with the foot closest to the ball, the player steps around the front of the ball to the other side. They then push the ball in the opposite direction using the outside of the other foot.

Double Scissors

Same as the Scissors, however the player steps around the front of the ball with both feet and then pushes the ball away using the outside of the foot of the leg that they first stepped with.

Shielding

Crucial to keeping the ball in possession as an individual, shielding asks the player to keep their body between the ball and the defender trying to steal the ball.

Group Exercises

Passing Through Windows

The players are encouraged to pass the ball with a partner as they move within a defined area amongst the remainder of the team. In order to receive a pass from their partner, they are asked to find the largest areas ('WINDOWS') between the other players moving around. The larger the WINDOW, the easier the pass will be. The passer is encouraged to pass the ball before the WINDOW closes.



Triangles & Diamonds: Coaching in Games And Competitions:

Your time to really shine and take full charge of your team's coaching will occur during their practice games and competitions. Players must become accustomed to having teammates in which to pass to and to receive passes from. This also means getting used to a MUCH bigger field! Therefore, the focus of your game coaching should contain tactical comments as well as technical comments to reinforce what is being learned in the practice exercises. This section will focus on the key tactical objectives that you should be focusing on in your coaching.

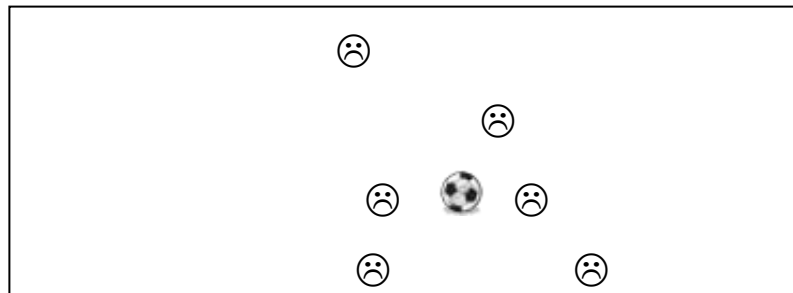
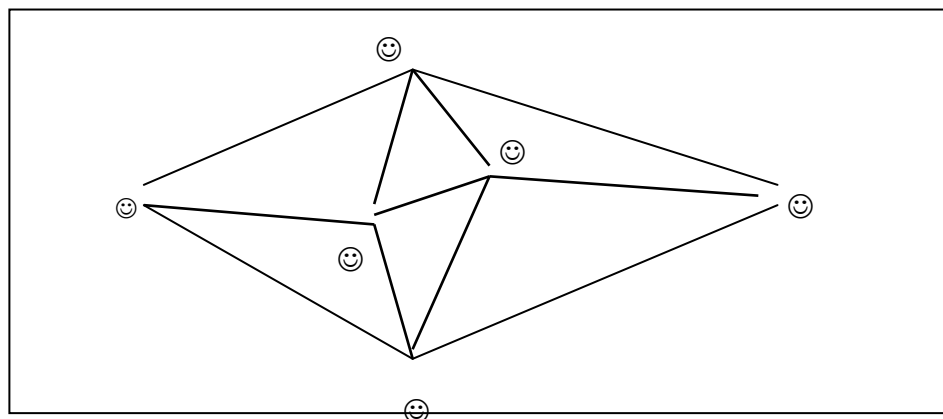
First of all, it is strongly recommend that the following occurs:

- Do not worry about the score in practice or in competitions; instead ask yourself, "How is the team playing?" and "How is each individual playing?"
- Play all players in all positions (it is not encouraging to hear, for instance, a ten or eleven-year-old say that she is a fullback and does not know how to play forward).
- Focus on the overall shape of the team more so than the actual positions as a means of keeping players properly spaced (this will be explained in greater detail below),
- Positively reinforce the effort (not the outcome) and reinforce all efforts, all the time.

Attacking Team Shape is a concept that should allow you to use all of the available space on the field (not have players 'bunching up'). At the same time, it should also not cause players to become specialized at doing only one thing (it is way too early for a player to feel that he/she is only a winger or a defender, etc.). Attacking Team Shape is based on the principles of play and requires that once your team has possession of the ball, players spread out from side to side (width) and from end to end (depth/penetration or length).

Regardless of the system of play you use (that is, how many forwards, midfielders and fullbacks you play with), the attacking shape is always the same. This shape, geometrically speaking, is a combination of **triangles and diamonds**. Below you will find two examples of team shape. The first shows a team that is bunched up (something we can probably all relate to), the second shows a team that is assuming a good attacking shape.



COAXING the FUNDamentals**'The Beehive'** - All Players Swarming Around the Ball**'The Diamond'** - All Players in a Good Attacking Shape

As you can see, the players in the second example are spreading out from side to side and from end to end. The player with the ball will always have three passing options (one forward, one to the side or **'square'** as it is called in soccer and one back or **'support'** as it is called in soccer (we often call it simply "Help" ... "Help Forward", "Help to the Side", "Help Backwards". This is a key point to maintaining possession of the soccer ball and you should be coaching your players to provide the player with the ball always with at the least three passing options.

You may have noticed that in the first diagram there are six unhappy players swarming around the ball while in the second diagram, there are only six players spread out on the field. This was done to provide you with an idea of the basic attacking team shape. Just remind yourself that whatever system of play you use, the players should be assuming this attacking shape as much as possible. So constantly remind your wide players to stay wide, and your forwards and defenders to spread out long. Where ever the ball goes on the field, the shape goes with it, constantly remaining in the basic diamond form, created by triangles. Whether your players are playing four-aside or 11-aside, the shapes within the larger team system shape remain the same.

Multiple Goal Games

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Four Goal Game:

Game Rules:

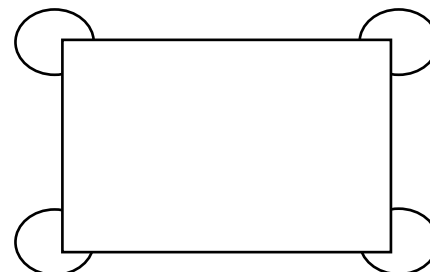
- ✓ Set up game with in an area 15 x 25 metres,
- ✓ 2 vs 2 or 3 vs 3 within area,
- ✓ Play starts with coach passing ball to one team. Each team must pass at least twice before dribbling through one of the small goals,
- ✓ When ball goes out of bounds on the side, re-start play with kick-in from the side on the field,
- ✓ Game played for 2 minutes, then the players can take a short rest, or to allow time to change the opposition for each team (move teams to other fields),

Objectives:

- ✓ To achieve pace of running with ball and accuracy in passing,
- ✓ To recognize opportunities to pass or dribble.

Variations:

- ✓ Place a small area in the corners of the field. Place a player in each of the corners. The players in the middle must pass at least twice before passing to one of the players in the corner areas for a goal.



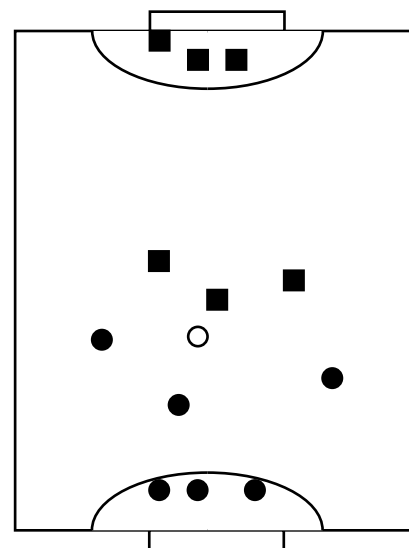
Change Game

Organization:

- ✓ Group is split into two; if odd number, coach joins in or plays strongest team a player short,
- ✓ In the example shown, three players from each team play a normal game,
- ✓ Three players on each team are collective goalkeepers – within a designated area that the goalkeepers cannot leave and the players cannot enter,
- ✓ Coach shouts “Change” and the on-field players run back to their goals without touching the ball again – and become the goalkeepers,
- ✓ Goalkeeping teams become the on-field teams and move quickly to win possession of the ball,
- ✓ Coach shouts “Change” at any time,
- ✓ Make goals wide enough so that it’s not too difficult to score,
- ✓ Any major infraction means a free shot from the half-way line, with no goalkeepers.

Teaching Points:

- ✓ Encourage players to pass frequently in order to create scoring chances,
- ✓ Encourage goalkeeping teams to move sideways together, as a wall,
- ✓ Defenders should help each other and should stay on their feet as much as possible.



COAXING with FUNdamental Games



COAXING the FUNDamentals**Practice : Week #1 Theme: Introduction to basic body and manipulative control****Warm-up (10 min) [Learning To Dribble Game]**

Purpose: To get players smiling ☺ , sweating and to introduce dribbling with different parts of the feet

- ✓ Everyone is inside half of the field with a ball in a small area
- ✓ Each player should have the ball at their feet
- ✓ Have the player tap the ball ahead out of feet and then run to the spot where the ball stops; repeat this process a few times
- ✓ Now ask players to try to get to the ball and tap it again before it stops rolling
- ✓ Ask them if it is easier to keep the ball rolling with larger taps or small taps (which is less work?)
- ✓ Using little taps (dribbling), have players dribble their ball around the area using right foot only, left foot only, both feet, inside of feet only, outside of feet only, bottom/sole of feet, heels, etc.
- ✓ Finally, have players focus on using all the available space to dribble their ball so that collisions are avoided
- ??? Ask the players to tell you the parts of the foot that can be used to dribble the ball

Advanced Dribbling Warm-up (10 min)Free Dribble

- ✓ Players can dribble within a confined area attempting to keep the ball close to their feet. At this point show the different parts of the foot where the ball can be played and ask the players to show you as many ways as possible to use these parts
- ✓ You may want to allow one or two children to show their ways of dribbling to the whole group
- ✓ Encourage the use of all parts of the feet - inside, outside, heel, top (laces), bottom/sole

Skipping with the Ball

- ✓ The players assume a stance behind the ball with one foot forward and one foot back
- ✓ They rock/skip back and forth from front foot to back foot without touching the ball
- ✓ They then begin to move around their area while touching the ball as they skip forward with the inside and outside of the front foot
- ✓ It is important that they touch the ball every time they place their front foot on the ground
- ✓ Ask the player to make the ball move from side to side by getting their foot around either side of the ball

Destroyers and Construction Workers (10 min)

Purpose: Soccer-specific ball and body awareness

- ✓ Scatter 15-20 pylons or markers on the field throughout a 20 x 20 y area (cans of food or drink, or plastic pop bottles and milk cartons filled partially with water or sand). These pylons should be standing up straight
- ✓ Divide the group into two equal teams. One group is designated the Destroyers and the other group the Construction Workers
- ✓ On the coach's "GO", the Destroyers attempt to tip over the pylons with their hands, while the Construction Workers attempt repair the pylons by standing them back up
- ✓ Set a time for this activity and at the end count the number of pylons that the destroyers have knocked down, then allow the teams to switch roles
- ✓ After each group has had an opportunity being both a Construction Worker and a Destroyer, reverse their roles again
- ✓ The second time that the players must dribble a soccer ball and must have their foot on top of the ball when they tip over a pylon either as a Construction Worker or a Destroyer

Monkey See, Monkey Do (10 min)

Purpose: Soccer-specific body part awareness

- ✓ Each player has a ball, including coach and a semi-circle is formed around the coach
- ✓ The coach says a body part out loud and then will bounce the ball off the body part and catch it
- ✓ The players copy exactly what the coach did
- ✓ Body parts used include left and right instep (laces) of foot; left and right thigh; chest; left and right shoulder; and forehead
- ✓ Gradually increase the speed until you are bouncing the ball off a body part and catching continuously (try to get a flow going)
- ✓ Progress to asking players to show the group a new body part to bounce the ball off of and catch

Change Sides Game (10 min)

Purpose: Soccer-specific body/ball management

- ✓ Two parallel lines are established 15 to 20 yards apart with cones. Half of the players are at each end standing side by side between a pair of cones.
- ✓ On signal, all cross to the other line, face the center and stand at attention
- ✓ The first group to do this correctly wins a point



Practice : Week #2 Theme: Introduction to basic body and manipulative control

Warm-up (10 min) [Goalkeeper Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺ , sweating and to introduce goalkeeper catching/collecting and rolling

- ✓ Using half a field, get everyone inside that area with a ball
- ✓ Have player carry ball in hands as they jog (or slide) around the area
- ✓ As they jog, players roll ball ahead of them so that they have to sprint to get it and pick it up again and then continue jogging
- ✓ After repeating this a number of times, have players throw the ball above their heads and try to catch it as they jog (or slide) around the area

Advanced Dribbling (10 min)

Free Dribble

- ✓ Players can dribble within a confined area attempting to keep the ball close to their feet. At this point show the different parts of the foot where the ball can be played and ask the players to show you as many ways as possible to use these parts
- ✓ You may want to allow one or two children to show their ways of dribbling to the whole group
- ✓ Encourage the use of all parts of the feet - inside, outside, heel, top (laces), bottom/sole

Skipping with the Ball

- ✓ The players assume a stance behind the ball with one foot forward and one foot back
 - ✓ They rock/skip back and forth from front foot to back foot without touching the ball
 - ✓ They then begin to move around their area while touching the ball as they skip forward with the inside and outside of the front foot
 - ✓ It is important that they touch the ball every time they place their front foot on the ground
 - ✓ Ask the player to make the ball move from side to side by getting their foot around either side of the ball
 - ✓ Have the players move the further from side to side than they have in previous practices
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- ✓ On the coach's command i.e. "Touch with your Head", the players stop the ball and touch it with their head
 - ✓ Use various body parts and then combine body parts i.e. "Touch with forehead, right elbow and left knee"

Red Light Game (10 min)

Purpose: Soccer-specific body/ball management including stopping and starting

- ✓ A goal line is established at each end of half a soccer field
- ✓ The object of the game is to move across the area successfully without getting caught
- ✓ The coach is the leader and stands on the goal line furthest from the players
- ✓ The leader turns away from the players and says, "Green light!"
- ✓ In the meantime, the players move toward the goal line (running or sliding)
- ✓ When the leader faces the group and says, "Red light!" everyone must stop motionless
- ✓ If the leader catches any movement by any player, that player is required to go back in line with the last player in the group at that time
- ✓ The first player to reach the goal line successfully is the winner and becomes the leader for the next game; repeat 3 to 4 times
- ✓ It is the ball that must be stopped motionless not the player when "Red light!" is shouted
- ✓ Have players experiment stopping the ball with different parts of the foot (inside, outside, sole, heel)

Squirrels and Nuts Game (10 min)

Purpose: Soccer-specific body/ball management including dribbling

- ✓ Divide players (the squirrels) into four equal groups (using colored vests or by the colors of their shorts or socks or hats, no hats)
- ✓ Each group is to stand in one corner of half a soccer field (the nest)
- ✓ Soccer balls (the nuts) are placed in the middle of the area
- ✓ On the coaches command squirrels scamper around the area
- ✓ When coach calls, "Feeding time!" squirrels try to collect all nuts and bring them back to their nest (by dribbling one ball at a time)
- ✓ Squirrels can also steal nuts from other nests but are not allowed to stop other squirrels from taking the nuts

Scrimmage (30 min)



Practice : Week #3 Theme: Introduction to basic body and manipulative control

Warm-up (10 min) [Dodging & Feinting Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺ , sweating and to introduce players to the skill of dodging/feinting without a ball

- ✓ Using half a soccer field, have everyone inside the area with a soccer ball
- ✓ Players should jog into traffic (other players) so that they have to weave in and out of each other's way
- ✓ Instead of simply weaving in and out, players should try to fake out the person that they are approaching (make him/her think you are going one way but instead go the other)
- ✓ Encourage players to try using different body parts to initiate the fakes with (head, shoulder, arm, leg, etc.) and to make fakes that take them in different directions(not always forward)

Review Skipping with the Ball (3 min)

Purpose: To reinforce the movements and ball manipulation

- ✓ Refer to Practice : Week # 1 or Week # 2

Plastic Bag Tail Tag Game (10 min)

Purpose: To practice the skill of dodging (or feinting as it is called in soccer) and running, twisting, turning, stopping, starting

- ✓ To perform Everyone tucks a plastic bag into the back of their pants that must hang out at least 1/2 way (a tail)
- ✓ On the coaches command, all players try to pull out other players' tails while protecting their own (cannot protect with hands)
- ✓ When a player loses his/her tail, he/she must perform an activity (push-ups, jumping jacks, etc.) before re-entering the activity
- ✓ When the tail is lost, the player should step outside the area and replace his/her tail
- ✓ The area should be large enough that players are not bumping into each other but small enough that players have to work hard to not lose their tails
- ✓ Collect all plastic bags at the end of the activity and return them for recycling

Triangle Tag (10 min)

Purpose: To practice the skill of dodging (or feinting as it is called in soccer) and running, twisting, turning, stopping, starting and dribbling

- ✓ Groups of four, one person 'it', other three players join hands to form triangle
- ✓ 'It' player tries to tag a designated player within the triangle (cannot go through triangle, must go around)
- ✓ The triangle can move and spin around to avoid the 'it' player
- ✓ Switch players around so that everyone has a chance to be 'it'
- ✓ Progress to 'it' player dribbling a ball while players in triangle must hop on one foot

Scrimmage (30 min)



Practice : Week #4 Theme: Introduction to basic body and manipulative control

Warm-up (10 min) [Everyone is 'it' Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺ , sweating and to work on the skill of dodging (feinting)

- ✓ Everyone is 'it' and play occurs in an area 15 yards by 15 yards
- ✓ If you are tagged, you go down on one knee
- ✓ When on one knee you can free yourself by 1) reaching out and tagging someone else as they run past, or 2) reaching out and high fiving someone who is on one knee freeing both of you

Advanced Dribbling (10 min)

Purpose: To introduce specific techniques to players

Dribbling Techniques (Stop Turn / Whoop Turn !)

- ✓ As the players dribble / skip with the ball, within a defined area, they put one foot on top of the ball, rolling it behind them and then running bodies around
- ✓ Encourage them to roll the ball, bend their knees and jump over the top of the ball
- ✓ The players can be told that this is called a Whoop! Turn and every time they turn they should say "Whoop!", loudly (Whoop ! will add novelty to the technique)

Jump and Catch

- ✓ Player place the ball between their feet, jump with the ball still tightly held and then release it while they are still in the air
- ✓ "Who can catch the ball before it hits the ground 10 times in a row?"

Octopus Game (10 min)

Purpose: To practice dodging while dribbling a soccer ball

- ✓ Divide the team into two groups
- ✓ Half of the players will be taggers (octopii) and they must spread out from each other at arms length inside a 30 yard by 10 yard area
- ✓ Their formation should be staggered so that there is enough room for other players to weave through
- ✓ Taggers must stand perfectly still but can try to tag oncoming players(with their tentacles) by reaching out as far as possible
- ✓ Other players have a ball and start at one end of the area
- ✓ They try to dribble through to the other end with out getting tagged by an octopus
- ✓ If successful, they turn and dribble back along the outside of the area to the starting line again

Freak Out Dribble Tag Game (10 min)

Purpose: To practice dodging (feinting) while dribbling a soccer ball

- ✓ Every player has a ball and stands in an area roughly 1/2 of the soccer field in size (or any corner of the field that you can call your own)
- ✓ The coach and/or other adult(s), are 'it'
- ✓ This is the same as normal tag but everybody is also dribbling a soccer ball at the same time (except for 'it' people)
- ✓ When player gets tagged, he/she must stop on the spot and freak out for a couple of seconds (that is, have sort of a nervous breakdown with lots of shaking but limit the amount of screaming done - players love it when the coach demonstrates how to 'freak out')
- ✓ Once the player has 'freaked out' he/she returns to dribbling

Scrimmage (30 min)



Practice : Week #5 Theme: Introduction to space

Warm-up (10 min) [Where's My Space Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺ , sweating and to make players aware of the differences between personal and general space

- ✓ Mark off an area about the size of 1/2 of the soccer field with cones
- ✓ Have players run (or do any other locomotor movement)
- ✓ When coach says, "Freeze!" all players stop very quickly where they are
- ✓ Players should be spread evenly throughout the entire space (if not show them how to); repeat 3 to 4 times
- ✓ Tell players that this is called the "general space"
- ✓ Now have each player explore all of the space around them as they stand on the spot
- ✓ Each player should reach their arms out forward, backward, left and right as well as above and below them
- ✓ Tell the players that this is called "personal space" (it is like a bubble that surrounds them)
- ✓ Have the players travel in "general space" noting to them that as they move, their "personal space" goes with them like a suit of armor they are wearing
- ✓ Progress to each player dribbling a soccer ball in the "general space" and as the coach says, "Freeze!" players must stop the ball and stand like statues spread out in the space

Frogs and Alligators Game (10 min)

Purpose: To help players learn to protect the ball when it is in their personal space as well as to make good use of general space

- ✓ Mark off an area about 1/4 of the field with cones and then within the middle of this area make a smaller square about 10 yards by 10 yards
- ✓ The small square is the lilly pad which sits on top of the water (the larger square)
- ✓ Most of the players (the frogs) have a soccer ball each and spread out along the perimeter of the large area
- ✓ Two or three players (the alligators) do not have a ball and stand (swim) inside the large area (water) around the lilly pad
- ✓ The frogs try to dribble (swim) across the water to the lilly pad
- ✓ As long as they are on land or on the lilly pad the alligators cannot eat them (take their balls)
- ✓ Frogs try to go from land to lilly pad and back again as many times as possible
- ✓ If an alligator gets a frog's ball, the two switch roles
- ✓ Half way through, explain how frogs can better protect the ball
- ✓ By occupying more of their personal space (making themselves bigger) the alligator will not have as easy a time getting the ball
- ✓ Frogs should get their arms out to the side and use them to hold off alligators (they can lean against the alligators using their forearm but they cannot push using their hand)

Looking for Space Game (10 min)

Purpose: To help players look for and recognize useful space in soccer

- ✓ Players travel around inside an area about ¼ of the field
- ✓ As the players travel around they should be looking at the general space carefully
- ✓ What they are looking for are big pockets or areas of space where no one else's
- ✓ As soon as they see an open space they should sprint into it
- ✓ They sprint into it because everyone else is looking for space and it may become a race for whoever sees it first
- ✓ After sprinting into an open space keep jogging around the area looking for other areas to open up and sprint into them
- ✓ Progress to each player having a ball and dribbling
- ✓ As they dribble around, they look for space and when they see it, they should accelerate with their ball into it, then stop their ball and begin dribbling at normal speed again

Advanced Looking for Space Game (10 min)

Dribbling Slowly

- ✓ As the players are dribbling slowly ask them to lift their heads so that they are able to take photographs through their eyes of the surrounding area

Attacking Open Space Directly in Front of the Dribbler

- ✓ If the player sees open space directly in front of them, they should sprint as quickly as possible into that space. When they get into that space they should slow down and dribble slowly again and look for more open space

??? Remember that a challenge goes a long way. "Can you get into the space before anyone else?"

Attacking Open Space to the Side of the Dribbler



Practice : Week #6 Theme: Introduction to space

Warm-up (10 min) [Steal a Ball Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺ , sweating and to help players learn to protect the ball when it is in their personal space as well as to make good use of general space

- ✓ Have all players inside an area the size of 1/4 of the field with a ball (except for two players)
- ✓ The two that do not have ball try to take one from those who do
- ✓ If the takeover is successful there will be a new person without the ball who will look to take one off of someone else
- ✓ Remember to stress the importance of using the arms to become bigger and hold of challenges
- ✓ Dribblers should also be encouraged to try and keep their body between the ball and the challenger (in soccer this is called **shielding**)

Follow the Leader Game (10 min)

Purpose: To make players aware of the common pathways used in soccer to make passes along or runs into space by

- ✓ Make 20 x 20 yard squares using cones and break players into groups of four; one group per square
- ✓ One player, the player at the front of the single file line of group members, is the leader
- ✓ He/She must lead the others along the perimeter of the square
- ✓ The leader must also call out the pathway/direction that he/she is leading the group in
- ✓ The directions would include forward, backward, sideways, diagonally (cutting from one corner to the other on an angle; show players what a diagonal is) and curved (leader takes players into center of square and goes around in a half a circle; show players how)
- ✓ When coach gives signal, the leader drops to the last and the second person in line becomes the new leader
- ✓ Progress to having a second signal that means the lines change directions (the player who is last in line becomes the new leader)

Advanced Dribbling (10 min)

Purpose: To introduce specific techniques to players

Dribbling Techniques (Matthew's Move)

- ✓ With the ball standing still:
- ✓ Jump to one side of the ball and balance on one foot, then push the ball with the outside of the other foot
- ✓ It is good to use the phrase, "Jump In, Push Out"
- ✓ Next, ask the players to dribble the ball and practice the Matthew's Move while dribbling

Dribbling Techniques (Scissors Move)

- ✓ With the ball standing still, have the players stand to one side of the ball:
- ✓ The foot closest to the ball moves around the front of the ball and is planted on the other side
- ✓ The other foot goes around the back and then is places beside the first foot (we like to tell young players that they imagine their legs as the two blades of scissors and they should open the scissors around the front of the ball, and then close the scissors by bringing the blade behind the ball)
- ✓ How fast can the players do this motion while the ball stands still ("Around - Behind")
- ✓ Instead of putting the foot beside the first foot, use the outside of the second foot to push the ball forward and to the side
- ✓ "Step in one direction, push the ball in the other direction"
- ✓ Practice both of these moves while moving. Emphasis should be placed on the player's change of direction

Pirates Game (10 min)

Purpose: To help players learn to protect the ball when it is in their personal space as well as to make good use of general space

- ✓ Two goal lines are established about 1/4 a field apart
- ✓ Most of the players stand spread along one goal line with a ball except for one player
- ✓ This one player stands at the other goal line without a ball and is referred to as the pirate (should make lots of pirate noises - ARRHHH!)
- ✓ On the coach's signal all dribblers try to get their ball safely to the other goal line
- ✓ The pirate tries to kick the ball away from as many dribblers as possible
- ✓ If this happens, they become pirates too
- ✓ The last person or two with a ball become the new pirates for the next game; repeat 2 to 3 times

Scrimmage (30 min)



COAXING the FUNDamentals

Practice: Week #7 Theme: Introduction to basic movement quality (effort), basic body control

Warm-up (10 min) [Sky High Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺, sweating and to help players determine the differences between strong and light movements using the goalkeeper skills of throwing and catching/collecting as well as the player skill of controlling

- ✓ Each player should have a ball and be in their own space
- ✓ Start by having players throw ball up in air and catch it
- ✓ Begin with a light toss and catch using two hands and progress towards a much stronger toss and catch
- ✓ Next have players drop ball from hands and kick it in the air using the instep (laces) of the foot and then catch it
- ✓ Again, have players toss ball in air (lightly) and use different body parts (head, chest, thigh, foot) to try and catch the ball
- ✓ The object is to try and absorb as much of the force of the ball as possible as it descends
- ✓ Continue with the player moving around in general space

Dribbling Practice (5 min)

Purpose: To reinforce the dribbling techniques learned during earlier practices

- ✓ Have the players dribble freely or skip with the ball for 30 seconds
- ✓ Demonstrate the Stop Turn / Whoop Turn ! and explain in 10 seconds
- ✓ Have the players practice the Stop Turn / Whoop Turn ! as many times as possible in 20 seconds
- ✓ Demonstrate the Inside Hook and Outside Hook and explain in 10 seconds
- ✓ Have the players practice the Inside Hook and Outside Hook as many times as possible in 20 seconds
- ✓ Demonstrate the Matthew's Move and explain in 10 seconds
- ✓ Have the players practice the Matthew's Move as many times as possible in 20 seconds
- ✓ Demonstrate the Scissors Move and explain in 10 seconds
- ✓ Have the players practice the Scissors Move as many times as possible in 20 seconds
- ✓ Demonstrate all of the previously used techniques in 10 seconds
- ✓ Have the players practice all of the techniques as many times as possible in 30 seconds

Pass Tag (5 min)

Purpose: To have the players moving around and passing the ball with the inside of the foot

- ✓ Inside of an area 20 x 20 yards each player stands with one foot on top of their ball in their own space
- ✓ On the coach's "GO", players attempt to pass (kick) their ball at another player below the knees
- ✓ The players must use the inside of the foot so that the ball stays low and they have the greatest accuracy
- ✓ Players are permitted to jump or dodge the ball coming toward them
- ✓ If they are hit below the knees with a ball they must go to the outside of the area and perform 5 jumping jacks and then return to the area with a ball
- ✓ Continue the game, stopping occasionally to coach proper technique and to change the exercise that they perform when hit

5-Ball Dodge Tag (10 min)

Purpose: To help players with running at contrasting speeds as well as practice dodging, throwing and catching

- ✓ 5 taggers, each with a ball, chase other players within a 1/2 area of the field
- ✓ Taggers can throw/kick or tag the other players with ball (below waist)
- ✓ When tagged you can have players frozen or they perform an activity (push-ups, bunny hops, etc.)
- ✓ If frozen, free players can 'unfreeze' others by giving them a 'HIGH TEN'
- ✓ Give all players a chance to be both roles; repeat 2 to 3 times

Guard the Castle (10 min)

Purpose: To practice rolling, shooting, passing and controlling the ball as well as changing directions quickly

- ✓ A couple of soccer balls (or things that can be hit or knocked over) are placed inside the center of a circle made by the players
- ✓ One or more players are assigned to guard the balls/cones
- ✓ The ball is rolled/passed/shot at the cones
- ✓ If a cone/ball is hit, the thrower/kicker switches places with a guard
- ✓ Variations: add more guards, more balls/cones, or a second set of ball/cones within the circle to be guarded (more work for the guard players, easier for throwers/kickers)

Scrimmage (30 min)

COAXING the FUNDamentals

Practice : Week # 8 Theme: Introduction to movement quality (effort), body control and relationships

Warm-up (10 min) [Activity Dribble Tag Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺ , sweating and to review dodging (feinting) and dribbling

- ✓ All players have a ball inside an area the size of 1/2 of the field
- ✓ The coach and/or other adult(s), are it
- ✓ If a player is tagged, he/she leaves the area and performs a specified activity (sit-ups, run around a tree, parent sitting in lawn chair, etc.)
- ✓ Once the activity has been performed the player re-enters the activity dribbling around and trying not to get tagged

Partner Tag (10 min)

Purpose: To practice dodging (feinting), dribbling and working together with other players

- ✓ Two players are in a pair with an arm locked to each other at the elbow (they are 'it')
- ✓ All players (including 'it' pair) travel around an area about 1/2 of the size of the field
- ✓ Try to tag free players, if successful player tagged joins the pair (by linking an arm to the player who tagged him/her)
- ✓ When the three tag another player and make the linked group now four players long, they separate into two pairs
- ✓ Continue only one player remains
- ✓ Progress to have free players dribble a soccer ball while trying not to get tagged

Small Ball Soccer (10 min)

Purpose: To practice ball manipulation and movement with various types and sizes of balls

- ✓ Begin by setting up a small field with a goal at either end (40 x 30 y)
- ✓ Divide the players into two teams
- ✓ Begin the game with a normal soccer ball
- ✓ After a minute, add a second ball
- ✓ After two minutes, remove one of the normal soccer balls and add two different size or shaped balls (i.e. examples of different ball may be squash balls, Nerf soccer balls, Nerf footballs, small hand ball, rolled or taped up pair of socks, beach balls, rugby ball)
- ✓ You can use anything that is different for the children that will be more difficult and interestingly funny to watch

Star Wars Game (10 min)

Purpose: To practice throwing, catching, running fast, changing directions quickly and dodging (feinting) while working together with other players

- ✓ Divide players into two teams (Imperial Army and Rebel Resistance)
- ✓ The area is ¼ of a soccer field divided by cones into two halves; each half also has a 10 by 10 yard grid (a base)
- ✓ Each team occupies one half of the area and cannot cross the halfway line
- ✓ One player from each side is made a Jedi (Luke/Princess Leah for the Rebels and Darth Vader for the Imperials)
- ✓ All soccer balls are lined up at the center of the area
- ✓ When the coach shouts "May the force be with you!" all players run to center and try to grab as many soccer balls as possible
- ✓ They throw the balls at their opponents trying to make contact below the waist
- ✓ If hit, player is frozen in a time warp
- ✓ Jedi can free frozen soldiers by tagging them. Jedi must be careful because he/she can be hit and frozen when off of the home base (must protect Jedi or game is over if he/she gets frozen).
- ✓ One player from either team (Han Solo/Princess Leah or Boba Fett) is allowed to enter the other team's half and try to tag the Jedi and freeze him/her
- ✓ This player cannot be hit and frozen until he/she comes into the opponents half (this player is always safe within his/her own half)
- ✓ If this player gets hit, he/she returns back to own half of field and a new Han Solo/Princess Leah or Boba Fett is chosen

Scrimmage (30 min)

Practice : Week #9 Theme: Introduction to basic relationships

Warm-up (10 min) [Partner Warm-up Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺ , sweating and to introduce players to the concept of working together with another individual

- ✓ Players pair up with one ball per pair
- ✓ Players stand back to back and pass the ball to each other by going over their heads and then bending down and going through their legs
- ✓ Players next twist side to side pass the ball to each other
- ✓ Next, without the ball, pairs race against each other
- ✓ The race is to see how many over/unders a pair can do in a time limit set by the coach
- ✓ One over/under consists of one of the partners leap frogging his/her partner from behind and then crawling through his/her partner's legs from the front
- ✓ Switch so that stationary partner gets to do over/unders and active partner gets to rest

Twins Game (10 min)

Purpose: To help players with body management, running and dribbling while working with one other players

- ✓ The area should be about 1/2 of a soccer field
- ✓ Each player should have a partner (twin)
- ✓ Coach gives commands such as "Take three hops and two leaps" or "Walk backward four steps and three skips"
- ✓ When the pairs are separated, the coach says, "Find your twin!"
- ✓ Players find their twin and stand frozen back to back
- ✓ The goal is not to be the last pair to find each other and assume the frozen position
- ✓ Progress to each player dribbling a ball
- ✓ Coach gives commands like, "Dribble with left foot only," "Dribble with inside of feet only," "Stop your ball and touch your right knee to the ball," and "Stop your ball and get someone else's"
- ✓ When the coach shouts, "Find your twin!" players dribble toward their twin and freeze back to back with ball under foot

Circle Straddle Ball Game (10 min)

Purpose: To help players improve on ball rolling, catching, passing and faking while working with others

- ✓ Players are in a circle formation, facing inward, each stands in a wide straddle stance with the side of the foot against the neighbor's foot
- ✓ The hands are on the knees; two balls are used
- ✓ The object of the game is to roll one of the balls between the legs of another player before that player can get hands down to stop the ball
- ✓ Progress to having one child in the center of the circle with the only ball
- ✓ The center player tries to pass the ball through the legs of any child, masking intent by using fakes and changes of direction
- ✓ Any player allowing the ball to go through changes places with the center person

Scrimmage (30 min)



Practice : Week #10 **Theme: Introduction to basic relationships**

Warm-up (10 min) [Shadow Game]

Purpose: To get players ☺ , sweating and to help players improve their ability to work with one other individual while dribbling a soccer ball

- ✓ All players have a ball inside an area (1/2 of a soccer field) and finds a partner
- ✓ Inside the area, one partner dribbles around and the other partner mimics all actions (shadow)
- ✓ Then have partners switch roles on you command; the follower becoming the new leader
- ✓ Remember to tell players to use all the available space and try not to run into each other
- ✓ The goal is for the leader to use all his/her tricks and fakes while dribbling to try and 'shake' the follower

Passing on the Move Game (10 min)

Purpose: To help players improve their ability to work with one other individual while passing

- ✓ In an area 1/4 to 1/2 of a soccer field, have players pair up with one ball per pair
- ✓ As partners move throughout the space, they pass the ball back and forth trying to always keep the same distance apart
- ✓ Players should not move around the area in a circle but instead should cut across the space frequently as they pass the ball
- ✓ Have players experiment using the different surfaces of the foot to pass and control while running with their partner
- ✓ Next, progress to where the passer varies his/her pass (directly to the receiver, slightly ahead, slightly behind)
- ✓ See if players can figure out which pass works best and under what circumstances

Monkey in the Middle Game (10 min)

Purpose: To have two players learn to work together in order to keep a ball away from another individual using throwing, catching, passing and controlling skills

- ✓ Have players get into groups of three with one ball per group
- ✓ Two players work together throwing the ball back and forth while the third person tries to intercept it
- ✓ If the pair can make three catches and throws in a row they get a point
- ✓ If the one intercepts the ball he/she gets a point
- ✓ Coach gives signal for players to switch roles
- ✓ Progress to using passing and control with the feet to play the game
- ✓ Coach should make the point that the cooperating player trying to receive the ball should not stand directly behind the monkey in the middle (tell the player not to stand in that player's shadow but instead to move to one side or the other in order to be open to receive a pass)

Scrimmage (30 min)



Bits and Bites on COAXING the FUNdamentals And Coaching Methods



Using Circuits and Parents

If you watch UM's Summer Soccer Camp Programs, you will see the coaches utilizing a simple rotation of players through a circuit. During one Camp Program I was leading back in Canada, we had 100 players, all 11 years of age or less. Even with the quality coaches that were assisting, a six hour day with one coach is a long day for players aged 6-11. Players at this age need variety. Yes we could have simply changed the games. But we went one step further. Every 10 minutes we gave them a new coach, a new exercise or game, and a new position on the field. Everything was new, everything was novel.

I want all coaches to consider Circuits within your training. But what if you have only yourself to run the team? Two suggestions. First is the easiest. Combine your team with another coach's team that trains at the same time and have that coach control a station with a group of players. Second suggestion. Parents, it is time to put down the coffee and the umbrella and get out there and have some fun. All you have to do is organize one station, one game that lasts 10 minutes. It is amazing how quickly 10 minutes flies by in a Circuit. So you don't know anything about coaching or soccer? The Head Coach will provide you with all the information that you need. It may be a simple tag game or a soccer related fun activity that requires no technical soccer background. Hey, jump in and play yourself. The players will love it.

Circuits are a way to add variety and novelty to training sessions. Instead of throwing the ball out and playing for 30 minutes coaches, organize three stations, divide your team or the teams, and find some volunteers to help you. Parents, 10 minutes of giving a hand with activity organization keeps you warmer than standing with that coffee in hand.

When Do We Practice Passing?

Young players are egocentric and do not truly understand the mechanics of a team or space. It is there stage of development that dictates this. They would like to have the ball to themselves rather than give it to someone else. They don't understand that spacing themselves out on the field makes it difficult for the opposition to defend as it also creates passing options and channels. This is one of the reasons for the herd of stampeding eight year olds up and down the field.

But they don't have to understand that they should be passing. But the coaches should. If you ask a seven year old to take up proper passing positions and you teach passing on a regular basis, you may be fighting nature. If these players cannot understand the space that a team uses for passing, and if they cannot understand the need for passing, why do we beat our heads against a wall in hopes that our U9's will be a great passing team. Could we spend our time at practice, and use our encouragement more wisely?

The young soccer player wants the ball. This is the other reason for the herd. So when we practice we should attempt to give each of them a ball. Between the ages of 6 to 12 years we know that we are capable of learning and retaining motor skills the fastest. This is the period of time that we want to teach player about ball manipulation. Skills such as dribbling, running with the ball, juggling, are the vital skills at this age.

"Not Bad" - Not Good!

When we listen to many coaches on a soccer field we often hear the phrase "Not Bad". But what does it mean? If we look at each word in isolation, 'not' is a negative, as is 'bad'. Two negatives. Well a student studying English may say that this is a double negative and consequently becomes a positive phrase. But how does a player perceive "Not Bad"?

Some players may think it is a positive statement when the coach comments on their play or skill by saying "Not Bad". Others however, recognize that there exists no positive word in the phrase "Not Bad". A player may ask, "Thanks coach, it was 'Not Bad', does this mean that it was neither bad nor good." We are sending little information with "Not Bad". We tell the player that the execution wasn't a bad thing, nor was it a good thing. Further, "Not Bad" offers no constructive information that will help the player execute the skill better in the future.

Remember that the feedback that we want is positive and constructive. "That was a good attempt, next time, place your foot beside the ball when you pass to your teammate." Coaches, let's be better than "Not Bad".



What do we coach during a game?***“Control”, “Can you Pass? Can you Dribble? Can you Shoot?”***

When you stand on the side and watch coaches during a game you will see the different types. The Talker/Screamer is the one I will mention today. The Talker/Screamer has a higher heart rate than the players because they are actually playing every step, every pass, every tackle that the players play. Watch their body language because sometimes they sway from side to side as if able to move the player's body with their own subtle movements. The Talker/Screamer will continually speak to, or scream to the players, giving them directions. Tell them when to pass, where to pass, where to mark, when to tackle, and sometimes what they should do when the get the ball even when the ball is 50 yards away from the player.

Being involved in the game is okay. It demonstrates excitement and enthusiasm. But what should we be telling players in a game. “A coach asked me how he can stop yelling so much during a game.” Easy, only coach those things in a game that you have practiced previously. This brings us back to the Theme article. Coaches should identify specific factors in a team that are not working well or that they would like to work on improving. They can then isolate these technical and tactical factors within their teams training sessions. Come game day, this isolated factor is what the coach observes. Everything else can be going wrong, but this is the one that they reinforce. This reinforcement is what will make the knowledge permanent with the players.

So when you coach, please don't attempt to correct everything that the player or the team is doing wrong between the start and finish whistle of the game. Training is the time for correction of isolated game factors, and the game is the time for reinforcement.

Is Juggling Good?

No, we do not mean the interchange of three balls around and around in someone's hands. Juggling in soccer means to keep the ball up in the air using all parts of the body (usually feet, thighs and head), except hands. Now is it worthwhile as a coach to introduce juggling to the players and encourage them to practice. A definite “Yes”.

Juggling, like dribbling in soccer compares to dribbling or shooting hoops in basketball, or stick handling or shooting a ball against a wall in hockey. These are all activities that the players can perform on their own, without a coach, parent or teammate. They are also activities that can provide the child with instant gratification. Think about children entering a gymnasium and picking up a ball. What is the first thing that they usually try to do? Shoot a hoop. This is because of this instantaneous feedback or gratification. The child realizes that they missed or scored. They consider the changes that must be made to correct the shot. Feedback and gratification that there for the child without instruction from an outside source like a coach.

When juggling, players must develop balance, coordination, a feel for the ball on different parts of the body, and most importantly the centering skills crucial to effective ball contacts in any sport. Players must learn to control all of these motions before they are successful. How do they know that the time that they spend juggling is successful? Well, I encourage players to keep records. If a player, on the day you introduce juggling, can only juggle twice with a bounce on the ground between the two touches, then two is their record and the measuring stick for all future successes. This record keeping is the means in which children will receive feedback and instant gratification. Every time that they achieve a higher record, they are receiving positive images about themselves, juggling, and about soccer. This inspires players to set new goals that will always be one juggle more than their record.

If you are to introduce juggling to young players, do so on a hard flat surface (hard field, tennis courts, gymnasium) as this will increase their likelihood for success. If they are successful the first time that they try juggling, the chances of them continuing with juggling increases. The more they want to beat their record, the more time they must spend with the ball, the more proficient the player becomes.

Introduce juggling with a bounce in between each touch. When the players can reach a reasonable number of juggles (i.e. 100), encourage them to complete two juggles before the ball bounces. When it bounces they juggle two more times and then it can bounce again. When this becomes easy for them, the players should try three juggles and then a bounce; four and a bounce, etc.. For a mini player, they may not accomplish the 100 in their first year, it all depends on the amount of time the player spends juggling away from the practice. As the coach, spend 10 minutes introducing juggling and then spend 5 minutes in each practice following reviewing the key elements of juggling and allowing the players to practice.



Encourage juggling and practice yourself so you can show the players. You may be amazed with your own records.

When Do We Practice Heading?

Heading, like passing and tactics, is a technique that I feel we spend too much time worrying about too early in a player's development. We as adults recognize that heading is an important part of the game. We have seen older players play live or on television, and we have seen that they use their heads in many parts of the field. However, young players within mini soccer do not understand that headers are used for defensive purposes when challenging a defender, nor do they understand that a header is used in attack by the striker/forward to pass the ball back to a supporting midfielder. In fact, many coaches of mini do not understand this. Why? Because it is not part of the mini game. Rarely do we see the ball kicked high; they don't have the strength or ability. Rarely do we see a cross from the side line in mini soccer allowing a teammate to score with a header; it just doesn't happen.

Yet we often see players lined up with the coach or a teammate tossing the ball at their head. Look at the player's body language and you will see a tightened, frightened look on the face, and a neck has shortened in an attempt to pull itself and the head that will soon be hit with this tossed boulder back inside the body.

Lets save the players from this anxiety. If you are introducing heading before 11 years of age, introduce it in the context of juggling. Here they learn how it can help them instead of how it can hurt them. Before age 11 we are concerned with teaching players the skills required to play the game on the ground. These include dribbling, running with the ball and the early mechanics of passing with the inside and front of the foot. Another idea for introducing heading is indoors with balloons or 'Nerf' balls. Design a fun game where the players must head the ball or balloon to keep it off the floor. The concept of heading is taught, and players begin to realize through these fun activities or juggling that the head can be used in soccer.

Last comment on heading. When you do begin to work with players 11 and older, plan heading into every training session for five minutes. This five minute period will allow the players to practice heading without the 45 minute heading exercises that coaches have traditionally planned into their sessions. Five minutes per practice will help players retain the heading technique longer than the single 45 minutes of heading. The feet are the furthest point away from the brain and will take the longest to develop, train the feet first and the head last.

Shooting Lines

Whoopee!! I was once driving past a field when I just had to stop. I saw a coach set up a number goals with wooden stakes (they looked like corner flags). She then proceeded to coach shooting. She had one player standing 20 yards from the artificial goal on one side, another playing in goal, and a third standing 20 yards from the goal on the other side. The player on one side would roll the ball several steps out of their feet and then proceed to shoot. If the ball went in, the player on the other side of the net collected the ball and if the ball was saved, the goalkeeper threw the ball to the next shooter. Regardless, the goalkeeper and the original shooter traded places with a sprint. The exercise was wonderful as it had a purpose which was shooting and it had incredible flow because of the hard working players that sprinted in and out of goal. This went on for 10 minutes with the players continuously changing.

For her next step, the coach set up two players on either side of the net. They would play a wall pass or give-and-go 20 yards out from goal and then one of the players would shoot. After the shot the shooter would sprint to be the goalkeeper and the goalkeeper would sprint to the spot left by the shooter and become the next wall in the wall pass. This progression took the players from a basic technical shooting exercise to the game application of a wall pass developing into a shooting situation.

Well she didn't end here. She then placed an additional player next to the post. The instant the players started their wall pass, the defender could leave the post and close down the shooter. The shooter then had the option of shooting quickly around the defender or taking the defender on one versus one. The shooter would become the goalkeeper, the goalkeeper would be the next defender and the defender would join the player 20 yards out to act as the next wall in the wall pass. It was beautiful.

It lived up to my favourite rule of having at least one-half of the players active at any one time and she avoided that long shooting line of 10 players where a player shot once and rested for nine. Very innovative use of corner flags.



