

# YOUTH SOCCER COACHING MANUAL FOR AN INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PROGRAM

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## PREFACE

This CoachingAmericanSoccer.com Youth Soccer Coaching Manual for an Instructional Soccer Program provides a format, instruction, and drills appropriate for any Pre-Kindergarten to Under-7 (“Pre-K” to “U-7;” 3- to 6-year-olds) soccer program.

**This Instructional Soccer Program is a “child-centered” (“child-oriented” or “child-centric”) program, of the type endorsed by child psychologists, U. S. Youth Soccer, and the United Soccer Coaches organization. It is designed to maximize the opportunity for EVERY child to be successful and to enjoy their first exposure to the sport. As such, this Program does NOT include any provision for competitive games.**

The “competitive-game” (“game-centered,” “game-oriented” or “game-centric”) approach has been proven repeatedly, year-after-year, to crush the spirit and interest of a significant percentage of very young children. It is the opinion of the author and CoachingAmericanSoccer.com® that organizations that use competitive games as the foundation of their introduction to soccer do not have the interest of all their participants at heart.

Accordingly, the objectives of this program are to provide very young children with a fun experience, outdoor exercise, developmental growth, and an introduction to the game of soccer and its fundamental skills that tries to minimize putting them into situations that they do not understand or that they are not prepared to handle.

## INTRODUCTION

This Youth Soccer Coaching Manual for an Instructional Soccer Program provides a format, instruction, and drills appropriate for any Pre-Kindergarten to Under-7 (“Pre-K” to “U-7;” 3- to 6-year-olds) soccer program. It is written using the following assumptions:

1. There is a sports “Club” or “Association” structure in place which provides the organization necessary to obtain field space, equipment, players (including the capture and manipulation of registration information) and coaches, and the collection of appropriate fees and/or sponsorships.
2. Equipment provided includes team T-shirts, practice balls, portable goals, cones, disks, and scrimmage vests (“pinnies”).
3. The program can handle from approximately 30 to 360 players, based on the field space available. If possible, Clubs may offer both co-ed and girl’s only options.
4. A sufficient number of volunteer coaches are available to limit “team” sizes to 12 or fewer players. Coaches do not need to have any prior experience.
5. Volunteers will be properly supported with on-field instruction, written soccer training materials, and the respect that they deserve.
6. A knowledgeable soccer training coach will be used to correctly teach the skills and drills to the volunteer coaches.
7. A copy of this manual will be provided to all coaches. This manual is updated on-line at [CoachingAmericanSoccer.com](http://CoachingAmericanSoccer.com).
8. The Club will provide written materials to all volunteer coaches that clearly outline any Club goals, philosophy, or rules expected to be followed.
9. Volunteers will be vetted (back-ground checked) to ensure social suitability.
10. Volunteers will be trained in the process to be followed in response to an emergency, including recognizing and responding to a possible concussion.
11. The Club will provide an effective mechanism, via a “weather-line,” web site or e-mail, to cancel practices due to inclement weather (rain, snow or excessive heat/humidity).
12. The Club will ensure that there is easy access to rest rooms or portable toilets at the field.
13. A wide range of physical and mental maturation exists in this age group. The Club should keep players of like-ages and abilities together and tailor the

material in this manual accordingly. This has two aspects: First, certain skills and “fun games” are easier to understand and to perform. Clearly, these are best for the youngest players. Second, more advanced drills and “fun games” may be restricted to the higher ages so that players, as they progress through the program (potentially represented by as many as six Spring and Fall seasons), continue to be challenged and do not get “bored.”

Acknowledgement: This is to acknowledge all of the wonderful volunteer coaches and teachers throughout the United States who have been dreaming up and presenting different types of skill demonstrations, drills, and “fun games,” since soccer truly went national beginning around 1970, so that the sport is enjoyable for our children.

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## YOUTH SOCCER COACHING PHILOSOPHY

A basic youth soccer coaching philosophy should focus on fundamentals (ball skills) and decision-making (tactics). Unlike American football, which uses mostly set plays and demands far fewer individual decisions on the part of the players during a game, soccer has few set plays and demands hundreds of individual decisions on the part of players. Good fundamentals are maximized by using as many activities as possible with each player working with a ball. Good decision-making is maximized by using as many activities as possible employing small groups. Scrimmaging puts the whole game together and is fun. All players are expected to learn all skills and all the positions. Stated objectives of this philosophy are:

Short-term objectives: Learn soccer skills and tactics and have fun.

Long-term objectives: Learn all aspects of soccer to play at the college varsity level.

Winning games is not considered to be a primary objective. Winning is the result of the application of good ball skills and good tactics. Good ball skills demand the use of both feet with equal ability. Since many players demonstrate the use of a dominant leg at a very early age, emphasis must be added during all drills to force the use of the non-dominant or “weaker” leg. Good tactics demand the ability to think and to react quickly. Whereas the coach can teach and drill tactics and proper decision-making, it is the players themselves who must achieve a true mental understanding of what is expected. This learning is often a function of age.

Players learn the most by playing. Until approximately age 15, or the equivalent of the start of high-school competition, all players on a developmental team should essentially receive the same amount of playing time in games. This is especially true because there is no way of knowing who will be a “late bloomer.” Because a team must carry enough players in order to scrimmage during practices and to allow for injury, illness, and absences during competition, no players should expect to play an entire game. A reasonable expectation might be half of a game. If the coach is particularly clever, it might be more. For example, an eleven-a-side game, lasting 60-minutes, represents 660 minutes of player-time (11 times 60). If each player of a 16-player team received equal playing time, they would get approximately 41-minutes each (660 divided by 16). Even though all attempts should be made to keep playing time fair and equal, there are circumstances which will affect this goal:

- Age/Maturity
- Emotional state
- Exhaustion/Physical well-being
- Warnings/Cautions/Ejections

- Opportunities for the coach to make substitutions
- Rewarding team members who play goalkeeper with time in the field

At the other extreme of possibly not getting enough soccer is getting too much. This has two aspects: 1.) At young ages, too much running and pounding of the feet and legs on hard surfaces has been linked to an increased risk of stress fractures and/or stunting of the growing zones of bones. Heading should not be done at young ages and the cumulative effects of heading are still being studied. 2.) By the time players who started the game at five-years old reach their high school varsity teams, they could have played two, three, or even four seasons of soccer a year for 12 years. As a result, just when it is time to get serious, they can exhibit “burnout” and announce that they are quitting the sport. Dating, jobs, school pressure, peer pressure, and cars can also play a role.

Soccer, therefore, needs to be kept in perspective in the overall development of youth. They should play soccer because they want to, not because they feel forced. In this regard, taking off-season breaks, playing other sports, or attending summer camps of their own choosing can be very beneficial. Similarly, nothing should be assumed. Good communication between parents and their child, and among the parents, player, and the coach, might include an annual assessment of how the player feels about continuing to participate.

## PROGRAM FORMAT

This Instructional Soccer Program is designed for Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and First Grade boys and girls, roughly equivalent to ages 3, 4, 5, and 6, playing together in a “co-ed” environment. If there is a sufficient number of players, they should be assigned to the three age groups, based on the “school-year” age-group system – covering August 1 of one year to July 31 of the next year. (If there is an insufficient number of players to establish exact age groups, every attempt should be made to combine younger players in one group and older players into another group.) The program may be offered in the Fall and Spring seasons of each year or just one season. A season generally consists of approximately seven training sessions held over about ten weeks. There are usually “black-out” dates involved due to holidays or tournaments, during which the fields may be unavailable, and a make-up date to be used, if necessary, due to inclement weather.

Sessions are held on Saturdays at 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 12:00 Noon, which are intended to correspond to the respective age groups. Sessions may last from 45-minutes to one hour each. Up to ten “teams,” consisting of between eight and twelve children each, are assigned to each session. Volunteer coaches are assigned to each team.

Teams are established using rough geographic boundaries based on elementary school district. In addition to a shirt or jersey, the Club provides the opportunity for each player on a team to have individual and team photographs taken by a professional photographer and to receive a participation trophy, medallion, or certificate. Coaches are required to attend certain youth-coaching training and are expected to attend Instructional Soccer program classes, as well. Coaches should expect to undergo background checks, and/or to attend specialized classes for basic first aid and how to recognize possible concussions, based on Club policy.

The objectives of the program are to provide each child with a fun experience, outdoor exercise, developmental growth, and an introduction to the game of soccer and its fundamental skills. Additional practice days during the week may also be made available by the Club.

**Coaches are not restricted to a proscribed, rigid, program of instruction. On the contrary, coaches are encouraged to recognize the individual talents and needs of their players and team and to tailor their own instruction for the season accordingly.**



## SESSION FORMAT

Each Instructional Soccer Program session consists of individual coaches directing their own practices within one of several “grids” laid out on a practice field. Each grid is approximately 20 yards by 30 yards.

The grids are delineated by flags at each corner and discs and cones to mark the perimeter. There is a space approximately five yards wide between each grid and a “service aisle” down the middle. The Club provides additional discs and cones for use within the grid and “pinnies” or vests which may be used to designate different players for drills or scrimmages.

Players are expected to bring their own balls to practice. Coaches are encouraged to provide their own ball to be used for demonstrations. Coaches may also purchase additional discs, cones, balls, an equipment bag, and/or portable goals from local soccer stores or on-line, to supplement those provided by the Club, if needed for drills.

Coaches assigned to the first session of the day should arrive early enough to help set up the grids. All sessions must start and end on time. Coaches assigned to the last session of the day should help pick up the equipment at the end of the session. (Note that there may be certain corner flags associated with the game field that might need to stay in place.) Sessions must end on time and the field cleared promptly so the parking lots are available for the next group. Parents and spectators are requested to stay outside the perimeter of the actual full game field.

Coaches of 3-year-olds, however, are encouraged to promote direct participation by their parents. This has two tremendous advantages: 1.) It reassures “reluctant” or “sensitive” children, who are likely being exposed to a “team” sport for the first time, that they are being supported; and, 2.) It significantly increases the amount of one-on-one instruction time by adding a very large number of “assistant coaches.”

A sample of the grid layout follows.

The grid determines the area to which a team is restricted. The drills and fun games described later in this manual are not necessarily designed to take up the whole space within the grid. In fact, many of them are most effective, especially for the younger age groups, when they are performed in a more restricted area. Smaller areas can be established with cones or discs and enforced by parent helpers.

**This manual is currently designed to allow coaches to pick and choose those drills and activities they feel are most appropriate for their age groups and practices. Clubs may select various options to design a standardized program of instruction at each level.**

### SAMPLE GRID LAYOUT

The Instructional Soccer Program is designed to maximize the number of children who can participate in a limited amount of space.

Ten small grids may be laid out on one regular-sized soccer field. This can handle approximately 120 children, with up to 12 children on each grid. Multiple fields allow for more participants.

10	Administrative Service Area (Please Keep Clear)	9
8		7
6		5
4		3
2		1

## GENERAL SESSION RULES

- **ARRIVAL** – Please arrive at least five minutes before practice starts so that practice may begin on time. Find your “grid” or playfield and have your child dribble their ball around.
- **INCLEMENT WEATHER** – If you have any question about whether or not practice may be cancelled, please call the Club weather line and/or look on the website. Please do not call your coach, unless he or she has given permission to do so.
- **GENERAL SAFETY** – Drive slowly in all areas of the park – watch for darting children! Practice fields should be checked for glass, rocks, and other debris before starting. Children must be reminded that they are not to throw anything or engage in “horseplay.” Parents must be reminded that soccer practice and soccer coaches do not represent a “babysitting service.” Parents still retain responsibility for their child’s behavior. A parent or designated adult guardian must be present for each child during the entire time at all practices.
- **SOCCER SAFETY** – Children must be taught not to kick a ball in the direction of another child who has their back turned and does not know a ball may be coming. Children must be taught to “stay on their feet;” no sliding is allowed at this age. Similarly, traditional “heading” of the ball is not allowed at this age. Children should not try to stand and balance themselves on a ball. No one should shoot or play with the game field soccer goals or nets. (They can be turned over well in advance of the instructional sessions in order to make them less attractive.)
- **LEFT AND RIGHT** – Children at this age may not know their left from their right! Do not assume that they do! It is critical that players learn their left from their right feet and legs. Please reinforce this.
- **USE OF BOTH FEET EQUALLY** – All drills that emphasize the feet and legs in the instruction of ball skills must allow for the use of both feet. Equal time must be provided for both left and right. This is critical at this age in order to form a sound basis for future development.
- **COMMON COURTESY** – Coaches and parents alike must hold each other to a high standard and represent a true example of decent, adult behavior for the children. Emphasis must be placed on how important it is to be on the field, not on winning and losing or how many goals are scored. Inappropriate or foul

language or gestures are prohibited. There shall be no smoking and no drinking of alcoholic beverages. No dogs are allowed on the grounds.

- **SOCCER TERMS** – Every opportunity should be taken to use correct soccer terms. They do not have to be taught or coached to this age group, *per se*. Simply using correct soccer terminology at the appropriate time, e.g., “that means the other team now gets to take a goal kick,” will provide its own introduction and reinforcement.
- **STRETCHING** – Although it is a good idea to introduce the concept of stretching, it is not needed at this age and should not be allowed to take up valuable time that could be used in skill training (one-player/one-ball, maximizing touches).
- **SPORTSMANSHIP/FAIR PLAY** – Actions to positively reinforce all aspects of sportsmanship and fair play are to be taken on the part of the coaches and parents whenever the opportunity arises.
- **LIGHTNING/THUNDER** – During a practice or a game, if lightning is seen or thunder is heard, play is to cease and the field is to be cleared immediately. Go get in your car. **Do not stand under trees.** An administrative decision may be made regarding resumption of activity, but it should not occur until at least 15 minutes after the last instance of lightning or thunder (some weather services recommend up to 30 minutes).

## PLAYERS' EQUIPMENT

Players in the Instructional Soccer Program must have a minimum set of equipment. This includes:

- **Ball** – Every player must have their own ball. It must be marked in permanent marker with their last name. Players are required to bring their own ball to practice and to be responsible for keeping up with it and taking it home. Further, they should be strongly encouraged to practice with their ball at home. Parents should be informed that they should purchase an inexpensive “Size 3, FIFA-approved, official size and weight” soccer ball (balls range from Size 1 to Size 5 with 1 being the smallest and 5 used by adults). When properly inflated, balls can still feel “hard” or “soft.” For this age group, the ball should feel “soft” when kicked. Unfortunately, the “feel” of a ball is learned with experience over time. (The Club should sell balls and shin guards.)
- **Shin Guards** – Shin guards are mandatory for all activities. (Unfortunately, players without shinguards will not be allowed to participate.) For this age group, they should be the type that either pull on “sock style,” or use velcro®, but otherwise stay on by themselves. They should have a soft backing on the side next to the leg and a hardened outer surface. They must be fitted to the size of the child, always above the ankle and below the knee to allow for proper movement of the joints. One size does not fit all. They do not have to be expensive. They should be covered by outer socks when worn. A thin pair of socks underneath the shin guards may be preferred by the child, rather than having the shin guards directly against the skin. The guards should be washed periodically.
- **Shirts/Shorts/Socks** – Soccer shirts should be provided by the Club. Specific “soccer shorts” and “soccer socks” are not required, but make a nice complement to the program.
- **Shoes** – Specific “soccer shoes” (“cleats”) are not required. If purchased, they should be inexpensive and have molded-rubber soles. Shoes with metal or plastic in the soles or cleats are not permitted. Soccer shoes should be fitted to exact size or one-half size larger with game or double socks and even the shin guards on, if the shin guards are sock- or stirrup- style. General athletic/sports (“tennis”) shoes are acceptable; however, they must stay on the feet under soccer conditions. The laces of general or soccer shoes must be tied in such a way that they do not come undone. Full tightening from the bottom up and then “double-knotting” is recommended.

- **Proper Clothing for the Weather** – Children should not be over-dressed when it is hot and they must have appropriate, warm, clothing when it gets cold (sweat shirts, pants). Team shirts may be worn over other clothing. A jacket can then be worn over top which can be removed while playing.
- **Water** – All children must have their own water bottle or a “sports drink” of sufficient quantity to last for an entire practice. This is true even in cold weather. Coaches shall provide for sufficient water breaks, especially in warm weather.
- **Wear Nothing Dangerous** – Players shall not wear any clothing or accessories that could otherwise prove harmful to themselves or to others. This includes belts, bracelets, necklaces, wrist-watches, casts, splints, hats, ear-rings, rings, sun glasses, or anything that is generally hard, made of metal, or dangles. Proper “sports glasses” are acceptable. This applies to both boys and girls. There are no exceptions

## **NOTES FOR PARENTS AND COACHES**

Special notes and information that need to be recognized by all parents and coaches participating in the Instructional Soccer Program:

- This is an all-volunteer operation. Say “THANK YOU!” to all the volunteers.
- A parent or guardian shall always be available for each child during practices.
- Please park in marked spaces. Unless all spaces are taken, please do not park on the grass and please never park in driveways.
- No dogs are permitted on any of the grounds.
- If a coach is going to be absent, he or she should make arrangements for a substitute. If no coach or substitute is available at a practice, parents should organize and run the practice themselves.
- Players are not to practice at the real goals.
- Players should never pull up or play with the corner flags.
- Parents and friends are requested to sit to the “outside” of the practice grids, not in the “middle aisle.”
- Please bring a trash bag. Collect all trash at the end of your session. Take your trash with you.
- Upon departure, make sure you leave all Club equipment (discs, cones, and scrimmage vests) in place.
- Parents should offer praise, enthusiasm, cheer, energy, and positive reinforcement. Pay attention when instruction is given. There is a lot more to soccer than just “run” and “kick it.”

## NOTES FOR COACHES

The following items are to be implemented by all coaches participating in the Instructional Soccer Program:

- Always remember how important it is to teach the fundamental skills properly. As writing skills are built from the alphabet forward, so soccer skills build from the most basic first touches on the ball. (The concept of “[Learning Progressions in Soccer](#)” is provided under Introduction to Skills at the CoachingAmericanSoccer.com website.)
- Coaches must have at least one assistant coach who can be counted on to take over the practice in the event of an emergency encountered by the coach.
- Bring your cell phone.
- Wear a watch.
- No whistles are to be used.
- Involve the parents as much as possible if they are willing to participate. This is especially helpful for 3- and 4-year-olds.
- If shoelaces need to be tied, send the child to the parent so that it doesn’t take time or attention away from the practice. Shoelaces should be “double-knotted.”
- You are not to use goalkeepers in drills or scrimmages. This includes both players and parents. Players need to know the success of scoring. If parents are used to retrieve balls during drills, they should be well behind the goal. For 3- and 4-year-olds, at a minimum, no players should be directed to stand in front of the goal to block shots. If players do this on their own, they should be asked to participate within the field of play. Players at all ages should be taught how to run back and take a proper defensive stance/position.
- Remember to avoid lines, lectures, and down-time. Always strive for one-player/one-ball activities and keep things moving. Take water breaks as necessary.
- It is recommended that you not use the same “fun game” more than twice in one practice.
- It is recommended that you not scrimmage with another team until after at least the first two practices. When you do, it is recommended that you first scrimmage with the team in the grid opposite the “middle aisle” from you.



- Write out a “lesson plan” on a “3 x 5” card for each practice. Include alternatives.
- If a drill or activity appears to be hard to understand, move on to something else.
- If multiple players seem to become bored or disinterested in a drill or activity, move on to something else.
- Always demonstrate a positive, upbeat, attitude. Praise the players often. Try to ensure that each player is singled out for some form of praise each practice.
- Try to “dress the part” of being a soccer coach.
- **NO HEADING.**
- For activities where balls are not used, you may establish a “nest,” consisting of a small circle of discs, at a flag or just outside the grid where the players may place their balls.
- Purchase inexpensive shin guards for back-up purposes when parents and children forget theirs so that children will not have to be denied the ability to participate. If they have to be used, remember to get them back (and wash them)!
- Establish a “team identity” with a team name and a team cheer. The name can be as simple as something related to the jersey color, such as “Big Red, “B,” or “Yellow Jackets.” The cheer can be as simple as – all hands in / one-two-three / “Go Big Red!” as all hands are raised. Reinforce this at the beginning of each session.
- Introduce lining up for an end-of-practice or end-of-scrimmage “low-five” hand touch with a corresponding “Thank you / Good game.” Reinforce this at the end of each session.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL BASIC SOCCER RULES**

Before beginning any activities, all players and parents must be taught the specifics of wearing shinguards and not wearing anything that could be dangerous to themselves or to other players. This includes all of the detail contained in Law 4 of the Laws of the Game, “The Players’ Equipment.” There are not exceptions for what cannot be worn.

Otherwise, for the Instructional Soccer Program, there are really only three basic soccer rules that need to be taught, “ball in and out of play,” “hands” and “dangerous play.” In addition to acting upon violations of these rules as they occur, instances of holding, tripping, kicking, knocking someone down and any other unsporting conduct, need to be dealt with immediately. Play must be stopped and everyone informed that the conduct is against the rules and unacceptable.

### **“BALL IN AND OUT OF PLAY”**

Using the grid, whether marked by lines, saucers or cones, identify the inside of the field of play and the outside of the field of play. For drills, inform the players that they need to stay inside the field of play and, if they go outside of the field of play, they simply need to come back. For scrimmages, inform the players that when one player kicks the ball outside of the field of play, the ball goes to the other team. (There is no need to get into the details of the ball having to be “all the way over the line.”) During scrimmages, it is recommended that “kick-ins” be used to put the ball back into play. Simply ask the defenders to back up so that the kick-in will be successful. (See Format for an Instructional Soccer Scrimmage.)

### **“HANDS”**

Players at this age should be taught that, except for when directed by the coach, no one is to use their hands to touch the ball inside the field of play while the game or practice is going on. This approach is usually more than sufficient to introduce the handling rule. If it appears that the children understand this easily, coaches can expand the instruction to include that soccer’s “funny definition” of “hands” means everything from the articulation of the arm/shoulder joint down to the tips of the fingers. Finally, the coach may introduce that there is an exception for goalkeepers. If the coach has enough time, the parents can be instructed on the difference between “intentional” and “unintentional” handling.

For a detailed explanation of the handling rule, see [CoachingAmericanSoccer.com](http://CoachingAmericanSoccer.com)  
[Hand Ball! \(Handling\)](#)

### **“DANGEROUS PLAY”**

Players at this age should be taught that, because it is dangerous to themselves or to their opponents, in general:

- They should not raise their leg higher than their waist to kick a ball;
- They should not lower their head below their waist to “head” a ball\*; and,
- If they find themselves down on the ground, they should forget about the ball and get up immediately. (Most important in the instructional age group.)

These are the basic tenets behind the concept of “dangerous play,” if an opponent is nearby, and may result in a penalty being called by the referee.

In the instructional age group, players should be taught that if another child is down on the ground next to the ball, they should stop kicking and give the child an opportunity to get up. Coaches, upon seeing a condition where a player is not able to get up, must stop play immediately and intervene. Introduction of the word “Freeze” to stop play is particularly helpful in this regard.

In addition, players should be taught not to try to take a ball away from an opponent by sliding. Although certain forms of sliding are ultimately legal, it should not be allowed at this age. In other words, players in the instructional program are to be taught to “stay on their feet.”

Also see: CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [Laws of the Game](#)

**\* No heading is to be done in this age group.**

## **SOCCER COACHING 3- TO 4-YEAR-OLDS (4 & UNDER – U4/4U)**

### **The First Introduction to Soccer as an “Organized Sport”**

Three years old is not too young for children to be introduced to the outdoor sport of soccer. Under the proper conditions, 3- and 4-year-olds will enjoy this new experience.



This is an outdoor program designed to introduce young children to soccer for the first time. The concepts contained within the Manual that are particularly relevant to this age group include:

**Practices on Saturday Mornings only – not weeknights:** The children this age are usually fresh and rested on Saturday mornings. Even so, they can go up-and-down due to things such as illness, getting a bunch of shots at the pediatrician the day before, or staying up too late the night before. As a result, they may be okay one practice but not the next. Saturday mornings, however, provide the greatest opportunity for 3- and 4-year-old children to be at their best. On weeknights, children this age are usually tired from their day, can be cranky and, if they have been at extended day care early and late, they may just want to go home. Practices should be no longer than 45-minutes.

**Introduce Soccer as Playtime – not competitive games:** Competitive games (two teams set against each other) are the opposite of what children this age are being taught in pre-school. At pre-school, they are being taught to share; to be nice; not to push, shove, or run into others; and to respect the space of their classmates. They are expected to play well with others and are usually admonished if they do not do so. “Play” at this age looks nothing like a competitive soccer game. Play for these children usually does not have a specific goal, is not on a timed schedule, and can generally start and stop at the child’s discretion. Play at this age is generally not “with” other children, but “beside” other children. It is certainly not “against” other children. Play is supposed to be fun. It is not supposed to be a huge

contradiction. Competitive soccer games are overwhelming and make no sense to 3- and 4-year-olds. Children this age are usually intimidated by the extra people and the noise (adults screaming “encouragement” from the sidelines sounds like anger), not to mention the collisions. They may refuse to get in the car to go to competitive games or, while at a game, will stall, sit on the sidelines and refuse to play. This can easily lead to not even wanting to go to practices or to just “hate soccer” altogether. Another downside to competitive games is that they can bring out the worst in some parents (adults screaming criticism).

**Learning as Fun – not lectures:** A proper introduction to the sport of soccer for this age group focuses on having “fun.” Activities need to be fast-paced, with minimal instruction time, should encourage silliness and laughter, and should not last too long before the next one is introduced. The entire concept of utilizing “soccer fun games” to encourage children to enjoy the sport starts here. In addition to instruction in proper ball techniques, a fun environment provides responsible listening, cognitive learning, and socialization skills. Further, it promotes the shift from individual to group learning and introduces the concept of “team.” See particularly those games within CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [“SOCCER FUN GAMES”](#) identified as “Tested and Confirmed for 3-year-olds and up.”

**Parent-Child Practices – a time of transition, not a dramatic break:** If allowed by the Club structure and acceptable to the coach, parents are encouraged to participate with their child during the introductory season. There are extremely significant benefits to be derived from the participation of a helpful, responsible, concerned parent interacting with his or her child during practices at this age. In the majority of cases, this is the child’s first exposure to soccer – or to an organized sport of any kind. At first, the children are likely to be nervous, anxious, or have no idea what to expect. The on-field presence of the parent is almost always calming and reassuring. Beyond that, parents can become a small army of assistant coaches. They can provide constant one-on-one instruction and produce a significant increase in the number of ball touches. In addition, children are more likely to understand and respond to a parent who, being most familiar with their child, is more likely to talk to them in a way that they can understand best and to understand what their child is trying to express in return.

## MEET THE THREE-YEAR OLD

First and foremost, the chronological age of the child really matters. Physical maturity based on age permits the child to be able to properly participate at the activity level expected. *Two-years old is too young for this program.* Three-and-one-half years old and above is better and just-turned-four is optimal. Still, this does not account for the emotional maturity of the child. Children who are demonstrably “outgoing” and appear willing to “try new things” are likely to be ready. Children who tend to show behaviors of

being “shy” or “stand-offish” will need special encouragement and extra attention. Some children are simply ready for this type of experience and some are not. Some children at this age are already capable of clearly showing their preferences for “more physical” versus “more intellectual” activities. The key is to provide the exposure and to appreciate and understand the child’s response.

Second, the children need to feel safe, secure, and comfortable, both on and off the field. Forcing a child to play soccer against their will can turn them off to the game forever. A reluctant child must not be forced or pushed. If they are, they can easily express that they “hate” soccer, or worse, that they “hate” their parents for “making them go.” These are not helpful emotions and must not be allowed to become protracted behaviors. Coaches must allow children to go to their parents for comfort. Parents must provide the comfort. Some children may just be too young physically, emotionally, and/or cognitively. Six-months to one-year older can make all the difference. A poor reaction to the first exposure to soccer does not necessarily mean that it is permanent. Parents who may find themselves in this situation should be encouraged to let their children try again next season.

Third, it must be recognized and appreciated that three-year-olds are experiencing so many things in their lives that they can exhibit a wide range of reactions to their first exposure to the “soccer environment.” Most children like to try new things. Those children with older siblings who have already been introduced to the sport can be ready to go and can’t wait to start kicking. These children want to keep up with their older brother or sister and tend to want to know “what’s next?” Those children with no previous exposure to “organized sports” probably have no idea what is going to happen to them and are likely to be very anxious. In either case, children this age are just learning language and are trying to deal with a flood of emotions. As such, they do not yet have a real mechanism for expressing their feelings other than by saying “no,” refusing to participate, or by crying. These responses are normal. A child that goes to tears, falls to the ground, or just otherwise melts down, can be tired, hungry, sick, exhausted, over-stimulated, over-heated, or just “having a bad day.” They must not be chastised.

It is extremely important to recognize that every child is different and each child’s needs are to be addressed accordingly. Boys may be more likely to “rough-house,” while girls may be more deliberate in their movements. Both are perfectly reasonable.

### **MEET THE PARENTS**

Parents of three-year-olds, especially if it is their first child, may also be experiencing their initial exposure to “organized sports” and they are undergoing a similar learning curve as the child. Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of parents are positive and eager to participate if they can.

These parents are positive, helpful, useful, want to see and to help their child succeed, to get exercise, and to learn soccer. They tend to like to play with their child, can help reinforce concepts, and are serious about introducing their child to new things. These parents are likely to be ready and willing to join the activities, are excited about the prospect of learning soccer themselves, and are willing to volunteer to provide other assistance. Due to the soccer explosion in the United States during the past 40 years, most of these parents have been exposed to soccer or may have actively played in the past. (Even active grandparents can be the same!) These parents are to be praised by the coach and they should be provided with every possible opportunity to assist.

Unfortunately, there are other parents who, for whatever reasons, may choose not to participate. They tend to be the ones who are on their phones and do not provide the attention and positive encouragement their children crave and actively seek. They also may be the ones that are extremely negative in general and have parenting “styles” that are critical or dismissive. They are not to be confronted in any way. Having been given the opportunity, if they decline to participate the subject should then be dropped. Remember that it’s all about the children!

### **GENERAL CONDITIONS**

The following is general guidance for coaches at this age group:

If possible, send out an introductory e-mail before the start of the first session. (See below.)

Parents or a caregiver must be present and accountable for each and every child at all times.

Children are probably familiar with the word and concept of “teacher,” but not the word “coach.” Introduce to the children that “coach” means “teacher.”

Praise, praise, praise – use high fives, low fives, “awesome,” “great job,” “I’m proud of you” and other physical and verbal actions of praise for each child at every session.

Involve older siblings if you can – most have soccer experience and would just love to participate.

Recognize legitimate complications for parent participation: such as having to watch younger siblings or mom is pregnant.

Equipment: Portable-collapsible goals/nets are better than cones as goals because they represent a real target. Cones are generally too conceptual at this age. It is better to have two pair of goals, if possible and you can afford them, because they significantly improve the number of activities that can be used and reduce the number of players at each goal. Also, if you can afford it, buying goals without nets, or cutting out the nets,

keeps kids from sitting in or playing inside the nets and allows balls to go through and not have to be dug out.

Children this age have a short attention span – keep it moving; use brief directions; there should be no sitting or standing around for too long. Implement the “Four L’s”: no lines, no lectures, no laps, and no bad language.

Note that the Inside-of-the-Foot kick/pass does not work with this age, but that the Instep Kick does.

Children this age generally do not like to wear shin guards, but they are mandatory. If parents find that their children dislike the commercial, stirrup- or sock-type guards, they can be informed to purchase the cheapest, simplest, slip-in pair available and then cut them down to size.

Heat: Children this age de-hydrate much faster than adults. Hot/tired/bothered means children that get cranky/quit. Frequent drink breaks are mandatory in hot weather.

Snacks – children this age love “snack time.” Set a schedule for each practice for parents to bring a snack and a drink for each child (and siblings...). (Ensure that backup is available if someone suddenly can’t make it.) The kids whose parents bring the snack and drinks love to hand them out. Please note to ask for such things as gluten-free or allergies, etc.

### **Sample E-mail**

Hello, Soccer Families!

**I KNOW THIS IS A LONG E-MAIL, BUT IT CONTAINS IMPORTANT INFORMATION. PLEASE TAKE THE TIME TO READ IT CAREFULLY. YOU MAY WISH TO PRINT AND/OR SAVE IT FOR FUTURE REFERENCE. THANK YOU!**

My name is **(Coach)** and I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you as your child’s coach for the upcoming season for 3- and 4–year olds. I will ask the children to simply call me “Coach.” (Name) will act as my Assistant Coach and (Name) will act as my sideline proxy and Team Mom.

At the first meetings, I will be wearing (description). Warning! – At practices, I like to have the adults (one per child) participate whenever I can work them in!!! You don’t need “gear,” just appropriate shoes and clothes. In addition, I will be touching your child to demonstrate skills, technique, proper movement, and positioning. I also give handshakes, “high fives,” and hugs. Further, please note (any important Club item).

### **ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS:**



- **Every child needs their own BALL.** For this age group you should purchase a “SIZE 3.” It does not have to be expensive. Please print your LAST NAME on the ball in permanent marker. PLEASE BRING THE BALL TO EVERY PRACTICE.

- **Every child is REQUIRED to wear SHIN GUARDS.** Players are not allowed to participate without them! They do not have to be expensive. I recommend full, “ankle” (“pull-on,” “ankle-protection,” “stirrup”) guards in Youth Small (YS), Youth Medium (YM) or (YL), depending on the height of the child.

- **SOCCER SHOES (“cleats”)** are not required for this age, but they can be cute and the kids sure seem to love this different type of shoe. (Regular “tennis” shoes are fine.) The Club does “recommend” cleats, however. If you choose to get them, they should not be expensive (you may wish to try Payless or Walmart for a generic sports cleat or, if you are comfortable with the shoe size, on-line). They must have molded-rubber/synthetic soles.

Some of the large sports stores may put together package deals of shoes/shin guards/balls.

- **UNIFORMS (shirt to be provided by Club) are to be worn to all practices.** If you wish, you may purchase black or dark navy shorts to enhance the uniform, “team” look. Inexpensive “soccer socks” should also be purchased. Shin guards are to be worn under the socks and the guards are expected to be fully covered.

- **You should bring a WATER BOTTLE (or sports drink) to all practices.** Water is best. There will be specific water breaks, especially during hot weather.

- **Practices will START ON TIME AND END ON TIME.** It is not a problem if you arrive late for a start. **A PARENT RESPONSIBLE FOR EACH CHILD MUST BE PRESENT AT ALL TIMES and claim their child immediately at the end.**

- **A LIMITED NUMBER OF PORTABLE TOILETS** are available at the field. Even so, it is strongly recommended that you back off on your child’s fluid intake before practices and have them use the bathroom just before you leave for the field. In this regard, please do not let your child carry their own water bottle in the car – they have been known to just suck on it continually...

- **Please ensure that your child is always APPROPRIATELY DRESSED** for the weather. If the weather is cold, remember that you can always take things off, but you can’t put something on if you don’t have it.

- **No child is to be forced to attend** a practice. This is to be fun!

- **You DO NOT have to contact me** if you are going to miss a practice.

- **There shall be NO “HEADING,”** ever, for this age group, in practice or at home! At no time shall a ball be tossed or thrown at a child’s head in this age group, especially by an older sibling. Neither should a child be allowed to try to toss a ball up for themselves to try to head.
- **Please use the county WEATHER LINE if there is a question about a practice or game being held: (xxx-xxx-xxxx).** This may direct you to (url); click on “Cancellation Notice.”

Our team is designated as “(Name/Sponsor and/or Number).”

**PRACTICES are scheduled for (time) every Saturday, starting (date) and ending (date), at the (name/location) field.\* We will be on “FIELD (#).”** Facing the fields from the parking lot, this is the (designation). Parents who are not participating need to remain on the sideline. Children may leave the field at any time to visit with their parents. Parents may enter the field at any time if their child needs attention.

**“Picture Day”** will be held at the field on (date). If it rains, the pictures will be taken on the same day and time as the scheduled practice, indoors at (location).

Again this year, the (Club) will be distributing personalized **participation trophies** at the end of the season. Your player’s first name, as submitted at registration, is expected to be used. If the name is incorrect, misspelled, or you would like to use a nickname, please notify me by (date).

**PARKING:** Please park only in designated spots. Violators parked in nearby private lots can be towed at their own expense!

\*Driving (directions)...

Sincerely,  
(Coach)  
(E-mail)  
(Home phone)  
(Cell phone)

## **FORMAT OF A PRACTICE**

The following is a generalized format for a practice in the Instructional Soccer Program, essentially for 5- and 6-year-olds. See the separate approach for Soccer Coaching 3- and 4-Year-Olds earlier in this document, although this format may be used at the lower ages.

### **WARM UP** (Approximately 5 minutes)

This should include general body movement and coordination activities that may be with or without a ball. Without really knowing it, this introduces the players to the need to bring up body temperatures and stretch in advance of physical exercise. The use of a ball for stretching, sometimes referred to as “soccernastics,” is preferred over static stretching. Static stretching may be introduced at this time, but it is not as fun as playing with the ball. In addition, it is not really necessary with this age group. (See the suggested list of warm-up activities.)

### **WATER BREAK** (Suggested – Approximately 2 minutes)

### **FUN GAMES** (Approximately 18 minutes)

This should include as much activity as possible with each player working with their own ball in a group situation. It is not recommended that you play the same fun game more than twice in one practice, although the children quickly develop favorites. They need to constantly be challenged with new activities and learn to respond to the direction associated with each. (See the suggested list of fun games.) (There may be a water break in between games.)

### **WATER BREAK** (Mandatory – Approximately 2 minutes)

### **INSTRUCTION AND DRILL** (Approximately 10 minutes)

This should include a very brief demonstration of the skill topic for the day (less than 2 minutes), giving the name of the skill and showing how it is to be performed (and sometimes what not to do). This should move promptly into activities that maximize one-player/one-ball in the performance of the skill. (See suggested list of skills and drills.)

### **WATER BREAK** (Mandatory -Approximately 2 minutes)

### **SCRIMMAGE** (Approximately 18 minutes)

Large games where one strong player on each team dominates play are inherently not fun for the other players. Accordingly, if possible, it is suggested that coaches set up games with small, equal teams, and just let the children play. It is recommended that you not use goalkeepers. Further, to maximize involvement and the number of touches,

it is recommended that games not exceed 4 v. 4. If a coach has 9 or more players, two scrimmages should probably be established (e.g., one 2 v. 2 and one 3 v. 3). A parent or the coach (or even a visiting sibling) can always fill in if there is an odd number. Move players around to “balance” the teams. (See the suggested formats for scrimmage.) (There may be a water break in the middle.)

### **CONCLUSION AND ANNOUNCEMENTS** (Approximately 3 minutes)

Ask the children to tell you what the skill topic was and to demonstrate it. Suggest a “homework”\* assignment. Announce the next practice. End on time.

**\* Homework – Parents, please play “soccer” with your children. Do not try to coach them, just PLAY with them! Place down cones, saucers, or pieces of cloth for goals. Make sure that your child gets a majority of the touches on the ball. Do not try to take it away from them. It is yours if they kick it too far out in front of themselves, then tap it back to them. Remember to show excitement and provide encouragement. Also remember that you are bigger and stronger than they are! Do not KICK at the ball! Use gentle touches or a blocking move. You can stand in the way and make them go around you. Let them score. Quit when they say they want to quit.**

## WARM-UP ACTIVITIES

**Introduction to the grid**, marked by corner flags, discs. For first demonstrations, one can place parents around the perimeter. Explain that, in general, everything takes place inside the grid. Coaches can use the parents to constrict the grid during some drills. For really young players, the grid may be first introduced as the “play-yard.”

### WITHOUT BALL

- Walk around the perimeter of the grid; move to the inside, move to the perimeter; Find a line – everyone to the left, everyone to the right, jump to the left, jump to the right.
- From one end, run to the other end; run backward to the first end. Run sideways, left, then right.
- Slide sideways, all the way left, all the way right
- High kicks soldier march, up and back
- “Run around/freeze.” (Or “go/stop.” Or “green light/red light.”)
- Jumping Jacks
- Helicopters, arms out swing with twist at waist
- Jogging “In-Place” (can add high-knees and alternating thigh slap; alternating elbows to thighs)
- Kangaroo Hop (Rabbit Hop/Bunny Hop), forward, backward, left and right
- Skipping; Skipping Backward
- Tip-toes, toe raisers (calf raisers), walk on toes (balls of the feet)
- Jumping around using one leg, then the other
- “All fall down,” get up as fast as possible, jogging in between; Forward-roll. (Don’t use with wet grounds.)
- Run to parent, give high five (low five, side-to-side, fist bump), run back
- Back-forth through THEIR OWN parents’ legs (for surprise effect, you can add a “fanny pat” by telling the parents only); figure “8” through legs with instruction/directions from parent.
- Knee Bends (both legs, down to 90-degrees only)

- “Make-A-Circle” around a disc, cone, or parent. Left (counter-clockwise) and right (clockwise).
- While stationary, balance standing on one leg, then the other
- Hokey-Pokey. (See [www.kidsongs.com/lyrics/the-hokey-pokey.html](http://www.kidsongs.com/lyrics/the-hokey-pokey.html)) Use right foot, left foot, right hand, left hand, and whole-self.
- Head-Shoulders-Knees-and-Toes.
- Duck, Duck, Goose – small groups, approximately five each
- Run in pairs – two players holding hands
- Challenge – “How Many Fingers?” – During any of the appropriate exercises, coach holds up fingers on one or both hands and at the end of the exercise asks how many fingers were displayed.
- Challenge – “Crab Walk.”

## WITH BALL

While standing... (not recommended for really young players first learning to not use their hands).

- Toss in air, catch with hands; toss in air- clap – catch with hands; toss in air – clap as many times as possible – catch with hands; toss in air – close and re-open eyes – catch with hands; (challenge – toss in air – spin 360 degrees – catch with hands).
- Push ball around with right hand. Push ball around with left hand. (Challenge: With feet spread, push ball around feet in a figure “8” with hands).
- Push ball with both hands from front, between legs, to back; turn; repeat.
- Hold ball with both hands, twist from side-to-side; hold ball with both hands, touch to back of neck, touch to toes; repeat. Knee bends while holding ball out in front.
- Still ball – step over, turn around, step over one foot then the other (from front-to-back); repeat side-to-side.
- Forward roll while holding ball.

While sitting...

- Touch ball to left hip, touch ball to right hip; twist left, twist right; lie back and touch ball to ground above head; sit up and touch ball to toes.

- Start in sitting position: place ball between feet/ankles and “hold”/lock ball in place; brace with hands or lie back; bend legs to bring ball back to fanny, extend; move legs left and right; point legs to the sky; try to take the legs/ball and touch the toes/ball to the ground above the head.
- Name Game. Establish a small circle with discs. Half of the players have ball. Players stand around the circle and are to pass the ball across the circle to a player who does not have a ball. Before making a pass, however, the player must call out the name of the person to whom they are going to pass. (Before using this game, everyone should sit in a tight circle and introduce themselves by first name.) (Variations: Include yourself as “coach.” Add more balls if success rate is high.)

## **SOCCER FUN GAMES**

There are too many SOCCER FUN GAMES to be included in this document. They may be found on the [CoachingAmericanSoccer](http://CoachingAmericanSoccer.com) website.



## INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS

Each of the following presentations of soccer skills (or techniques) is divided into three parts. The *Introduction* is intended for coaches. The *Demonstration* is the presentation by the coach to the players. Coaches need to remember that the Demonstration is critical to learning. There should be very little oral discussion and more concentration on visual instruction. Players at this age should be told the name of the activity and then see how it's done and then immediately be allowed to try it. The *Drills* put the skills into practice. The drills are designed to be fun. Minor, very brief, corrections can be made during the drills, but they should rarely be stopped. (Coaches should read through each of these presentations thoroughly and ensure that they are comfortable with being able to make the demonstrations. If any doubt persists, they should consult their Club instructor.) As with the "Soccer Fun Games," the drills are not presented in an age-specific manner. Coaches should move on to the more challenging activities as soon as their players can handle them.

- [Instructional Dribbling](#)
- [Instructional Inside of the Foot \(Push\) Pass and Receive](#)
- [Instructional General Receiving](#)
- [Instructional Positions – Attacking and Defending](#)
- [Instructional Instep Drive \(Kicking\)](#)
- [Instructional Shooting and Goal Scoring](#)
- [Instructional General Passing](#)
- [Instructional Juggling](#)

## **INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS: DRIBBLING**

### Introduction

In soccer, dribbling is the skill of moving the ball around the field, by use of the feet, unassisted by other players. The basic concepts of dribbling include keeping the ball as close to the feet as possible in order to maintain control of the ball; using the correct part of the feet to contact the ball in order to maintain balance of the body and achieve the desired result; and, ultimately using peripheral vision to see the ball in order to keep as much of the field in sight as possible during the performance of the skill.

At the introductory level, however, the most important aspect of dribbling is simply getting the players used to moving the ball around with any part of their feet. All the activities below involve one player with one ball.

### Demonstration

The coach should clearly identify, demonstrate the use of, and have the players touch their ball with the:

- Inside,
- Outside,
- Instep, and
- Sole\*

of both feet to be used in dribbling.

Introduce the “Irish Jig” (a.k.a., “Mexican Hat Dance,” “Hat Dance,” “Dance on the Ball,” or “Toe Tappers”): Balancing on the left leg, players should tap the top of a stationary ball with the sole of their right foot (preferably with the “ball” of the foot or the “bottom” of the toes); players should then switch legs. Players should then tap the ball with alternate feet, left-right-left, etc., and try to build up speed.

Introduce how to “Make an Airplane:” Balancing using the left leg, players should place the sole of the right foot on the ball and stretch out their arms to the sides to maintain balance; players should then switch legs.

### Drills

#### Dribbling in a Confined Space –

Mark off a square smaller than the grid. Coaches may use parents to define the space. Practice the “Irish Jig” and “Make an Airplane.”

Everybody “dribble” – no instruction, just use your feet to move the ball around (everybody dribble “to somewhere else within the square,” “to other green space,” “to a corner of the square,” “to the middle,” “to your mom or dad”...); the youngest players will start by walking – add a quicker pace over time

Non-moving ball – put the bottom (sole) of the right foot on top; switch to left foot on top; switch to right – add hop; switch to left – add hop; switch to right – toe tap; switch to left – toe tap; (challenge – alternate feet toe tap – i.e., do the “Irish Jig.”)

“Kangaroo Hop” up to the ball; put sole of one foot on top of ball. (Make an airplane.)

Run up to standing ball, put sole of foot on top of ball. (Make an airplane.)

Dribble/stop... by putting sole of foot on top of ball. (Make an airplane.)

After instruction – dribble with the right foot only; left foot only; inside of right foot only; inside of left foot only; outside of right foot only; outside of left foot only.

“Go/freeze” while dribbling; “All-fall-down/get back up fast” while dribbling.

Dribble in a line around the perimeter of the square (left turns); reverse direction (right turns).

“Dribble Snake” follow the leader in a line anywhere inside the square. (Advanced challenge... Leader breaks off upon request and dribbles to the back of the line – creates the next leader – can be done until everyone leads...)

Dribble – Stop Ball (anyway you want with foot) – Turn Around and dribble back the way you came.

Dribble – stop ball with sole of foot – PULL BALL BACK WITH SOLE of foot – turn around, dribble.

Dribble fast/Dribble slow.

“Make-A-Circle, right foot (counter-clockwise) then left foot (clockwise), first just with ball – using the inside of foot, then around a disc or cone, then around a parent.

Dribble around obstacles – discs, cones, and/or standing parents. (Challenge – parents move)

Dribble to objectives – flags, discs, cones.

Dribble through “gates” (pairs of cones or discs; or parents’ legs). (Challenge – count the number of “goals” scored during a given period of time.)

“Circle-and-Go” – “Make-A-Circle” around a cone, dribble to another cone, make-a circle around it; continue...

“Coerver Base Move” (inside of feet, one-touch, foot-to-foot)

Challenge – while slow dribbling, look for an open area and then fast dribble to it.

Line-to-Line Dribbling –

(Use sole-of-the-foot stop on the ending line...)

Inside of right foot only; inside of left foot only; outside of right foot only; outside of left foot only.

Slow/Fast.

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**Soccer Coaching Tips:**

\*The “ball” of the foot is the preferred location; however, this term causes great confusion among young children because it conflicts with the use of the word meaning the soccer ball. Accordingly, “sole” is used. Young children tend to actually use the sole of the foot, anyway. This can be corrected later.

Slower, methodical dribbling at young ages is referred to by Coerver Coaching as “Turtle” dribbling (as opposed to fast or speed dribbling which is referred to as “Cheetah” dribbling).

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW TO TEACH THIS SKILL, SEE:  
CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [Introduction To Dribbling](#)

## **INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS: INSIDE OF THE FOOT (PUSH) PASS AND RECEIVE**

### Introduction

The inside of the foot or “push” pass and its corresponding receive (“trap”), represent the most basic pass and receive in soccer. (“Trapping” is generally no longer a term that is used because it implies bringing the ball to a dead stop instead of setting it up for the next move.) Although they are a little awkward at first, for the Instructional Soccer Program they provide the highest level of control for passing and receiving for beginners. This is because the inside of the foot conforms to the outer curve of the ball. (Note: For 3- and 4-year-olds, the instep drive is actually easier to introduce first.)

### Demonstration

The foot is turned at the ankle and the leg is rotated at the hip so that the toes are pointed to 90-degrees to the outside. Balance is maintained so that the leg can swing freely at the hip. An analogy can be made to use of a putter in golf. An actual putter could be used in a demonstration with a reference made to miniature golf. The foot must be off of the ground so that the ball may be contacted dead center.



### **#11 – Inside of the Foot**

Like the instep drive, the point of the direction of the non-kicking (or “plant”) foot will roughly determine the path that the kicked ball will take.

The corresponding receive of the pass is the simple acceptance of the ball with the inside of the foot. Again, the foot needs to be off of the ground so that the ball may be contacted dead center. It should be shown that the foot must not be lifted so high that the ball can go under it. (A slightly advanced demonstration would provide for receipt of a faster-paced ball by showing the foot held out in front and the leg being relaxed as the ball is received in order to take the pace off of the ball.)

### Drills

Inside of foot pass and receive, left and right, with parent. (Short, then expand distance.)

Inside of foot pass and receive, left and right, with teammate. (Short, then expand distance.)

Dribble and then inside of foot pass to teammate who receive; re-set and then the other player goes.

Challenge – as above, but from some distance, alternate players back-peddle to reset.

In triangle – one ball – players pass and receive ball around.

In triangle – one ball – player passes to one player and receives ball back; player passes to other player and receives ball back; rotate.

Challenges – “Personal Pass” – dribble, push pass out in front, sprint, retrieve, dribble. (line-to-line); dribble at standing parent (who has their legs spread), push pass through legs, sprint around, retrieve (“nutmeg”).

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW TO TEACH THIS SKILL,  
SEE: [CoachingAmericanSoccer.com](http://CoachingAmericanSoccer.com) Introduction to Passing.

### **Soccer Coaching Tips:**

- For really young players it is more effective to introduce the [Instep Kick](#) before the Inside-of-the-Foot kick. See: [Coaching 3 and 4 Year Olds](#) presented in this document.

## **INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS: GENERAL RECEIVING**

### Introduction

Receiving the ball, formerly known as trapping, is one of soccer's most fundamental individual skills. Mastery of receiving sets up everything that a player – and the whole team – wishes to accomplish during a match, including maintaining possession of the ball, passing, and shooting. (“Trapping” is no longer a term in general use because it implies bringing the ball to a dead stop as opposed to setting it up for the next move.)

For the Instructional Soccer Program, the skill of receiving is the act of obtaining the ball from a pass, making sure it is under control, and then setting it up in a proper position for performance of the next skill. The steps involved in receiving the ball are:

- Deciding which receive to use
- Deciding where to place the ball after receiving it
- Positioning the body and the body part to meet the ball
- Taking the pace off the ball as it is contacted
- Directing the ball to the desired location in order to make the next move

Players at the youngest ages tend to receive the ball to a dead stop. This is reasonable. Unfortunately, when they next go to kick it, they will most often back up and then return to the ball. This must be discouraged. After receiving the ball, players must be taught to tap the ball out in front and then move forward to kick it. Ultimately, they will need to learn not to stop the ball dead but to use the receive to set up their next action. Players who back up from the ball should be routinely and consistently correct not to do so.

### Demonstration

There are many different ways to receive the ball, however, beginning players should concentrate on the following:

- Sole\* of the foot
- Inside of the foot
- Thigh (both inside and front)
- Chest

These are best practiced with the parent acting as a competent server, either gently rolling or tossing the ball to the player, depending on the receive being used.

For the sole of the foot and inside of the foot receives, beginning players are also tempted to lift their foot and try to “stomp” on the ball, often lifting their foot so high that

the ball goes right under. Players should be shown how to just put their foot a few inches above the ground and let the ball hit it.

An analogy which may be used to describe the art of receiving is like catching an uncooked egg. You want to be out in front with the body part and then give and relax to take the pace/force off of the ball (egg) as you “catch” it so that it doesn’t break or slip away.

### Drills

Parents as “servers:”

Parent sends an inside of the foot pass or “bowls” the ball to the player. Player receives with the sole of the foot, taps the ball in front and sends an inside of the foot pass back. Switch feet, left then right. Perform again using the inside of the foot receive.

Parent serves gentle, two-handed, under-hand, low toss directly to the player’s correct thigh. Player receives, lets the ball fall to the ground, taps the ball in front, and then sends an inside of the foot pass back. Perform using the right top thigh and then the right inside of the thigh. Perform again using the left top thigh and then the left inside of the thigh.

Parent serves gentle, two-handed, under-hand, low toss directly to the player’s chest. Player receives with the chest, lets the ball fall to the ground, taps the ball out in front, and then sends an inside of the foot pass back. For older players, this can also be an opportunity to introduce them to correct serving technique. You may have them try performing the drills above as servers.

**Note:** “Trap” and “Trapping” are older terms that were once common but are now rarely used. These terms implied taking the ball to a dead stop, meaning no movement of the ball at all, upon receiving it. Since this is rarely done, because it is more important to incorporate setting the ball up for the next action at the time it is received, “receiving” and “collecting” the ball are more instructive terms.

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\*The “ball” of the foot is the preferred location, however, this term causes great confusion among young children because it conflicts with the use of the word meaning the soccer ball. Accordingly, “sole of the foot” is used. Young children tend to actually use the sole of the foot, or the arch, anyway. It is often successful to demonstrate this as creating a “wedge” to stop the ball, with the heel just above the ground and the ankle flexed to bring the toes toward the shin.

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW TO TEACH THIS SKILL, SEE:

CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [Introduction to Receiving and Controlling \(Trapping\)](#)



## **INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS: POSITIONS – ATTACKING AND DEFENDING**

### Introduction

For the Instructional Soccer Program, it is sufficient to introduce the concept of two types of positions:

1. Strikers (Forwards)
2. Defenders (Fullbacks)

(Note that Goalkeepers are not used in the instructional program.)

Strikers are the main force of the attack, expected to score goals. They must have a special awareness of where the attacking goal is as they play. (Often at this age, the entire team needs to be reminded of which goal is the goal where they are attempting to score! Coaches may wish to have the entire team point to the goal at which the team is trying to score, both before the start of a game and especially after switching ends before the start of the second half.)

When playing the Striker position, players must be taught how to [dribble](#). If advanced enough, coaches may introduce “[speed dribbling](#)” and the “[personal pass](#)” both found at the CoachingAmericanSoccer.com website.

Defenders are expected to stop the opposing players from trying to score goals. They must have a special awareness of where the defending goal is as they play.

When playing the Defender position, players need to be taught the concept of being “[goal-side](#),” getting on the imaginary line between the opponent and the defending goal. This is described on the CoachingAmericanSoccer.com website.

In practice matches, players must be rotated between the positions. No one should be type-cast or permitted to play only one position.

### Demonstration

Positioning should be demonstrated by the actual placement of children on the field with the explanation of the names and the duties. This is also an opportunity to introduce the aspects of the left, center, and right sides of the field, and of the attacking end and the defending end. If there is sufficient time, demonstrating the placement of players for re-starts is desirable. During practice matches, sufficient time must be allowed for the physical placement/relocation of players on both teams by each coach before a re-start is taken.

Speed dribbling is performed with the leading edge (“outside of the little toe”) area of the outside of either foot. The ankle is turned just slightly as contact is made with the ball so

that the foot may fall in as natural a running stride as possible. This is an extremely challenging activity at a young age. Coaches may just wish to encourage “dribbling real fast.”

The personal pass is simply kicking the ball behind the defender and using speed to run around the defender and collect the ball on the other side.

At this age, the introduction to defending and being “goal-side” need only be the physical demonstration of “getting in the way” to keep the opposing player from getting to the goal. Coaches may wish to place a player in an attacking position and then use disks to show the imaginary line.

### Drills

- Physical placement.
- Speed dribbling line-to-line.
- Personal pass around a cone, then around a stationary defender.
- Run to get “goal-side.”
- Left-right movement to stay between an opponent and the goal.

Notes: When scrimmaging with no goalkeepers, do not “park” a defender in front of the goal. Similarly, do not place a striker to “cherry pick” in front of the offensive goal.

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON POSITIONS, SEE:

CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [Soccer Positions](http://CoachingAmericanSoccer.com/SoccerPositions)

## INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS: THE INSTEP DRIVE (KICKING)

### Introduction

The “instep drive” is the most important kicking skill in soccer. Because of this, it is critical that the instep drive be introduced properly during the Instructional Soccer Program.



Soccer players do not “toe” the ball when they kick, but use the top part of the foot covered by the shoelaces, known as the “instep.” Just as a tennis racket becomes an extension of the arm, with the wrist locked as the tennis ball is struck, so the foot becomes an extension of the leg in soccer, pulled down with the ankle locked, as the soccer ball is kicked.

The instep drive is also sometimes referred to as the “instep kick” or, for children, the “laces kick.” For children, the “laces kick” may be the preferred usage in order to avoid confusion between the words “instep” and “inside,” as associated with the “inside-of-the-foot” kick. The assumption, of course, is that the children understand shoes with laces. At particularly young ages, this may be the “straps,” “tabs,” or “Velcro-tabs” kick!

### Demonstration

Place 2-inch-long strips of white adhesive tape over the instep of both shoes of every player. Do the same for the coaches.



### Tape Used to Identify the Insteps

This can be athletic tape, first-aid tape, or any type of tape that will stay on. Test which type of tape works best for you. Announce the “instep drive” or “laces kick” and show the players that they will be contacting the ball with the part of the foot covered by the tape.\*

To contact the ball, the non-kicking foot is planted just far enough away from the ball to allow for the extension of the kicking leg and foot without the toes of the kicking foot stubbing the ground. The non-kicking foot should point in the direction the ball is intended to go.

The upper part of the kicking leg is pulled back at the hip while the knee of the kicking leg is flexed. The upper leg of the kicking foot is then brought forward while the lower leg is forcefully extended at the knee so as to drive the instep into the ball. A follow-through is then very important. The kicking leg is to swing freely with body weight over the non-kicking or “plant” foot. The ankle is to remain “locked” and not allowed to “flop” during the course of swinging the leg.

Demonstrate the leg swing from all four positions, facing away from the players, facing 90-degrees to the players, facing the players, and facing the opposite 90-degrees to the players.

Further, it should be clearly shown that the ball is not being kicked with the front of the shoe or being “toed.” It should further be shown that proper balance will allow the kicking foot to swing freely “through the ball.” Players are not to “stab” at the ball and then step down onto their kicking foot. The ball is to be kicked along the ground.

### Drills

- On hands and knees, players (with the help of parents or assistants) point toes straight behind and tap the ground with both insteps. Emphasis on foot extension and ankle lock.

- In the position above, add the ball, held by the parent or assistant, so that it is struck (into the ground) with the instep, first with one foot and then with the other. Emphasis on foot extension and ankle lock.
- Have players sit with arms out and back, hands to the ground for balance, so that one leg and then the other can be brought up freely. Add the ball, held by the parent or assistant, so that it can be struck with the instep, first with one foot and then the other. Emphasis on foot extension and ankle lock.
- Using teammates, parents or assistants to support themselves, players stand on a plant foot and then swing a leg freely as if kicking a ball; right then left, ensuring that the foot is extended and the ankle locked.
- Free leg swinging, as above, but without support.
- Using a stationary ball, perform a standing instep drive to the parent or assistant, right then left, using proper form and not for power or distance.
- Same as above with a simple walk up to the ball and kick.
- Try a short run up to the ball and kick, right then left.
- Try a run up to the ball and kick for power and distance, right then left.
- Try to dribble the ball and then kick, right then left.
- Practice shooting at the “big goal.”

\*In order to keep the tape on, some coaches have just taped all the way around the instep and arch of the shoe and then used a colored marker to draw an oval on the tape over the instep.

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW TO TEACH THIS SKILL, SEE:

CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [Introduction to the Instep Drive – The Big Kick of Soccer](#)

Note: For really young players, it is more effective to introduce the instep kick before the inside-of-the-foot kick. See: [Coaching 3- to 4- Year-Olds](#) in this document.

### **Soccer Coaching Tips:**

- A simple, low “punt” to the parent or assistant may also be tried to get the players used to getting the ball onto the instep, but this is usually too difficult for beginners.
- Like the angle on the head of a golf club, the angle at which the instep contacts the ball will determine the ball’s flight. This angle will depend on the placement of the “plant” or non-kicking foot. If the non-kicking foot is planted behind the

horizontal axis of the ball, the instep of the kicking foot will generally be rising and the angle will cause the ball to go up. If the non-kicking foot is planted beside the ball, the instep will generally be perpendicular to the ground and the angle will cause the ball to go along the ground. Ultimately, kicking with a rising foot will cause the ball to go over the goal when shooting. Unfortunately, when this happens, many novice coaches call out to the player to “keep your toe down.” This phrase is meaningless to the player when they know that their foot is extended and their ankle is properly locked in place. The correction is to get the non-kicking foot properly beside the ball at the moment it is struck. Often this is a challenge for players because they must learn to anticipate where to place their plant foot in order to allow for the travel of a moving ball. A better phrase might be, “remember to get your body over the ball.”

## **INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS: SHOOTING AND GOAL SCORING**

### Introduction

The objective of shooting is to legally propel the ball into the opponents' goal, completely "over the goalline, between the goalposts and under the crossbar." This may seem very straight-forward, but, in reality, the shooter has to overcome the nature of the goal itself and the opposing goalkeeper in order to score.

As young players are first learning the game, they are usually drilled to dribble and then to pass to a moving teammate. These are mobile, human activities. In learning to shoot, however, they are expected to direct the ball through a fixed, inanimate, invisible plane and to make sure that the ball goes away from the goalkeeper.

Conceptually, this can be a very hard transition to make, as evidenced by the countless times in youth games that shooters can be seen kicking the ball directly to the opposing goalkeeper. Accordingly, for the Instructional Soccer Program, coaches should utilize and build upon the more basic skills of dribbling, passing, and kicking in order to introduce the more advanced skills of shooting and goal scoring.

### Demonstration

Coaches should first introduce their players to the goal by identifying the goalline, the goalposts and the crossbar. If simple cones are used, for the youngest players it must be clearly shown that it is the space between the cones that represents the goal.

Coaches should then demonstrate that the ball must go completely over the goalline, whether on the ground or in the air, to score. Similarly, coaches should demonstrate that a ball stopped on, or rolling along the goalline, is not a score and needs to be kicked again, as long as it is not in the possession of the goalkeeper.

Accuracy is the key to scoring. When first learning to shoot, however, youth and adults alike have a tendency to want to power the ball into the goal. Accordingly, coaches should first demonstrate how easy it is to score with proper placement. This is initiated by using the skills learned earlier. The coach should demonstrate dribbling through the goal to score, push passing through the goal to score, and using the instep drive to kick the ball through the goal to score.

### Drills

One player, one ball; everyone scores each time; positive reinforcement for everyone scoring a goal. Cones set up as goals. Set up as many goals and split team as needed to avoid lines.

No goalkeeper; toward the middle of the goal:

- Dribble through the goal (can also employ “dribble snake”)
- Dribble to goal, use short inside of the foot pass to score (can alternate feet)
- Dribble to goal, use short instep drive to score (can alternate feet)

Players to get as close to the inside of a goalpost (the cone) without missing; alternate cones and feet:

- Dribble through the goal (can also employ “dribble snake”)
- Dribble to goal, use short inside of the foot pass to score (can alternate feet)
- Dribble to goal, use short instep drive to score (can alternate feet)

Add discs to represent the presence of a goalkeeper or defender; players to dribble or shoot between the discs and a cone; alternate sides and feet with each turn:

- Dribble through the goal (can also employ “dribble snake”)
- Dribble to goal, use short inside of the foot pass to score (can alternate feet)
- Dribble to goal, use short instep drive to score (can alternate feet)

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW TO TEACH THIS SKILL, SEE:  
CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [Introduction to Shooting and Goal Scoring](#)



## **INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS: GENERAL PASSING**

### Introduction

The objective of general passing is to move the ball among teammates in order to keep it away from opponents and, ultimately, to put the ball in a position for a shot on goal. For the Instructional Soccer Program, the youngest players are usually introduced to passing using the inside of the foot to push the ball to a standing partner. The use of the instep drive is then added to allow for passing greater distances. The next step in the passing progression is to introduce choices of teammates to pass to and player movement.

### Demonstration

For the introduction to passing choices, the coach sets up a triangle of the coach and two players with an assistant (parent) in the middle. The coach has a ball. As the assistant moves toward one or the other player, the coach demonstrates passing the ball to the “open” teammate.

For the introduction to movement, the coach sets up two cones about ten yards apart and then shows how an assistant will slowly move from one cone to the other. Off-set from the cone from which the assistant starts, the coach, with ball, then demonstrates how a pass toward the second cones “leading” the assistant (player/teammate) so that the ball and the player will meet at the same time and place.

### Drills

#### (Movement)

- Pairs with ball passing back and forth (minimum two-touch; i.e., receive/pass or receive/set-up/pass or receive/dribble/pass), while moving around.
- Same as above, in groups of three players.
- Same as triangle demonstration with a parent “defender” who does not take the ball away.
- Same as above with a player “defender” who does not take the ball away. (Rotate defenders.)
- Same as above with a player “defender” who is allowed to try to take the ball away. (Rotate defenders.)
- 4 v. 1 “keep-away” in a spacious grid.

- 4 players in a grid, two-touch passing, calling out the name of the intended receiver before passing the ball.

(Leading)

- Same as the demonstration, but with players only (static passer).
- Same as above, but change angles.
- Same as above with movement on the part of the passer.

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW TO TEACH THIS SKILL, SEE:  
CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [Introduction To Passing](https://www.coachingamericansoccer.com/introduction-to-passing)

## **INSTRUCTION AND DRILLS: JUGGLING**

### Introduction

Juggling is the skill of repeatedly striking the ball in order to keep it up in the air. This is usually done while standing in place. Juggling, in and of itself, is a practice skill which is often the best way for players to develop a soft, deft “touch” to the ball. A soft touch is the ability to contact the ball with the minimum amount of force needed to maintain the maximum degree of control. The ability to control the ball — in order to make it go where you want it to go, when you want it to go, and the way you want it to go — is the single most important objective for an individual soccer player to try to achieve.

Accordingly, for the Instructional Soccer Program, juggling should be introduced as early as possible and made a part of a good practice routine. A higher success rate is achieved after players have been introduced to the instep drive.

The keys to first learning effective juggling are:

1. At the time the ball is struck, the surface of the body part used to strike the ball should be parallel with the ground, i.e., horizontal.
2. The ball should be struck in such a way that it goes straight up into the air, i.e., vertical or perpendicular to the ground, approximately 18 inches.

At the youngest level, the following parts of the body are the most commonly used to strike the ball while juggling:

- Top of the thigh of both the right and left leg
- Instep of both the right and left feet\*

### Demonstration

For both youth and adults first being introduced to juggling, it is easiest to learn the thigh juggle. The ball should first be held in the hands, chest-high, with the arms slightly outstretched in front of the right leg. Next the right thigh is raised parallel to the ground and the ball is dropped onto the thigh so that it bounces straight back up and is caught. After this is mastered, the ball should be dropped simultaneously with the raising of the thigh so the ball is actually struck straight back up and caught. After this is mastered, the player should attempt to strike the ball a second, third, and fourth time with the same thigh, without catching the ball. This same progression is then used with the left thigh.

After some success is achieved with the thigh juggle, the instep juggle may be introduced. The ball should first be held in the hands, just below waist high, with the

arms slightly outstretched in front of the right leg. Next, the ball should be dropped simultaneously with a slight upward kick from the right instep so that the ball is struck straight up to be caught with the hands. When first learning, this action is similar to the instep drive or a goalkeeper's punt: the ankle should be locked and the upward kick should come from flexing the leg at the knee. After this is mastered, the player should attempt to strike the ball a second, third, and fourth time with the same instep, without catching the ball. This same progression is then used with the left instep.

**Important Note:** Young players who experience difficulty learning to juggle may first achieve success by following the steps above using a sturdy, soccer-ball sized balloon. This also has the advantage of being something that can be done indoors. After that, they could progress to a "play ball."

Players who achieve quick success with juggling should be moved on to the elimination of use of the hands. This calls for the introduction of the "sole of the foot/instep pick-up." To do this, the sole of the foot is first placed on top of the ball. Then, in one fluid motion, the foot is used to pull the ball backward such that the toes are sent under the ball and the ball is allowed to run up on top of the instep. As the ball centers on top of the instep, the ankle may be flicked, the non-pickup leg may be flexed, or the pickup leg may be bent at the hip in order to propel the ball upward sufficiently to begin an instep or thigh juggle. At this point, juggling may continue using any combination of the right or left thighs and insteps.

### Drills

Players should be allowed to "free juggle" any way they want and count the number of hits they can achieve before they catch the ball with their hands or lose control.

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\*Some young players have found it easier to start with the inside of the foot.

FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW TO TEACH THIS SKILL, SEE:  
CoachingAmericanSoccer.com [Introduction to Juggling](#)

### **SUGGESTED FORMAT OF A SCRIMMAGE**

To set up a scrimmage in the instructional soccer program, start by using the existing grid. Place cones or disks two-yards apart on each end-line to establish goals. Do not use goal-keepers. Start with 3 v. 3 (three versus three), with one of the teams wearing colored pinnies. Have one coach on the field with each team. Place parents around the perimeter to retrieve balls when they go out of bounds. (Make sure that the parents behind the goals are going to resist the temptation to step forward and block shots!) It is extremely important that the players get lots of positive reinforcement from making goals. Do not keep score, even though the players and parents may want to do so. Rotate players frequently to ensure equal playing time. In warm weather, take water breaks.

The team coaches must constantly position players and describe what happens next. When a team kicks a ball in, the coach from the opposing team must get the defending players to stand far enough away in order to let the play resume fairly. Coaches should tell the players which teammate to kick to, by name.

Encourage the team with the ball (attackers) to spread out and to move to get open for passes, even though most young, beginning players will have absolutely no idea what this means! Encourage the defenders (team without the ball) to get between the ball and the goal (goal-side) or between an attacker who is “up front” and the goal.

Don’t worry about the finer points of rules regarding throw-ins, offside, or goal kicks. Every ball that goes over the end-line becomes the defenders’ kick-in. Balls that go out the side-lines are a kick-in for the other team. Prohibit sliding or leaving ones’ feet in any way. Encourage the attackers to shoot and the defenders to get back as soon as they lose control of the ball. Apply the “Basic Soccer Rules” identified earlier in this Instructional Soccer Program Manual. After a number of weeks, you may add the concept of a kickoff and changing ends at “halftime.”

The scrimmage will most likely look like a swarm around the ball (often referred to as the “ants to honey stage”). If the coach must engage in some tactical instruction, have one player play behind the swarm to collect any balls coming to him and play the ball forward to space in front of, and to the side of, the swarm. Later, introduce players to the sides of the swarm to collect any balls to the side, or passes from behind, and then dribble forward and shoot or pass to the middle. Finally, add a player in front of the swarm to serve as a target.

Often, one or more players on a team may become dominant. There is a fine line to be worked with this type of player, one who figures things out fast, has more experience, or

is just gifted early. They are to be encouraged and gently offered as “role models,” but not at the expense of other players never getting to kick the ball.

Variations: Set up more than one scrimmage; go to 4 v. 4 and 5 v.5, enlarging the grid as necessary; introduce a kick-off; introduce substituting. Create a half-time and introduce switching ends. Introduce corner kicks. After approximately three weeks, scrimmage the team opposite from you on the main field by splitting each team in two and setting up two games. Ultimately, one can open up the field to the full combined length of both grids, including the service space between the grids, and have a larger-sized team scrimmage.

Circle Game. Set up a large circle of discs in the center of the grid. Establish goals with cones at each end. All players with ball. Divide the team into two groups. One group has different-colored pinnies. Establish which group will attack and which group will defend in which direction. All players start by dribbling within the circle. When the coach calls out a group color, those players are all to dribble to attack their goal. The other group is to leave their balls in the circle and go defend. Time the event based on the success rate, starting at approximately 30 seconds. Re-set and go with the other group. Count the number of goals for each. Modify the time accordingly and go again.

## **“BUILD-A-PRACTICE”**

To build your own customized instructional soccer practice, copy and paste this entire document into your word processor, then follow the steps below and save and print as your own document to be used as your practice plan.

**EQUIPMENT REQUIRED:** 20 SAUCERS, FOUR CONES, ONE BALL PER PLAYER, (10 VESTS)

**FIELD SET-UP** in advance: 30-yard x 40-yard rectangle of saucers; goals with cones 3-yards apart at each end.

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT:** Partners with own child during instruction and drill segment.

**RUNNING TIME:** 1 HOUR. Start on time.

### **1. WELCOME AND WARM UP** (Approximately 5 minutes)

This should include general body movement and coordination activities that may be with or without a ball.

### **STEP ONE: COPY AND PASTE YOUR SELECTION “A” HERE FROM BELOW (Warm Ups)**

### **2. WATER BREAK** (Suggested – Approximately 2 minutes)

### **3. FUN GAMES: 2-to-4 iterations** (Approximately 18 minutes)

It is not recommended that you play the same fun game more than twice in one practice, although the children quickly develop favorites. They need to constantly be challenged with new activities and learn to respond to the direction associated with each. See the suggested list of fun games. (There may be a water break in between games.)

### **STEP TWO: COPY AND PASTE YOUR SELECTION “B” HERE FROM BELOW (Fun Games)**

### **4. WATER BREAK** (Mandatory – Approximately 2 minutes)

### **5. INSTRUCTION AND DRILL** (Approximately 10 minutes)

This should include a very brief demonstration of the skill topic for the day (less than 2 minutes), giving the name of the skill and showing how it is to be performed (and sometimes what not to do). Then move promptly into activities that maximize one-player/one-ball in the performance of the skill.

### **STEP THREE: COPY AND PASTE YOUR SELECTION “C” HERE FROM BELOW (Instruction and Drill)**

#### **6. WATER BREAK** (Mandatory -Approximately 2 minutes)

#### **7. SCRIMMAGE** (Approximately 18 minutes)

Large games where one strong player on each team dominates play are inherently not fun for the other players. Accordingly, if at all possible, it is suggested that coaches set up games with small, equal teams, and just let the children play. It is recommended that you not use goalkeepers. Further, in order to maximize involvement and the number of touches, it is recommended that games not exceed 4 v. 4. If a coach has 9 or more players, two scrimmages should probably be established (e.g., one 2 v. 2 and one 3 v. 3). A parent or the coach (or even a visiting sibling) can always fill in if there is an odd number. Move players around to “balance” the teams. (There may be a water break in the middle.)

#### **8. CONCLUSION AND ANNOUNCEMENTS** (Approximately 3 minutes)

Ask the children to tell you what the skill topic was and to demonstrate it. Suggest a “homework”\* assignment. Announce the next practice. End on time.

\* Homework – Parents, please play “soccer” with your children. Don’t try to coach them, just PLAY with them! Place down cones, saucers, or pieces of cloth for goals. Make sure that your child gets the majority of the touches on the ball. Don’t try to take it away from them. It’s yours if they kick it too far out in front of themselves, then tap it back to them. Remember to show excitement and provide encouragement. Also remember that you’re bigger and stronger than they are! Don’t KICK at the ball! Use gentle touches or a blocking move. You can stand in the way and make them go around you. Let them score. Quit when they say they want to quit.

### **STEP FOUR: DELETE EVERYTHING FROM HERE DOWN, SAVE AND PRINT**

#### **CHOICES FOR SELECTION “A”**

##### **Warm Up Activities**

- Without ball: Walk around the perimeter of the grid; move to the inside, move to the perimeter; Find a line – everyone to the left, everyone to the right, jump to the left, jump to the right.
- Without ball: From one end, run to the other end; run backward to the first end. Run sideways, left, then right.
- Without ball: “Run around”/”freeze.” (Or “go”/”stop.” Or “red light”/”green light.”)
- Without ball: Jumping Jacks



- Without ball: Jogging “In-Place” (can add high-knees and thigh slap)
- Without ball: Kangaroo Hop, forward, backward, left and right
- Without ball: Skipping
- Without ball: Jumping around using one leg, then the other
- Without ball: “All fall down,” get up as fast as possible, jogging in between; Forward-roll. (Don’t use with wet grounds.)
- Without ball: Back-forth through THEIR OWN parents’ legs (for surprise effect, you can add a “fanny pat” by telling the parents only); figure “8” through legs with instruction/directions from parent.
- Without ball: Challenge – “Crab Walk.”
- Without ball: “Make-A-Circle” around a disc, cone, or parent. Left (counter-clockwise) and right (clockwise).
- Without ball: Hokey-Pokey. (See [www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/lyrics/hokey.htm](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/lyrics/hokey.htm)) Use right foot, left foot, right hand, left hand, and head.
- Without ball: Head-Shoulders-Knees-and-Toes.
- Without ball: Knee Bends (down to 90-degrees only)
- Without ball: While stationary, balance standing on one leg, then the other
- With ball, while standing: Toss in air, catch with hands; toss in air- clap – catch with hands; toss in air – clap as many times as possible – catch with hands; toss in air – close and re-open eyes – catch with hands; (challenge – toss in air – spin 360 degrees – catch with hands).
- With ball, while standing: Push ball around with right hand. Push ball around with left hand. (Challenge: With feet spread, push ball around feet in a figure “8” with hands).
- With ball, while standing: Push ball with both hands from front, between legs, to back; turn; repeat.
- With ball, while standing: Hold ball with both hands, twist from side-to-side; hold ball with both hands, touch to back of neck, touch to toes; repeat. Knee bends while holding ball out in front.
- With ball, while standing: Still ball – step over, turn around, step over one foot then the other (from front-to-back); repeat side-to-side.
- With ball, while standing: Forward roll while holding ball.

- With ball, while sitting: Touch ball to left hip, touch ball to right hip; twist left, twist right; lie back and touch ball to ground above head; sit up and touch ball to toes.
- With ball, while sitting: Start in sitting position: place ball between feet/ankles and “hold”/lock ball in place; brace with hands or lie back; bend legs to bring ball back to fanny, extend; move legs left and right; point legs to the sky; try to take the legs/ball and touch the toes/ball to the ground above the head.
- With ball, while sitting: Name Game. Establish a small circle with discs. Half of the players have ball. Players stand around the circle and are to pass the ball across the circle to a player who does not have a ball. Before making a pass, however, the player must call out the name of the person to whom they are going to pass. (Before using this game, everyone should sit in a tight circle and introduce themselves by first name.) (Variations: Include yourself as “coach.” Add more balls if successful.)

## **CHOICES FOR SELECTION “B”**

### **Soccer Fun Games**

Select from the list contained in [SOCCER FUN GAMES](http://CoachingAmericanSoccer.com) at CoachingAmericanSoccer.com®

## **CHOICES FOR SELECTION “C”**

### **Instruction and Drill:**

#### ***Dribbling***

#### **Introduction**

In soccer, dribbling is the skill of moving the ball around the field, by use of the feet, unassisted by other players. The basic concepts of dribbling include keeping the ball as close to the feet as possible in order to maintain control of the ball; using the correct part of the feet to contact the ball in order to maintain balance of the body and achieve the desired result; and ultimately using peripheral vision to see the ball in order to keep as much of the field in sight as possible during the performance of the skill.

At the introductory level, however, the most important aspect of dribbling is simply getting the players used to moving the ball around with any part of their feet.

#### **Demonstration**

The coach should clearly identify and demonstrate the use of:

- Inside
- Outside

- Instep
- Sole

of both feet to be used in dribbling.

## **Drills:**

### **Dribbling in a Confined Space**

Introduce “Irish Jig” (a.k.a., “Mexican Hat Dance,” “Hat Dance,” “Dance on the Ball,” or “Toe Tappers”). Balancing using the left leg, players should tap the top of a stationary ball with the sole of their right foot (preferably with the “ball” of the foot or the toes); players should then switch legs. Players should then alternate feet and try to build up speed.

Introduce how to “Make an airplane.” Balancing using the left leg, players should place the sole of the right foot on the ball and stretch out their arms to the sides to maintain balance; players should then switch legs.

(Initially, mark off a space smaller than the grid... Can use parents to define space...)

Everybody “dribble” – no instruction, just use your feet to move the ball around (everybody dribble “to somewhere else within the grid;” “to other green space;” “to a corner of the grid;” “to the middle;” “to your mom or dad”...)

Non-moving ball – put the bottom (sole) of the right foot on top; switch to left foot on top; switch to right – add hop; switch to left – add hop; switch to right – toe tap; switch to left – toe tap; (challenge – alternate feet toe tap – “Irish Jig.”)

“Kangaroo Hop” up to the ball; put sole of one foot on top of ball. (Make an airplane.)

Run up to standing ball, put sole of foot on top of ball. (Make an airplane.)

Dribble/stop... by putting sole of foot on top of ball. Make an airplane.

After instruction – right foot only; left foot only; inside of right foot only; inside of left foot only; outside of right foot only; outside of left foot only.

“Go/freeze” while dribbling; “All-fall-down/get back up fast” while dribbling.

Dribble in a line around the perimeter of the grid (left turns); reverse direction (right turns).

“Dribble Snake” follow the leader in a line anywhere inside grid. (Advanced challenge... Leader breaks off upon request and dribbles to the back of the line – creates the next leader – can be done until everyone leads...)

Dribble – Stop ball (anyway you want with foot) – turn around and dribble back the way you came.

Dribble – stop ball with sole of foot – PULL BALL BACK WITH SOLE of foot – turn around, dribble.

Dribble fast/Dribble slow.

“Make-A-Circle, right (counter-clockwise) then left (clockwise), first just with ball – using inside of foot, then around a disc or cone, then around a parent.

Dribble around obstacles – discs, cones, and/or standing parents. (Challenge – parents move)

Dribble to objectives – corner flags, cones.

Dribble through “gates” (pairs of cones or saucers; or parents’ legs). (Challenge – count the number of “goals” scored during a given period of time.)

“Circle-and-Go” – “Make-A-Circle” around a cone, dribble to another cone, make-a circle around it; continue...

“Coerver Base Move” (inside of feet, one-touch, foot-to-foot)

Challenge – while slow dribbling, look for and then fast dribble to an open area.

### **Line-to-Line Dribbling**

(Use sole-of-foot stop on the ending line...)

Inside of right only; inside of left only; outside of right only; outside of left only.

Slow/Fast.

### **General Passing**

#### **Introduction**

The objective of general passing is to move the ball among teammates in order to keep it away from opponents and, ultimately, to put the ball in a position for a shot on goal. The youngest players are usually introduced to passing using the inside of the foot to push the ball to a standing partner. The use of the instep drive is then added to allow for passing greater distances. The next step in the passing progression is to introduce choice of teammates to pass to and player movement.

#### **Demonstration**

For the introduction to passing choices, the coach sets up a triangle of the coach and two players with an assistant (parent) in the middle. The coach has a ball. As the

assistant moves toward one or the other player, the coach demonstrates passing the ball to the “open” teammate.

For the introduction to movement, the coach sets up two cones about ten yards apart and then shows how an assistant will slowly move from one cone to the other, off-set from the cone from which the assistant starts, the coach, with ball, then demonstrates how a pass toward the second cones “leads” the assistant (player/teammate) so that the ball and the player will meet at the same time and place.

### **Drills**

#### **(Movement)**

- Pairs will ball passing back and forth (minimum two-touch; i.e., trap/pass or trap/set-up/pass or trap/dribble/pass), while moving around.
- Same as above, in groups of three players.
- Same as triangle demonstration with a parent “defender” who does not take the ball away.
- Same as above with a player “defender” who does not take the ball away. (Rotate defenders.)
- Same as above with a player “defender” who is allowed to try to take the ball away. (Rotate defenders.)
- 4 v 1 “keep-away” in a spacious grid.
- 4 players in a grid, two-touch passing, calling out the name of the intended receiver before passing the ball.

#### **(Leading)**

- Same as the demonstration, but with players only (static passer).
- Same as above, but change angles.
- Same as above with movement on the part of the passer.

### ***General Receiving (Trapping)***

#### **Introduction**

Trapping is one of soccer’s most fundamental individual skills. Mastery of trapping sets up everything that a player and the whole team wish to accomplish during a match, including maintaining possession of the ball, passing, and shooting.

The skill of trapping is the act of receiving the ball, getting it under control, and setting it up in a proper position for performance of the next skill. The steps involved in trapping the ball are:

- Deciding which trap to use
- Deciding where to place the ball at the end of the trap
- Positioning the body and body part to meet the ball
- Taking the pace off the ball
- Directing the ball to the desired location in order to make the next move

### **Demonstration**

There are many different types of traps, however, beginning players may wish to concentrate on the following:

- Sole of the foot
- Inside of the foot
- Thigh (both inside and front)
- Chest

These are best practiced with the parent acting as a competent server, either gently rolling or tossing the ball to the player, depending on the trap being used.

Beginning players are tempted to trap the ball to a dead stop and then back up from the ball in order to run up and kick it. This should be demonstrated as “what not to do” and corrected when it occurs. It should be demonstrated that after a dead trap the ball is immediately tapped out in front and then moved onto.

An analogy which may be used to describe the art of trapping is that it is like catching an uncooked egg. You want to be out in front with the body part and then give and relax to take the pace/force off of the ball (egg) as you “catch” it so that it doesn’t break or slip away.

### **Drills**

#### **Parents as “servers:”**

- Parent sends an inside of the foot pass or “bowls” the ball to the player. Player traps with the sole of the foot, taps the ball in front and sends an inside of the foot pass back. Left then right. Same for inside of the foot trap.

- Parent serves gentle, two-handed, under-hand, low toss directly to the player's correct thigh. Player traps, taps the ball in front and sends an inside of the foot pass back. Left inside then top. Right inside then top.
- Parent serves gentle, two-handed, under-hand, low toss directly to the player's chest. Player traps, taps the ball in front and sends an inside of the foot pass back. For older players, this can also be an opportunity to introduce them to correct serving technique. You may have them try performing the drills above.

### ***Inside of the Foot (Push) Pass and Trap***

#### **Introduction**

The inside of the foot or "push" pass and its corresponding trap, represent the most basic pass and trap in soccer. Although it is a little awkward at first, it provides the highest level of control for passing and trapping for beginners because the inside of the foot conforms to the curve of the ball.

#### **Demonstration**

The foot is turned at the ankle and the leg is rotated at the hip so that the toes are pointed to 90 degrees to the outside. Balance is maintained so that the leg can swing freely at the hip. An analogy can be made to use of a putter in golf. An actual putter could be used in a demonstration with a reference made to miniature golf. The foot must be off of the ground so that the ball may be contacted dead center.

Like the instep drive, the point of the direction of the non-kicking will roughly determine the path that the kicked ball will take.

The corresponding trap is the simple receipt of the ball with the inside of the foot. Again, the foot needs to be off of the ground so that the ball may be contacted dead center. It should be shown that the foot must not be lifted so high that the ball can pass under it. (Slightly advanced demonstration would provide for receipt of a faster-paced ball by showing the foot held out in front and the leg being relaxed as the ball is received in order to take the pace off.)

#### **Drills**

- Inside of foot pass and trap, left and right, with parent. (Short, then expand distance.)
- Inside of foot pass and trap, left and right, with teammate. (Short, then expand distance.)

- Dribble and then inside of foot pass to teammate who traps; re-set and then the other player goes.
- Challenge – as above, but from some distance, alternate players back-peddle to reset.
- In triangle – one ball – players pass and trap ball around.
- In triangle – one ball – player passes to one player and receives ball back; player passes to other player and receives ball back; rotate.
- “Personal Pass” – dribble, push pass out in front, sprint, retrieve, dribble. (Line-to-line); dribble at standing parent (with legs spread), push pass through legs, sprint around, retrieve (“nutmeg”).

### ***Juggling***

#### **Introduction**

Juggling is the skill of repeatedly striking the ball in order to keep it in the air. This is usually done while standing in place. Juggling, in and of itself, is a practice skill which is often the best way for players to develop a soft, deft “touch” to the ball. A soft touch is the ability to contact the ball with the minimum amount of force needed to maintain the maximum degree of control. The ability to control the ball — in order to make it go where you want it to go, when you want it to go, and the way you want it to go — is the single most important objective for an individual soccer player to try to achieve.

Accordingly, juggling should be introduced as early as possible and made a part of a good practice routine. A higher success rate is achieved after players have been introduced to the instep drive.

The keys to first learning effective juggling are:

1. At the time the ball is struck, the surface of the body part used to strike the ball should be parallel with the ground, i.e., horizontal.
2. The ball should be struck in such a way that it goes straight up into the air, i.e., vertical or perpendicular to the ground, approximately 18 inches.

At the youngest level, the following parts of the body are the most commonly used to strike the ball while juggling:

- Top of the thigh of both the right and left leg
- Instep of both the right and left feet

#### **Demonstration**



For both youth and adults first being introduced to juggling, it is easiest to learn the thigh juggle. The ball should first be held in the hands, chest-high, with the arms slightly outstretched in front of the right leg. Next the right thigh is raised parallel to the ground and the ball is dropped onto the thigh so that it bounces straight back up and is caught. After this is mastered, the ball should be dropped simultaneously with the raising of the thigh so the ball is actually struck straight back up and caught. After this is mastered, the player should attempt to strike the ball a second, third, and fourth time with the same thigh, without catching the ball. This same progression is then used with the left thigh.

After some success is achieved with the thigh juggle, the instep juggle may be introduced. The ball should first be held in the hands, just below waist high, with the arms slightly outstretched in front of the right leg. Next, the ball should be dropped simultaneously with a slight upward kick from the right instep so that the ball is struck straight up to be caught.

When first learning, this action is similar to the instep drive or a goalkeeper's punt: the ankle should be locked and the upward kick should come from flexing the leg at the knee. After this is mastered, the player should attempt to strike the ball a second, third, and fourth time with the same instep, without catching the ball. This same progression is then used with the left instep.

**Important Note:** Young players who have trouble learning to juggle may first achieve success by following the steps above using a sturdy, soccer-ball sized balloon. This also has the advantage of being something that can be done indoors.

Players who achieve quick success with juggling should be moved on to the elimination of use of the hands. This calls for the introduction of the "sole of the foot/instep pick-up." To do this, the sole of the foot is first placed on top of the ball. Then, in one fluid motion, the foot is used to pull the ball backward such that the toes are sent under the ball and the ball is allowed to run up on top of the instep. As the ball centers on top of the instep, the ankle may be flicked, the non-pickup leg may be flexed, or the pickup leg may be bent at the hip in order to propel the ball upward sufficiently to begin an instep or thigh juggle. At this point, juggling may continue using any combination of the right or left thighs and insteps.

### **Drills**

Players should be allowed to "free juggle" any way they want and count the number of hits they can achieve before they catch the ball with their hands or lose control.

### ***Positions, Attacking and Defending***

#### **Introduction**

At this age, it is sufficient to introduce the concept of two types of positions:

- Forwards/Strikers
- Fullbacks/Defenders

Forwards are the main force of the attack, expected to score goals. They must have a special awareness of where the attacking goal is as they play. (Often at this age, the entire team needs to be reminded of which goal is the goal where they are attempting to score! Coaches may wish to have the entire team point to the goal at which the team is trying to score, both before the start of a game and especially after switching ends before the start of the second half.)

When playing the Forward position, players need to be taught to use “speed dribbling” and the “personal pass.”

Fullbacks are the main line of the defense, expected to stop the opposing players from trying to score goals. They must have a special awareness of where the defending goal is as they play.

When playing the Fullback position, players need to be taught the concept of being “goal- side,” on the imaginary line between the goal and the opponent.

In practice matches, players must be rotated among the positions. No one should be type- cast or permitted to play only one position.

### **Demonstration**

Positioning should be demonstrated by the actual placement of children on the field with the explanation of the names and the duties. This is also an opportunity to introduce the aspects of the left, center, and right sides of the field, and of the attacking end and the defending end. If there is sufficient time, demonstrating the placement of players for re-starts is desirable. During practice matches, sufficient time must be allowed for the physical placement/relocation of players on both teams by each coach before a re-start is taken.

Speed dribbling is performed with the leading edge (“outside of the little toe”) area of the outside of either foot. The ankle is turned just slightly as contact is made with the ball so that the foot may fall in as natural a running stride as possible.

The personal pass is simply kicking the ball behind the defender and using speed to run around the defender and collect the ball on the other side.

At this age, the introduction to defending and being “goal-side” need only be the physical demonstration of “getting in the way” to keep the opposing player from getting to the goal.

## **Drills**

- Physical placement.
- Speed dribbling line to line.
- Personal pass around a cone, then a stationary defender.
- Left-right movement to stay between an opponent and the goal.

## ***Shooting and Goal Scoring***

### **Introduction**

The objective of shooting is to legally propel the ball into the opponents' goal, completely "over the goalline, between the goalposts and under the crossbar." This may seem very straight-forward, but, in reality, the shooter has to overcome the nature of the goal itself and the opposing goalkeeper in order to score.

As young players are first learning the game, they are usually drilled to dribble and then to pass to a moving teammate. These are mobile, human activities. In learning to shoot, however, they are expected to direct the ball through a fixed, inanimate, invisible plane and to make sure that the ball goes away from the goalkeeper.

Conceptually, this can be a very hard transition to make, as evidenced by the countless times in youth games that shooters can be seen kicking the ball directly to the opposing goalkeeper. Accordingly, coaches should utilize and build upon the more basic skills of dribbling, passing, and kicking in order to introduce the more advanced skills of shooting and goal scoring.

### **Demonstration**

Coaches should first introduce their players to the goal by identifying the goalline, the goalposts and the crossbar. If simple cones are used, for the youngest players it must be clearly shown that it is the space between the cones that represents the goal.

Coaches should then demonstrate that the ball must go completely over the goalline, whether on the ground or in the air, to score. Similarly, coaches should demonstrate that a ball stopped on, or rolling along the goalline, is not a score and needs to be kicked again, as long as it is not in the possession of the goalkeeper.

Accuracy is the key to scoring. When first learning to shoot, however, youth and adults alike have a tendency to want to power the ball into the goal. Accordingly, coaches should first demonstrate how easy it is to score with proper placement. This is initiated by using the skills learned earlier. The coach should demonstrate dribbling through the goal to score, push passing through the goal to score, and using the instep drive to kick the ball through the goal to score.

## **Drills**

One player, one ball; everyone scores each time; positive reinforcement for everyone scoring a goal. Cones set up as goals. Set up as many goals and split team as needed to avoid lines.

No goalkeeper; toward the middle of the goal:

- Dribble through the goal (can also employ “dribble snake”)
- Dribble to goal, use short inside of the foot pass to score (can alternate feet)
- Dribble to goal, use short instep drive to score (can alternate feet)

Players to get as close to the inside of a goalpost (the cone) without missing; alternate cones and feet:

- Dribble through the goal (can also employ “dribble snake”)
- Dribble to goal, use short inside of the foot pass to score (can alternate feet)
- Dribble to goal, use short instep drive to score (can alternate feet)

Add discs to represent the presence of a goalkeeper or defender; players to dribble or shoot between the discs and a cone; alternate sides and feet with each turn:

- Dribble through the goal (can also employ “dribble snake”)
- Dribble to goal, use short inside of the foot pass to score (can alternate feet)
- Dribble to goal, use short instep drive to score (can alternate feet)

## ***The Instep Drive (Kicking)***

### **Introduction**

The “instep drive” is the most important kicking skill in soccer. Soccer players do not “toe” the ball when they kick, but use the top part of the foot covered by the shoelaces, known as the “instep.”

Just as a tennis racket becomes an extension of the arm, with the wrist locked as the ball is struck, so the foot becomes an extension of the leg, pulled down with the ankle locked, just as the soccer ball is kicked.

### **Demonstration**

To contact the ball, the non-kicking foot is planted far enough away from the ball to allow for the extension of the kicking leg and foot without the toes of the kicking foot stubbing the ground. The non-kicking foot should generally point in the direction the ball is intended to go. The upper part of the kicking leg is pulled back at the hip while the knee

of the kicking leg is flexed. The upper leg of the kicking foot is then brought forward while the lower leg is forcefully extended so as to drive the instep into the ball. A follow-through is then very important.

Like the angle on the head of a golf club, the angle at which the instep contacts the ball will determine the ball's flight. This angle will depend on the placement of the "plant" or non-kicking foot. If the non-kicking foot is planted behind the ball, the instep of the kicking foot will generally be rising and the angle will cause the ball to go up. If the non-kicking foot is planted beside the ball, the instep will generally be perpendicular to the ground and the angle will cause the ball to go along the ground.

It should be clearly shown that the ball is not being kicked with the front of the shoe or being "toed." It should further be shown that proper balance will allow the kicking foot to swing freely "through the ball."

### Drills

- On hands and knees, players (with the help of parents) point toes straight behind and tap the ground with both insteps.
- In the position above, add the ball, held by the parent, so that it is struck with the instep, first with one foot and then with the other.
- Have players sit with arms out and back, hands to the ground for balance, so that one leg and then the other can be brought up freely. Add the ball, held by the parent, so that it can be struck with the instep, first with one foot and then the other.
- (A simple, low "punt" to the parent may also be tried to get the ball onto the instep, but this is usually too difficult for beginners.)
- Standing instep drive to the parent, right then left, using proper form and not for power or distance.
- Same as above with a simple walk up to the ball and kick.
- Run up to the ball and kick.
- Run up to the ball and kick for power and distance.
- Standing instep drive to the parent, right then left, using proper form and not for power or distance.
- Same as above with a simple walk up to the ball and kick.
- Run up to the ball and kick.
- Run up to the ball and kick for power and distance.

- Dribble and then kick.
- Standing instep drive to the parent, right then left, using proper form and not for power or distance.
- Same as above with a simple walk up to the ball and kick.
- Run up to the ball and kick.
- Run up to the ball and kick for power and distance.
- Dribble and then kick.

### **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

The following ten sample U-5/U-6 instructional soccer practice plans build on skills and concepts from the first to the last practice. A fall-season “Halloween” practice is included as Number 8, along with a “Fun Field Day” practice as Number 10. Coaches may choose from any of the options included in other portions of the Instructional Soccer Coaching Manual, especially the [“Soccer Fun Games”](#) found at [CoachingAmericanSoccer.com](#).

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: ONE (Main Topics – Dribbling I, Scoring a Goal)**

ADMINISTRATION – Give out balls; Parents write first and last names on balls with permanent marker; discuss water bottles, Covid accommodations (no handshakes, etc.), uniforms, shin guards, Team Parent; Snacks/drinks for season and next week.

INTRODUCTIONS – Coaches, team name is “Tigers,” soccer, the grid (or circle)

ACTIVITY ONE – Player names; Name Game #1 – Everyone sits in a circle; each child in turn to loudly state first name; after each coach loudly repeats the name and says “Hi” or “Welcome” (name)

SKILL DEMONSTRATION -This is Dribbling – move the ball with your feet, we don’t use our hands unless told to; keep it close; we do not kick the ball and run after it

ACTIVITY TWO – Dribble in a confined space (grid or circle).

SKILL DEMONSTRATION – This is how we stop the ball with the bottom of a foot; when you stop the ball, “Make an Airplane.”

ACTIVITY THREE – Now everyone dribbles anywhere in the grid; when I say “Freeze,” stop the ball with the bottom of the foot and “Make an Airplane.”

WATER BREAK

ACTIVITY FOUR – Let’s try this: Toe Tappers

ACTIVITY FIVE – Fun Game: “Chase the Coach” – Dribble, Freeze, Continue

SKILL DEMONSTRATION – Straight ahead dribbling

ACTIVITY SIX – Line-to-line straight ahead dribbling. (Incl. stop/airplane, turn around)

WATER BREAK

SKILL DEMONSTRATION SKILL – This is how we score a goal (GOAL!!!); Dribble right into the goal, pull the ball out with your hands.

ACTIVITY SEVEN – Everybody go score a goal

DEMONSTRATION – Our goal, their goal. We score here, we try to keep the other team from scoring there.

SCRIMMAGE – Small goals, small-sides; two or more games. “Go Tigers” before; “Great Game (color) team” after.



CONCLUSION – Clean up – grab and stack cones and saucers. Get your ball. Announcements to Parents; No trash. Hope you had fun; see you next week! Thank you for coming. Remember to take everything you brought. Remember to bring your ball back each week. Homework: Practice what you learned today.

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: TWO (Main Topics – Dribbling II, Right & Left)**

ADMINISTRATION – Introduce Team Parent; Snacks Sign-up; **Picture Day** will require a form. NO HEADING! Concept of “Homework.”

Team cheer – Now we add show me your claws! One, Two, Three, Go Tigers! w/claws

REMINDERS: NO HANDS. Feet only, no pushing. If you fall down, get up immediately.

ACTIVITY ONE – Name Game #2: Everyone sits in a circle. Coach instructs each child in turn to loudly state their name; after each one, all children then yell, “Go, (name)!”

SHOW ME – Dribble, Freeze, Make an Airplane, Toe Tappers

TRY THIS – Dribble, stop the ball with one foot (make an airplane); dribble, stop the ball with the other foot (make an airplane)

SKILL DEMONSTRATION – Line-to-line: Dribble slow (“turtle”); Dribble fast (“cheetah”)

ACTIVITY TWO – Fun Game: “Turtle / Cheetah / Freeze” (freeze in funny positions)

WATER BREAK

SKILL DEMONSTRATION – Raise your right hand. Now point to your right foot with your right hand. Now raise your right foot and shake it around. Now raise your left hand. Now point to your left foot with your left hand. Raise your left foot and shake it around.

ACTIVITY THREE – Anywhere inside circle dribble, right foot only, then left foot only.

ACTIVITY FOUR – Dribble around outside of circle; right foot only (counter-clockwise), then left foot only (clockwise).

ACTIVITY FIVE – Dribble out, around cone (any way they wish), return (repeat if enough time)

WATER BREAK

REMINDER: In a game, if you find yourself going toward the wrong goal, you have to turn around and go the other way. Use a turn we just learned.

ACTIVITY SIX – Fun Game: “Everyone Scores” – Dribble out (from starting line), go around a cone (any way they want), dribble back and score! What is it called when we score? (GOAL!!!)

SCRIMMAGE – We score at that goal only. Everyone points to the goal where we want to score. If you fall down, get up immediately. Don't grab the ball with your hands. "Go Tigers" with Claws before; "Great Game (color) team" after.

CONCLUSION – Homework: Practice using each foot.

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: THREE (Main Topic – Turns)**

ADMINISTRATION – Next week, Coach will ask parents to participate in a drill right where they are, just outside of the field.

Team cheer: Show me your claws. Now we're going to add a "Roar." Go Tigers with Claws and Roar. One, Two, Three, "Go Tigers, (Roar) [Showing claws]. Does everyone have on their shin guards? Knock on your shin guards (right, then left).

ACTIVITY ONE – Name Game #3 – Children sit in a circle. Coach points to each child in turn, and the whole Team loudly announces, "Go (name)!"

DEMO and PRACTICE (once): If you fall down, get up fast! Don't worry about the ball. Now everyone falls down and gets up quickly. After you get up you go get the ball.

SHOW ME: Turtle dribble-come back, cheetah dribble-come back, freeze/make an airplane right and left, toe tappers.

WATER BREAK

SHOW ME: Waggle your right foot; waggle your left foot (correct as needed)

ACTIVITY TWO – Confined space (inside a circle of cones with scattered discs inside – don't let the ball touch any of the discs); dribble using right foot only; when I say "Switch foot," dribble using the left foot only. Don't hit any cones or discs!

SKILL DEMONSTRATION – Making turns around a cone, right foot to go left, left foot to go right (point)

ACTIVITY THREE – Dribble out, go around a cone, dribble back: right foot only (counter-clockwise); left foot only (clockwise)

WATER BREAK

DEMONSTRATION: Red light / Green light. Dribble for green light; Stop and make an airplane for red light. We start at red light.

ACTIVITY FOUR – Fun Game: "Red light / Green light." (Anywhere inside grid)

ACTIVITY FIVE – Same as last week: Fun Game: Everyone Scores – Dribble out (from starting line), go around a cone (any way they want), dribble back and score! What's it called when we score? (GOAL!!!)

WATER BREAK

SCRIMMAGE – Everyone point to the goal where we want to score. Don't grab the ball. "Go Tigers" with Claws and Roar before; "Great Game (color) team" after.

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: FOUR (Main Topic – Go Down/Get Up)**

ADMINISTRATION – Get parents ready for “Trees.”

Team cheer now to be done before practices and games. One, Two, Three, “Go Tigers, (Adding Roar) [Showing claws].” After game: One, Two, Three, “Great Game (color) team.”

ACTIVITY ONE: “Freeze.” Remember, if coach yells, “Freeze,” stop in your tracks. First, without ball – make funny positions. Then with ball, just stop immediately.

ACTIVITY TWO: “Ring Around the Rosies.” Remember, if you fall down, get up immediately. (Without ball, then with ball.) [Introduce “new,” “second verse.”]

Ring around the rosies,  
Pocket full of posies,  
Ashes, ashes,  
We all fall down!

Get up, get up,  
When you fall down.  
Get up, get up!  
Get off the ground!

ACTIVITY THREE – Fun Game: “Popcorn” – When you hear “popcorn” fall down and get up. With ball, Dribble, Dribble, Superman, Dribble, Dribble, Ariel, Dribble, Dribble, Popcorn, Dribble, Dribble, Iron Man, Dribble, Dribble, Olaf, Dribble, Dribble, Popcorn.

WATER BREAK

SKILL DEMONSTRATION – Turn your body around the ball to go the other way.

ACTIVITY FOUR – Dribble out, turn body around the ball, return dribble; repeat.

SKILL DEMONSTRATION – From “Make an Airplane,” we can now learn the “pull back” move. Show the pull-back move.

SKILL DEMONSTRATION – For Trees, touch the ball to the trunk of the tree, pull the ball back, then go around the tree and return; repeat with other trees.

ACTIVITY FIVE – Fun Game: “Trees” with parents.

WATER BREAK

DEMO AND/OR ACTIVITY SIX – (Time permitting.) To get turned around to go to the correct goal where we want to score, turn toward the nearest sideline away from the goal where the other team is trying to score.

WATER BREAK

SCRIMMAGE – Full team cheer before starting play. Point at goal where we score.

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: FIVE (Main Topic – Attack and Defend)**

ADMINISTRATION – Next week is PICTURE DAY – ARRIVE No Later Than (time) at (location). We have another parent activity today, similar to “Trees,” where you will first stand still as your child goes past you. On subsequent turns, stick a foot out a tiny bit but do not take the ball away.

Team Cheer; Concept of “Attack” (Score at their goal) and “Defend” (Do not let them score at our goal). [Set up “exclusion zone” at defensive goal.]

REMINDERS – We use both feet.

SHOW ME: (Make a circle) Dribble right foot, left foot; toe tappers, pull back.

ACTIVITY ONE –Fun Game: “Switch” (Dribble in circle; When coach says, “Switch,” leave your ball and go get a teammate’s ball and resume dribbling.)

DEMONSTRATION – Personal pass on attack. Push ball past a defender into open space behind them, sprint to collect ball; score at goal

ACTIVITY TWO – Fun Game: “Trees 2” with parents; Push ball past tree and get it, score.

### **WATER BREAK**

DEMONSTRATION – Taking the ball away from a running opponent to defend. Don’t run beside an opponent. Run to the ball, kick the ball away to the outside, get the ball.

ACTIVITY THREE – Ball take-away; left side then right side.

DEMONSTRATION – “Getting in the Way” of an oncoming opponent to defend (“goal-side”). Don’t let an opponent with the ball get into the “exclusion zone.”

ACTIVITY FOUR – First type of getting in the way. (Go to meet.)

ACTIVITY FIVE – Second type of getting in the way. (Run past and turn around.)

### **WATER BREAK**

SCRIMMAGE: Which goal to attack; which goal to defend. Use what we just learned: Personal Pass and Getting in the Way. Remember, games are competitions of “us” against them. We try to score more goals than they do. There is only one ball in a game and you need to go get it. Please don’t stand around watching during the game.



CONCLUSION – Next week is Picture Day rain or shine. Please arrive no later than (time). If you are bringing the envelope, recommend having your paperwork filled out in advance. Everyone gets in the team photo, even if you are not getting any individual pictures.

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: SIX (Main Topic – Inside of the Foot)**

ADMINISTRATION – **PICTURE DAY!**

REMINDER: Fall down, forget the ball, get up.

DEMONSTRATION: Using the Inside of the Foot; back and forth between feet (“Coerver base move”)

ACTIVITY ONE: Back-and-Forth between feet

ACTIVITY TWO: Fun Game: “Knock-out”; use the inside of the foot

WATER BREAK

ACTIVITY THREE: Fun Game: “Sharks and Minnows”

ACTIVITY FOUR: Fun Game: “Ball Tag”

WATER BREAK

ACTIVITY FIVE – Fun Game: “Red Light – Yellow Light – Green Light” (Green light – cheetah dribble; Yellow light – turtle dribble; Red light – Stop [or turn and stop])

REMINDER: Our goal versus Their goal.

DEMONSTRATION – Turn the ball away from their goal, go score at our goal

ACTIVITY SIX (A – Defense) – Coach “bowls” ball out toward goal; players sprint to ball, turn ball out away from goal and toward sideline; return ball to coach; repeat.

ACTIVITY SIX (B – Offense) – Coach “bowls” ball out toward goal; players sprint to ball, score; return ball to coach; repeat.

ACTIVITY SIX (C – Combined) – Coach “bowls” ball out toward goal; players sprint to ball, turn ball out away from goal and toward sideline; “cheetah dribble to opposite goal, score; return ball to coach; repeat.

WATER BREAK

SCRIMMAGE

ADMINISTRATION – Need parents to help with “Hokey-Pokey” next week.

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: SEVEN (Main Topic – Right & Left II)**

ADMINISTRATION – Halloween theme at practice next week; any problem w/ Coach giving out candy after practice?

DEMONSTRATION – How to do the “Hokey-Pokey.”

ACTIVITY ONE – Fun Game – “Hokey-Pokey” (At a minimum, right hand, right foot, left hand, left foot, whole self.)

DEMONSTRATION: Reminder – Using the Inside of the Foot; back and forth between feet

DEMONSTRATION: Turning the foot to the side is like using a putter in miniature golf (can actually show a putter).

ACTIVITY TWO: Fun Game: “Follow the Leader”; insides of the feet only (show/command player in front to go to the back of the line)

ACTIVITY THREE: Score at goal using inside of foot

WATER BREAK

DEMONSTRATION: Turns with inside of foot

ACTIVITY FOUR: Fun Game: “Turn, Turn, Turn” – Use the inside of the foot to turn to go the other way upon command of “Turn”

DEMONSTRATION: Turn/Kick the Ball away from goal

ACTIVITY FIVE: Fun Game: “Knock-out II” (Knock Out near the goal)

WATER BREAK

DEMONSTRATION: Passing between two players with the inside of the foot

ACTIVITY SIX: Pairs passing and receiving

WATER BREAK

SCRIMMAGE

CONCLUSION: Will need help from parents to give out “candy” next week at “Halloween” practice.

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: EIGHT (Main Topic – “Happy Halloween”)**

ADMINISTRATION – Halloween; give parents colored paper to hand out as “candy”; describe “Gates” and “Trick-or-Treat”

SHOW ME: Inside of right foot, inside of left foot; Coerver base move

ACTIVITY ONE – Fun Game: “Marbles” (in pairs, alternate trying to hit the other person’s ball using the inside of the foot)

ACTIVITY TWO – Fun Game: “Gates” with parents (must put the ball through the legs with the inside of the foot, run around, collect, [parent turns to face], repeat using other foot); continue

#### **WATER BREAK**

ACTIVITY THREE – Fun Game: “Unicorn” (dribble while holding cone to head)

ACTIVITY FOUR – Fun Game: “Zombies” (dribble while holding out arms with crepe paper and calling out for “brains”)

ACTIVITY FIVE – Fun Game: “Trick-or-Treat” with parents (touch a parent with ball, say “Trick or Treat,” collect colored paper in upside-down cones, move to next parent)

#### **WATER BREAK**

DEMONSTRATION: Attack and Defend (requires two coaches), players in two groups, defenders and attackers; one comes out from defensive goal to meet oncoming opponent; one heads to goal with ball.

ACTIVITY SIX – Attack and Defend – 1.) Coach serves/rolls ball for attacker to go to goal; 2.) Other coach sends out (or even walks with) defender to get in between the attacker and the defensive goal.

#### **SCRIMMAGE**

ADMINISTRATION – Hand out small bags of real candy to all players. Need a lot of one-on-one help from parents next week as we introduce the “Instep Drive.”

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: NINE (Main Topic – Instep Drive / “Laces Kick”)**

ADMINISTRATION – Parents will be working directly with their children. Coaches will demonstrate, parents will repeat with their children.

DEMONSTRATION: This is the big kick of soccer. It's called the “Instep Drive.” You use the top of your foot covered by your shoe laces. That's why we also call it the “Laces Kick.” You don't use your toes. Show the kick. Demonstrate the leg swing from all four positions, facing away from the players, facing 90-degrees to the players, facing the players, and facing the opposite 90-degrees to the players.

ACTIVITY ONE – Place 2-inch-long strips of white adhesive tape over the instep of both shoes of every player.

ACTIVITY TWO – On hands and knees, players (with the help of parents or assistants) point toes straight behind and tap the ground alternately with both insteps. Emphasis on foot extension, ankle lock, and contact of instep (tape) with ground.

ACTIVITY THREE – In the position above, add the ball, held by the parent or assistant, so that it is struck (into the ground) with the instep, first with one foot and then with the other. Emphasis on foot extension, ankle lock and contact of instep (tape) with ball.

ACTIVITY FOUR – Have players sit with arms out and back, hands to the ground for balance, so that one leg and then the other can be brought up freely. Add the ball, held by the parent or assistant, so that it can be struck with the instep, first with one foot and then the other. Emphasis on foot extension and ankle lock.

#### **WATER BREAK**

ACTIVITY FIVE – Using teammates, parents or assistants to support themselves, players stand on a plant foot and then swing a leg freely as if kicking a ball; right then left, ensuring that the foot is extended and the ankle locked.

ACTIVITY SIX – As above, but players perform free leg swinging, but without support.

ACTIVITY SEVEN – Using a stationary ball, perform a standing instep drive to the parent or assistant, right then left, using proper form and not for power or distance.

ACTIVITY EIGHT – Same as above with a simple walk up to the ball and kick.

#### **WATER BREAK**

#### **TIME PERMITTING:**

ACTIVITY NINE – Try a short run up to the ball and kick, right then left.

ACTIVITY TEN – Try a run up to the ball and kick for power and distance, right then left.

ACTIVITY ELEVEN – Try to dribble the ball and then kick, right then left.

ACTIVITY TWELVE – Practice shooting at the “big goal.”

SCRIMMAGE

CONCLUSION – What are the names for the kick we learned today? Point to the part of the foot that hits the ball.

ADMINISTRATION – Parents come dressed to play with the kids next week.

## **SAMPLE U-5/U-6 INSTRUCTIONAL SOCCER PRACTICE PLANS**

### **PRACTICE NUMBER: TEN (Main Topic – Fun, Field Day)**

ACTIVITY ONE – Players' Choice: Fun Game(s) – any Fun Games from any practices.

Chase the Coach

Turtle/Cheetah/Freeze

Everyone Scores

Red Light / Green Light

Popcorn

Trees

Switch

Trees 2

Knock-Out

Sharks and Minnows

Ball Tag

Red Light / Yellow Light / Green Light

Hokey-Pokey

Follow the Leader

Turn, Turn, Turn

Knock-Out II

Marbles

Gates

Unicorn

Zombies

- And / Or –

ACTIVITY TWO – Playground Games: Relay Races, Leap-frog, etc.

- And / Or –

ACTIVITY THREE – Parents, each with their own child, set up in two teams and play against each other.

- And / Or –

ACTIVITY FOUR – Parents vs. Kids (Parents MUST BE WARNED to be gentle, keep the ball on the ground, and never to kick the ball with any force.)

- And / Or –

ACTIVITY FIVE – Kids' Full-Sized Game

SCRIMMAGE

CONCLUSION – Mementos