



SOCCER COACHING MANUAL

FOR A YOUTH SOCCER INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

APPLICABLE TO PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH UNDER-7 CHILDREN

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Preface

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”) outdoor soccer program. It is written using the following assumptions:

1. There is a “Club” structure in place which provides the organization necessary to obtain field space, equipment, players and coaches.
2. The program can handle approximately 12 to 360 players.
3. A sufficient number of volunteer coaches are available to limit “team” sizes to 12 or fewer players each. Coaches do not need to have any prior experience.
4. A knowledgeable soccer training coach will be used to correctly teach the skills and drills to the volunteer coaches prior to the start of each season.
5. A wide range of physical and mental maturation exists in this age group. Coaches and 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. 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.”

Important Notes: 1.) Names given to “fun games” are common, generic names, most of which have existed and been in use throughout the United States since 1972. Because of this, no claim is made by CoachingAmericanSoccer.com® to have invented or trademarked any of these names. To do so would be to find that the name is clearly associated with a specific entity as the particular, original, and indisputable source. No such valid evidence has been found to date. 2.) Fun games are not identified by specific age groups. Just like the introduction of skills, coaches are left to challenge their players with the highest level of these games that they can perform successfully. 3.) A number of the fun games suggest using the right or left foot, or moving in a right or left direction. Coaches need to ensure that young players know their right from their left before using these games. 4.) Coaches are challenged to dream up their own games.

Acknowledgement: This is to acknowledge all of the wonderful 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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1 FORMAT OF THE PROGRAM

This Instructional Soccer Program is designed for Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and First Grade boys and girls, roughly equivalent to ages 4, 5, and 6, playing together in a “co-ed” environment. The program is offered in the Spring and the Fall seasons of each year. A season consists of approximately seven training sessions held outdoors over about ten weeks. There are usually “black-out” dates involved due to holidays or tournaments, during which the fields are 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 last one hour each. Approximately 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. 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 memento. Coaches are required to attend certain youth-coaching training and are expected to attend Instructional Soccer program classes, as well. 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.

2 FORMAT OF A SESSION

Each Instructional Soccer Program session consists of individual coaches directing their own practices within one of a number of “grids” laid out on a game 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, and/or an equipment bag from local soccer or sports stores or on the Internet, 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. Coaches assigned to the last session of the day should help pick up the equipment at the end of the session. (Note that there are 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 off of the game field. 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 that they feel are most appropriate for their age groups and practices.

3 SAMPLE GRID LAYOUT

(Spectators are requested to stay on the outermost perimeter.)

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

4 GENERAL SESSION RULES FOR PARENTS AND COACHES

- **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.
- **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.
- **GENERAL SAFETY – Drive slowly in all areas of the park – watch for darting children!** Practice and game fields should be checked for glass, rocks, and other debris before starting. **Children must never play on, climb on, or attempt to hang from goals.** 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 and games.
- **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. **NO “heading” of the ball is not to be done at this age at practice or at home.** 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 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. Inappropriate or foul language or gestures are prohibited. There shall be no smoking and no drinking of alcoholic beverages. No dogs should be 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 (i.e., 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.

5 PLAYERS' EQUIPMENT

Balls – 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” 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 shin guards 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 fine, 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, or anything that is generally hard, made of metal, or dangles.

6 NOTES FOR PARENTS AND COACHES

- This is expected to be an all-volunteer operation. Regularly say “THANK YOU!” to all the volunteers.
- A parent or guardian is to be available for all children at all times 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. Make sure to take all of your personal belongings.
- 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.”

7 NOTES FOR COACHES

- 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 www.CoachingAmericanSoccer.com website.)
- Bring your cell phone.
- Wear a watch.
- No whistles are to be used.
- Involve the parents as much as possible.
- 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.
- It is recommended that you not 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 cones set up as goals.
- 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 at practice or at home.

- 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 shinguards for back-up purposes when parents and children forget theirs so that children will not be denied the opportunity to participate. If these have to be used, remember to get them back (and to wash them)!

8 BASIC SOCCER RULES

For the Instructional Soccer Program, there are really only three 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 unsportsmanlike 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 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 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 [www.CoachingAmericanSoccer.com Hand Ball! \(Handling\)](http://www.CoachingAmericanSoccer.com/Hand%20Ball!%20Handling)

“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 and must not attempt 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.

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 is not to be allowed at this age. In other words, players in the instructional program are to be taught to “stay on their feet.”

Also see: [FIFA: Laws of the Game](#)

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

9 SUGGESTED FORMAT OF A PRACTICE

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 (Optional - Approximately 2 minutes)

Note: Coaches should use the water breaks as an opportunity to set up the next activity.

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 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 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 format of a 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 for them to demonstrate it. Suggest a “homework assignment.”* Announce the next practice. End on time.

Note: A Water Break for players consists of running over to the parents, getting a drink from water bottles, and running back to join the team. (Water breaks do not mean starting conversations or engaging in some other activity.)

* Homework – Parents should just “play soccer” with their children and not try to “coach” them! They should place down cones, saucers, or pieces of cloth for small goals and ensure that their child gets the majority of the touches on the ball. Parents must not try to take the ball away from the children. If the child kicks the ball too far out in front of themselves, then the parent should tap it back to them. They should also show excitement and provide encouragement. Parents must remember that they are bigger and stronger than the children and never kick at the ball! Gentle touches and possible blocking moves are the order of the day. Parents can stand in the way and make their children go around. Children are to be allowed to score early and often. Homework is over when child says that they have had enough.

10 SUGGESTED CHOICES FOR WARM UP ACTIVITIES

Introduction to the Grid – Define the area marked by corner flags and 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.

WITHOUT THE BALL (All balls gathered outside the grid) -

- 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.
- “Run around”/“freeze.” (Or “go”/“stop.” Or “green light”/“red light.”)
- Jumping Jacks.
- Jogging “In-Place” (can add high-knees and thigh slap).
- Kangaroo Hop, forward, backward, left and right.
- Skipping.
- 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.)
- Back-and-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.
- Challenge - “Crab Walk.”
- “Make-A-Circle” around a disc, cone, or parent. Left (counter-clockwise) and right (clockwise).
- Hokey-Pokey. (See www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/lyrics/hokey.htm) Use right foot, left foot, right hand, left hand, and head.
- Head-Shoulders-Knees-and-Toes.
- Knee Bends (down to 90-degrees only).

- While stationary, balance standing on one leg, then the other.

WITH THE BALL (Basic Coordination) -

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).
- 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.
- Run around the ball as fast as possible.

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.)

11 SUGGESTED CHOICES FOR SOCCER “FUN GAMES”

Many of these games can be introduced without using balls at first, either for ease of instruction or as a warm-up activity, and then balls can be added. In addition, a number of these games may be used as skill drills.

IMPORTANT NOTES: 1.) Names given to these games are common, generic names, most of which have existed and been in use throughout the United States since 1972. Because of this, no claim is made by CoachingAmericanSoccer.com to have invented or trademarked any of these names or that they can be ascribed to a particular source. To do so would be to find that the name is clearly associated with a specific entity as the indisputable originator. No such valid evidence has been found to date. 2.) Games are not identified by specific age groups. Just like the introduction of skills, coaches are left to challenge their players with the highest level of these games that they can perform successfully. 3.) A number of the games suggest using the right or left foot, or moving in a right or left direction. Coaches need to ensure that young players know their right from their left before using these games. 4.) Coaches are challenged to dream up their own games.

Ball Master. Coach throws one or more balls into the grid in different directions and gives commands to bring the ball back or take it to a designated area. Repeat with players working in pairs.

Ball Tag. See “Tag” games. All players with ball. Instead of touching other players with their hands, dribblers must touch other players’ feet or lower legs with their ball. Count touches during a timeframe. Variation – only certain players or coaches can be touched.

Blob I. Two players, without ball, holding hands, start as “the blob.” All other players with ball. Players dribble away from the blob. When a ball is kicked away by the blob, the player must leave his ball and join hands with the blob. Last player with ball “wins.”

Blob II. Two pairs of players without ball, holding hands, start as blobs. All other players with ball. Players dribble to avoid being tagged by a blob. If tagged, they must put their ball away and join the blob. Either blob must split into two pairs of two when it reaches four players. Last player with ball “wins.”

Body Parts I. All players with ball. Players dribble until directed to stop the ball with a particular body part, upon the coach’s command. For example, when the coach yells “knee,” the players are to all stop the ball with their knee and then, upon the coach’s command, resume dribbling. Other examples include the sole of the foot, ankle, shin, thigh, chest, arm, head, and the rear end. Command “right” or “left” parts as appropriate.

Body Parts II. All players with ball. The coach establishes a number for each body part to be used to stop the ball. Examples: 1 – right foot; 2 – left foot; 3 – rear end (sit); 4 – elbow; 5 – ear. Players dribble. When the coach calls out a number, the players must stop the ball with the associated body part. Start with a limited set of numbers and then build up. Players may be allowed to yell out the body part when the number is announced.

Bop the Adult. All players with ball. Divide the team into at least two groups assigned to a coach or a parent. Ensure that the groups are spaced away from each other. Players start by facing the coach or parent, who should be about 10 feet away. On command, the coach and parents move away from the players, who are to dribble and chase and try to hit the adult with the ball by shooting at them. Players can count a point for each hit. Even with a hit, players collect their ball and continue. This can be a timed event. Adults cannot jump to avoid getting hit.

Bowling. Set up cones as pins and have players kick their ball toward the pins to see how many they can knock over.

Capture the Balls. Set up two to four “nests” or “home bases” designated by disks or cones. Divide players into the same number of teams. Place all teams in a nest. Place all balls in the middle of the grid equidistant from the nests. Upon command, players are to retrieve balls one-at-a-time and dribble them back to their nests. Players may steal balls from the other nests! Players may not foul or lie on top of the balls. After a brief timeframe, count the number of balls in each nest.

Cattle Grazing. All players with ball. Down on hands and knees, all players move their ball around only with their heads.

Circle. Lay out a circle with disks from ten to twenty yards in circumference, based on age and leg strength. Distribute approximately five cones near the middle of the circle. Establish approximately six players, each with balls, around the circle. The objective is to pass balls through the circle and attempt to knock down or hit the cones. Players receive balls on the opposite side of the kickers and continue to return passes until all the cones have been knocked over. Players may enter the circle to retrieve balls, but must not allow themselves to be hit.

Coach Freeze Tag. All players with ball dribbling in the grid. When tagged by the coach, players freeze with their legs apart. Frozen players can resume dribbling when a teammate passes a ball between their legs.

Cone Soccer. All players in pairs. One ball per pair. Each player has one cone or disc each for a goal. Play one player against the other player for a limited time, then switch pairs so that no one player sees the same opponent twice.

Cops and Robbers. Use discs to establish a “jail” in a corner of the grid. All players except two with ball. Players with ball line up on one side of the grid. These players are the robbers. The two players without ball are the “cops.” They are to start from the other side. The object is for the robbers to dribble across the grid without having a cop take the ball away. If a robber loses his ball to a cop, he or she goes to the jail. Repeat the crossings until there are two players remaining. These two may become the new cops for successive iterations.

Crab Soccer. Designate players as crabs to “walk” around on their hands and feet. Other players with ball try to dribble from one side of the grid to the other without getting caught by the crabs.

Dribble Snake. Everyone with ball follows the leader in a line anywhere the leader goes inside the grid. Leader breaks off upon request of the coach and dribbles to the back of the line, establishing the next player in line as the leader. This can be done until everyone leads. Players must understand that, when they are the leader, they must make a number of turns, including even going in a circle around the line.

Dribbling Relay. All players with ball. Dribble from line to line or to cone and back – two or more teams. Make sure the number of players on each team is low and even.

Driving Test. – All players with ball. After demonstrating the commands, the coach calls out: Go, Stop, Slow Down, Speed Up, Right Turn, Left Turn, and “U”-Turn, as appropriate.

Egg Hunt. Use discs to define a “basket” in a corner of the grid. This activity requires more balls than players. This may be done by using extra balls from the coach or by dividing the team in half. Spread the balls around the grid. Line the (first set) of players up on one end of the grid. The object is for the players to collect all the balls (eggs) and put them in the basket as quickly as possible and return to the starting line. Coach defines whether this is to be done with hands or by dribbling. Everyone is on the same team; no one is to take a ball away from a teammate. The event can be timed against themselves or against the other group.

Fetch. Pairs with one ball. One coach or parent per pair. The coach or parent tosses the ball into the grid and the pair must bring it back in the manner directed by the coach. For example, the coach will yell “four hands” and the pair must return the ball to the coach with all four hands in contact with the ball. Others may include (at least) three hands and a thigh, or two heads.

Fox Tails. Cut up an old sheet into strips approximately 4” wide and 24” long. These are the “tails.” Each player sticks one tail in the back of their shorts. All players with ball. All players dribble while simultaneously trying to grab others’ tails while protecting their own.

Freeze Tag. All players with ball except for designated “tagger.” Players dribble within the grid while avoiding the tagger. The tagger runs around and touches any players to freeze them. Players can unfreeze themselves by performing the “Irish Jig” for ten touches. Continue briefly and then switch taggers. (Variations: Taggers can also be dribblers. Can use two taggers. Can separate team into two groups.)

Gates. Split the team in half, one half with ball and one without. The group without a ball is to spread out randomly within the grid and stand with their legs spread a little more than shoulder-width apart. These are the “gates.” Each player with a ball dribbles around the grid trying to put their ball through as many gates as possible. Time the event for two minutes. Players should count the number of gates they split. The teams then switch roles. “Score” may be kept by individuals or teams.

Hospital Tag. All players with ball. Start as in regular “Tag.” When a player is tagged, however, they must place their hand on the spot where they were tagged. By the third tag, they must dribble to the coach (“doctor”) to get fixed up. After being “healed,” they go back to the group to continue.

Kangaroos. All players with ball except two players who are the first kangaroos. Kangaroos must hop to tag players. Tagged players become kangaroos until all players are tagged. (Reduce size of grid for success, if necessary.)

Keep-away. Also known as 1 v. 1 without goals. Players in pairs with one ball. One player starts in possession of the ball and the other tries to take it away. Play for approximately one minute. Player in possession at end may be declared “winner.” May switch player starting in possession, then switch partners.

Knock Off. Divide the team in half. One group each has balls. Place several discs randomly spread out in the grid. Place a ball on each disc. One group goes at a time. The objective is to knock all the balls off the discs by kicking a ball into them. Each team gets a turn and the team that knocks off all the balls in the quickest time wins. Have the group that knocked the balls off re-set them and return their ball to a player in the other group.

Knockout. All players with ball. Have players kick other player’s balls out of the grid while retaining possession of their own. Have players count the number of times they knocked out a ball. When a ball is kicked out, it is to be retrieved and play resumed. After a certain amount of time, stop and ask for the number of knockouts. (Variations: Don’t ask for the number of knockouts. Vary the size of the grid. Have the players who are knocked out go to a side activity until only one or two players are left.)

Marbles I. Each player with ball. Divide the team into two groups and set them on opposite sides of the grid. Place a distinctly-colored or different-sized ball in the middle of the grid. This is the marble. Have each team try to move the marble to the other team’s line by striking it with a ball. Tell the players that after the game starts, they can kick at the marble with anyone’s ball. If a player kicks the marble directly, stop play and remind all players of the requirement to hit it only with a ball. (Variation: Everyone works to get the marble out of the grid.)

Marbles II. Each player with ball. Players in pairs. Players alternate using a single push pass to try to strike the other player’s ball.

Moving Goal. All players with ball. Two parents or coaches acting as “goalposts” carry a piece of rope as their “crossbar” and walk around in the grid as a moving goal. Players must shoot the ball between them and under the rope to score. Players may score from either direction.

Mud Monster. Two or three players start as the monsters. They then chase the rest of the players and try to tag them. Once they are tagged, they must spread their legs wide, pick up

their ball and hold it over their head, and stay “stuck in the mud.” They can be freed if another child crawls or kicks a ball through their legs.

Not in My Yard. Set up a “fence” of cones or discs dividing the grid in half in order to establish two “yards.” All players with ball. Divide the team into two equal groups and place each group in a yard. This is a timed event. Upon command, players are to kick their ball into the other team’s yard. The objective is to keep each yard free of balls. Parents should be used around the perimeter of the grid to keep the balls in play. At the end of time, the group with the least number of balls in their yard wins. (Variation: As players kicks get stronger, the fence can be modified with a second set of parallel cones or discs to create a “no player zone,” and the size of the yards increased.)

Numbers I. Set up a goal at each end, marked by cones. Divide the team into two groups, with approximately five players per group. Assign each player a number from one to five. Try to ensure that players with the same number are evenly matched. Have the players of each group spread out on opposite sidelines. Tell each group which goal they are to attack and which to defend. Put a ball in the center. Call out one or more numbers, and those players are to run out and play. Re-set when a goal is scored or if the ball goes out of bounds. (Variations: Have players start from the end lines. Throw the ball into the center.)

Numbers II. All players with ball. While dribbling, coach calls out random numbers 1 through 5 and players must form groups of that number.

Nutmeg. Two players with one ball. One player stands with legs spread. During time limit, see how many nutmegs a player can get. Switch.

Pass in the Night. Two small goals are established with disks or cones at each end of the grid. Players are divided into two groups at each goal. Coach has all balls in the center. When coach serves a ball, one player from each group sprints out to contest for the ball and try to score at the other player’s goal. Players must quit if the ball goes outside of the grid or a goal is scored. Multiple pairs may be in the grid at the same time. Coach may serve the ball anywhere inside the grid.

Passing Count. Players in pairs with one ball, approximately three yards apart. Inside of foot pass and trap, using “two-touch” passing. The pairs can count the number of passes made in one minute. (Variation: Older may be asked to move and pass.)

Pirates. Define a circle with discs inside the grid. All players with ball except one, who is the first pirate. Players dribble to retain possession while the pirate tries to steal a ball and kick it out of the circle. As players lose their ball, they also become pirates until one player with a ball is left. This player can become the starting pirate for the next iteration.

Planets. Set up three large circles designated with disks. Tell the players that they are going to visit parts of our solar system. Name the circles as “Venus,” “Mars,” and “Neptune.” All players with ball. Coach calls out the name of the next planet to visit. Can visit in groups in a rotation. Add more planets if memory can handle it.

Receive/Dribble/Shoot. Use cones to define at least two goals and set a disc approximately ten yards in front of both to define a starting point. Divide the team into groups for each set of goals and place the groups at the starting point, without balls. A coach and at least one parent should have the balls next to the goal. The coach should feed a ball to the first player, using “bowling.” The player should come to meet the ball, receive (trap) it properly, dribble and shoot. The player should retrieve the ball and return it to the coach. You should increase the number of groups if players aren’t moving quickly through the drill. A parent may also be used at the starting point for assistance. (Variation: Players start on the other side of the goal with the coach or server. The coach bowls the ball out into the field and the player runs to it, turns it back, dribbles and shoots.)

Red Light/Green Light I. All players with ball. Players dribble within the grid and respond to the coach’s direction. With Green Light, players are to dribble at a slow pace. With Red Light, players are to stop the ball immediately with the sole of their foot and “make an airplane.”

Red Light/Green Light II. All players with ball. Line the players up on one side of the square. On “green light,” players dribble to opposite side. On “red light,” they must stop. First player to other side “wins.” (Players must be cautioned that they must dribble properly; no kicking and running to the ball is allowed.)

Red Light, Yellow Light, Green Light. All players with ball. Similar to “Red Light, Green Light,” players start in a Red Light position with the ball stopped at their feet. With Green Light, players are to dribble at a fast pace. With Yellow Light, players are to dribble at a slow pace.

Relay Race I. Traditional race among teams between two sets of cones or disks. Can set up against parents or intermix parents and kids. (See “*Dribbling Relay.*”)

Relay Race II. Divide the team into three or four groups, with no more than four players per group. Set up identical courses where players must dribble between discs, around cones, perform the Irish Jig, stop the ball on a spot, or other activities. Practice, then race where first group to finish wins.

Roll. All players with ball. Players will start spread out shoulder-to-shoulder on a line. Each player is to “roll” the ball with the sole of their foot for approximately 10 yards, turn, and repeat back to original line. This may be done with from the inside or outside of both feet.

Shadow. Players in pairs. All players with ball. Similar to “Dribble Snake,” the first player dribbles around and their partner must duplicate, or “shadow,” their every move from behind. The leaders should change direction and speed throughout. Have players switch positions at least once and usually three times, to create four sets.

Sharks and Minnows I. One player starts with a ball as the first shark. Other players run in a confined space while the player with the ball tries to kick the ball at the other players’ feet. Once hit, they get their ball and become another shark.

Sharks and Minnows II. Two or three players are “sharks” and the rest are “minnows.” Sharks have soccer balls and the minnows don’t. The sharks chase after the minnows and try to tag them on the leg with the ball. If a minnow gets hit, he or she becomes a shark and goes and gets their ball and becomes a shark.

Shooting 1 v. 1. Groups of four in two pairs. One pair with a ball. One pair serves as “goals,” standing with their legs spread shoulder-width apart. The other pair is to play 1 v. 1 to score at their goal by shooting only on the ground. After approximately one minute, pairs switch positions. Modify pairs, if necessary to equalize the skill level. (Variation: use parents as goals.)

Snake. Different name or variation of “*Blob*” games. Players can be tagged instead of the ball being kicked away. Snake(s) can be told to make “hissing” sounds.

Star Wars. All players with ball. Players with ball try to kick at other players’ balls. Once a player connects three times, they move to a designated “safe” area.

Steal. Divide the team into two groups. One group with ball. Tell players without a ball to try to take one away from a player with a ball. Tell players with a ball to retain possession for as long as possible. Players who lose a ball then try to get one back. Play for approximately one minute cycles. Players with a ball at the end of each cycle may be declared “winners.”

Steal the Bacon. All players with ball, except for one player who is “it.” All players dribbling except one who is “it.” Designated player kicks balls out of the grid. Change designated player every 30 seconds. Players whose balls are kicked out retrieve them and wait at edge of grid until next 30 second-period starts.

Stuck in the Mud. One player without ball is “it.” All other players have ball. On signal, all players dribble until tagged. Once tagged, they must hold their ball over their head and spread their legs. They are stuck, but can be freed by another player with a nutmeg. Rotate “it.”

Switch. All players with ball. On command, have players switch soccer balls.

Tag. All players with ball. Players must always dribble their ball within playing distance. Players are to keep count of how many other players they tag with their hand within a certain timeframe.

Target Shooting. Two players, each with ball and one cone. See how many times each player can hit the cone.

Turkey Shoot. Set up random cones. All players with ball. In a time limit, players count how many cones they can knock over with the ball. Each cone knocked over must be re-set by the player who knocked it down.

Tunnel. Divide the team into small groups. Start with three players as the “tunnel,” and then you may add more players as success is achieved. Have each group line up in a straight line, front to back, and spread their legs apart, to form the tunnel. You may practice first, and then this can become a race between groups. To start, the first player in each line must turn and face the tunnel and pass a ball through the tunnel and then get back in the front of the line. The last player in the line collects the ball, dribbles it to the front and repeats the process. (As a race, the first group to complete a full cycle wins.) (Variation: The player at the back of the line may pass the ball through the tunnel from behind. The player at the front collects the ball, dribbles it to the back, passes it through the tunnel and remains at the back.)

Turns. All players with ball. Players will start spread out shoulder-to-shoulder on a line. Establish a second, parallel, line with discs approximately seven yards away. Each player is to dribble to the second line, turn, and go back to the original line. The coach should direct the following types of turns: 1.) Inside of Foot – Right foot for left turn and left foot for right turn; 2.) Outside of Foot – Right foot for right turn and left foot for left turn; and, 3.) Pull Back – Sole of the right foot and sole of the left foot

Two Squares. All players with ball. Divide the grid into two squares identified by cones. On command, have the players dribble their ball from one square into the other square. You can then split the players with half in each square. On command, the players dribble their ball into the other square while avoiding collisions. Last, after starting to dribble within one square, upon command players are to leave their ball, run into the other square, find another ball and continue dribbling in the new square.

12 INSTRUCTION AND DRILL

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 "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.

12.1 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 instructional 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 of 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, or Toe Tap): 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”...)

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.

*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.

12.2 INSIDE OF THE FOOT (PUSH) PASS AND RECEIVE (TRAP)

Introduction

The inside of the foot or “push” pass and its corresponding receive (trap), represent the most basic pass and receive in soccer. 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.

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 (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 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 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”).

12.3 GENERAL RECEIVING (“TRAPPING”)

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.

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

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.

Beginning players are tempted to take 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 if the ball is stopped dead, it should be is tapped out in front immediately and then moved onto.

An analogy which may be used to describe the art of receiving is 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 “bowl” 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.

*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.

12.4 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)

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 need to be taught to use “speed dribbling” and the “personal pass.”

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 goal and the opponent.

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.

12.5 THE INSTEP DRIVE (KICKING)

Introduction

Because the "instep drive" is the most important kicking skill in soccer, it is critical that it 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 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.

12.6 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)

12.7 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 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 will 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.

12.8 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 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.

*Some young players have found it easier to use the inside of the foot but this is generally awkward.

13 SUGGESTED FORMAT OF A SCRIMMAGE

Using the existing Instructional Soccer Program 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 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.