Iowa Soccer Association

U6/U8 Recreational Coaching Manual

IOWA SOCCER ASSOCIATION

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1 What is Recreational Soccer?

You have heard the term before, but do you really know what “recreational soccer” is? There are no legal definitions, no US Youth Soccer rules, policies or regulations therefore, for the purposes of this manual, let’s use the following basic definition:

Recreational soccer is a soccer program primarily devoted to the enjoyment and development of soccer players without the emphasis on travel or high-level competition. The purpose of recreational soccer is to provide an opportunity for the participants to have fun, learn the sport and develop life skills including a lifelong love of the game.

***Therefore*:**

- Access is open to all who desire to participate (*The Game for ALL Kids*).
- Emphasis is on active participation (minimum of half game playing time).
- Objective is for the players to enjoy the experience.
- Success and excellence are measured in players attracted and players retained.
- Recreational soccer is all about fun, recreation, love of the game, and winning is not a measure of success.

Children benefit in many ways from participating in recreational soccer and the chances are good that the children you coach will have fun and a very positive experience. However, it is also important that you understand some of the characteristics of recreational *play* and recreational *players*. *Those characteristics* are as follows:

- Almost every player and parent will start out in recreational soccer.
- Two-year age groups are typical of recreational teams so there may be a wide range between the most skilled player and the least skilled player.
- Wider age gaps create greater differences in physical, mental and social development.
- Players new to the sport are constantly being introduced into the mix.
- Enthusiasm and dedication varies widely from the highly motivated to the socially involved.
- Soccer, for the child who wants to play, is an outlet for energy and enthusiasm.
- Fit and unfit players often play together.
- Participation stretches from always there to when it is convenient.

- Recreational players (especially in the U6 and U8 age groups) generally do not develop strong feelings against the opposing team because they often have friends on the opposing team.
- Many young children start out in soccer. (It has been said that, “Soccer is the first sport that American children play.”) Soccer is a game, especially at the very young level, where all skill-levels of children can participate and have fun.
- Many young children try out many sports at a young age and may jump from one activity to another during the year or even during the same season.

Some of the main characteristics of recreational *coaches* are as follows:

- Virtually every recreational coach will be an unpaid parent volunteer.
- While an increasing number of recreational coaches played soccer growing up, many others, especially those coaching the youngest age groups are first time soccer coaches with little or no coaching experience.

2 Recreational Player Development

Recreational Player Development takes place most effectively in environments where coaches facilitate learning in two main ways. The first is through the use of developmentally appropriate activities and games; the second is through the coach displaying a thorough understanding of how young players learn and the developmental characteristics of those players.

Coaching in the Under Six Age Group

Game Application

Game Form	3 v 3
GK Status	Goalkeeper should not be used.
Field Size	Recommended field size is 20-30 yards long by 15-25 yards wide.
Ball Size	3
Restart Method	When the ball goes out of bounds (sidelines), the game is restarted with a kick-in or throw-in; club choice.

U6 General Developmental Characteristics

- Short attention span.
- Most are individually oriented (me, my, mine).
- Constantly in motion.
- Psychologically bruised very easily.
- Little or no concern for team activities.
- Physical and psychological development of boys and girls is quite similar.
- Physical coordination is immature.
- Eye/hand and/or eye/foot coordination is most primitive at best.
- Love to run, jump, roll and climb.
- Catching skills are not developed.
- Can balance only on good foot.
- No sense of pace — GO FLAT OUT!!!

U6 Age Group Practice Objectives

Coaching Emphasis	Fun!
Technique	Dribbling, changing direction while running with the ball, shooting and kicking with different surfaces.
Psychology	Sharing, fair play, how to “play”, emotional management.
Fitness	Balance; running; jumping; coordination; movement education.
Tactics	Players should be aware of the direction they are attacking, where they are on the field and be encouraged to be ball-orientated (always wanting to be involved in the action). Team shape can be addressed but under no circumstances should players be put in positions or made to stay in a certain area. In the U6 age group, players can be set up in a triangle shape to start the game and at other natural breaks (kick off, goal kicks, etc.)

U6 Coaching Considerations

The qualities of a good coach in the U6 age group are patience, good humor, and the willingness to see the world through a child’s eyes. Make sure you are dressed like a coach (no jeans, no suits) and be prepared to play with the children, demonstrate activities, act silly and become involved with the session.

Coaching in the Under 8 Age Group

Game Application

Game Form	4 v 4
GK Status	Goalkeeper should not be used.
Field Size	Recommended field size is 25-35 yards long by 20-30 yards wide.
Ball Size	3
Restart Method	When the ball goes out of bounds (sidelines), the game is restarted with a throw-in.

U8 General Developmental Characteristics

- Attention span is a bit longer than U6, but still not at the “team at all costs” intensity.
- Inclined more toward group activities.
- Still in motion - twitching, jerking, scratching and blinking are all second nature physical movements.
- Still very sensitive…
- Dislike personal failures in front of peers.
- Ridicule from the coach in front of the group is very destructive
- Boys and girls are still quite similar in physical and psychological development.
- Beginning to develop some physical confidence
- Still into running, jumping, climbing and rolling.
- More into imitation of the “big guys”.
- Still lack sense of pace — **Go Flat Out**! Will chase the ball until they drop.

U8 Age Group Practice Objectives

Technique Dribbling and running with the ball are still the main focus. Other techniques can be introduced, such as receiving ground balls, shooting with the laces, short passing, shielding and throw-ins.

Psychology Working in pairs, sportsmanship.

Fitness Agility, eye/foot and eye/hand coordination; introduce the idea of cool-down, movement education

Tactics

- Players need continual reinforcement to stay engaged in practice or the game.
- Coaches can also focus on those players who show a willingness to break from the swarm and encourage teammates to recognize this behavior.
- Coaches should encourage players to run with the ball and dribble past defenders. Players in the U8 age group must not be punished for dribbling the ball too much.
- Everyone attacks together and defends together and coaches can introduce what players must do when not in possession of the ball e.g. get back behind the ball, defend goal side.
- Team shape can be addressed but under no circumstances should players be put in positions or made to stay in a certain area. In the U8 age group players can be set up in a diamond shape to start the game and at other natural breaks (kick off, goal kicks etc.)

U8 Coaching Considerations

Every aspect of play coached in the U6 age must be reinforced at U8. It is the coach's responsibility to encourage a fear free culture in this age group at practice. Games should only be considered as another fun activity that happens to include a soccer ball. Most of the information you will provide to a U8 player will pertain to each player's individual relationship with the soccer ball — to want it, how to find it, to feel more comfortable with it, to keep it close, etc.

Consider that kids learn by watching and copying and a good picture of proper technique can be a very powerful learning tool in this age group. Coaches should say things such as, "See if you can make it look like this, and try to do most of your teaching by offering a picture and then set up fun games where the objective of the game is for players to practice certain ways to master that technique.

3 Recreational Coach Development

"Coaching development takes and lasts a lifetime. Coaches who are forever open to the 'new' will always create, grow and improve their understanding of coaching and the player development process."

A coach's influence on a young child is very important. The effect that a coach has on a child's development can last for an extended period of time and a lack of effective coaching is one of the main causes of player attrition. Therefore, it is vital that every coach improve their understanding of coaching and the player development process. The best way to achieve that is through participation in a variety of coach education courses.

The Iowa Soccer Association (ISA) and the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) offer a number of coach education courses. The ISA strongly recommends that every ISA coach undertake a coach education course prior to the start of their first season of coaching, and take additional training courses as the coach progresses through the age groups with their team. This recommendation is true for beginning through experienced coaches.

Iowa Soccer Association recommends that every U6 or U8 coach take the U6/U8 Youth Module. An outline of the curriculum is listed below:

U6/U8 Youth Coaching Module — Curriculum

- Course Length: 3 - 4 *hours*
- *Cost $15.00*
- Philosophy of Coaching and Characteristics of U6/U8 Children
- Prevention and Care of Injuries
- Team and Risk Management
- Laws of the Game
- Field Sessions for U6 Players
- Field Sessions for U8 Players
- All candidates receive a coaching manual, games book, rule book and certificate upon completion of the course.

Other coach education opportunities for coaches who wish to expand their knowledge of the game are as follows:

U10/U12 Youth Coaching Module — Curriculum

- Course Length: 3 - 4 *hours*
- *Cost $15.00*
- Philosophy of Coaching and Characteristics of U10/U12 Children
- Prevention and Care of Injuries
- Team and Risk Management
- Laws of the Game
- Field Sessions for U10 Players
- Field Sessions for U12 Players
- All candidates receive a coaching manual, games book, rule book and certificate upon completion of the course.

E-License

The “E" certification course consists of eighteen (18) hours of instruction. This course normally includes three and one-half (3½) hours of theory (tactics, methods, team management, Laws of the Game, prevention of injuries) and thirteen (13) hours of practical sessions (technique, tactics, principles of attack and defense and goalkeeping). The emphasis of the “E” License is toward coaches working with players U10 -14 years of age.

D-License

The “D" certification course is a continuation of the “E” course and offers more advanced training in all areas. The “D” License is a pass/fail course. It consists of thirty-six (36) hours of instruction. This course normally includes ten hours of theory and twenty six hours of practical sessions. The emphasis of the “D” course is geared toward coaches working with players U12 – U18 years of age.

ISA Coaching Course Registration

Online registration for all ISA coaching courses is available at:
www.iowasoccer.org/coaches/course_calendar.htm

Coaching Development Resources

Coaching information is abundant on the internet and is usually the easiest way for coaches to access additional coaching information. Some of the better websites with information relevant to coaching in the U6/U8 age group are as follows:

- www.iowasoccer.org
- www.socceralaska.org
- www.usyouthsoccer.org
- www.nscaa.org
- www.iowasoccer.org/coaches_content.htm

ISA Video Resources

ISA has produced a U6 and U8 games and activities DVD, which is available from the Championship Video Productions website at www.championshipproductions.com

4 Team Management

Effective communication and coordination with the parents of your players will make the job of coaching a lot more enjoyable. The first step is to organize a parent-coach meeting prior to each season.

Your parent/coach meeting should include the following:

Identify your Philosophy of Coaching and Goals for the Season

At the U6 and U8 age group your philosophy should be something similar to, "Success and excellence for this team will be measured in the number of players who continue playing next season, and how much fun they have during the season. Winning is not a measure of success."

Collect Player Information

Medical information (asthma, allergies, etc.), family situations that may affect the child's participation or the ride home.

Collect Parent Information

It is important to be able to reach a parent in case of inclement weather or an injury. Coaches should obtain work and cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses of all parents.

Identify Player Responsibilities

Players must bring an inflated soccer ball and water to every practice. Discuss expectations of the players concerning attitude and sportsmanship.

Identify Parent Responsibilities

Discuss expectations of the parents concerning communication with the coach e.g. what is required if their child cannot attend a practice or game. Emphasize that although you will always remain behind with players if a parent is late; the expectation is that parents pick up their child immediately at the end of practice. In addition clarify schedules, snacks, uniforms, etc.

Address Communication Issues

If parents have concerns, encourage them to call or e-mail you on a non game or practice day and definitely not immediately after a game. Appoint a team coordinator and determine how all team communication will be undertaken.

Parental Sideline Behavior

Identify appropriate and inappropriate sideline behavior and decide together how inappropriate adult behavior on the touchlines will be addressed. Some topics of conversation concerning sideline behavior are as follows:

- Children want cheerleaders to applaud their success, not adults yelling instructions. Think of the soccer field as a playground and not as a sports venue.
- What's appropriate at a sport stadium with adult athletes is NOT appropriate for young children at play.
- Focus on the process of playing and not the outcome.
- Unlike the adult game, kids playing soccer do not see the other team as the enemy.

The other team is full of their friends – friends from their school or their neighborhood. They are likely to be playing together in your backyard or in your den after the game.
- Cheer ANY and ALL success on the field. It DOES NOT matter which player OR team.
- Don't keep score, the kids don't regard it as that important.
- Don't care who wins or loses, they are having fun and that is the objective NOT winning or losing.

Sportsmanship

Here are six things you can discuss with your parents to show what sportsmanship really means:

- Cheer for all the children, even those on the other team. What a surprising difference it can make on the sidelines and in the stands when parents make an effort to applaud a good effort or a fine play — no matter who makes it.
- Talk to parents of the other team. They are not the enemy.
- Be a parent, not a coach. Resist the urge to critique. Children dread their parents going over their performance in detail, pointing out all their mistakes. Sometimes just being there shows your children what being a good parent is all about. Leave the coaching to the coaches
- Thank the officials. Find a few moments to compliment the officials for their hard work after a game (especially if your child's team loses) you will be rewarded with the pleasure of seeing a surprised smile in return.
- Keep soccer in its proper perspective. Soccer should not be larger than life for you. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Remember your relationship will continue with your children long after their youth soccer days are over. Keep your goals and needs separate from your child's experience.
- Have fun, that is what the children are trying to do!

Four Red Flags for Parents

- **Living Out Dreams** — A parent who is continuing to live personal athletic dreams through his/her child has not released his/her child to the game.
- **Too Involved** -— If a parent tends to share in the credit when the child has done well in sport or has been victorious, the parent is too involved.
- **Trying Too Hard** — If a parent is trying to continue to coach his child when the child probably knows more about the game than the parent does, he has not released the youth athlete.
- **Too Serious** — A parent should realize that he is taking everything too seriously and has not released the child to the activity when the parent:

    - is nervous before his/her child's game.
    - becomes verbally critical of an official.
    - has a difficult time bouncing back when the player's team suffers a defeat.
    - makes mental notes during a game so he can give his/her child advice at the conclusion of the game.
    - is evaluating his/her child's performance on the car ride home. Your child is playing to have fun, not to earn a grade! If he or she had fun, the day was a success

5 Planning Your Coaching Session

The U6 Coaching Session

- Session duration: 45 – 60 minutes
- All players must have a ball
- Necessary coaching equipment — Cones, pinnies, pump, extra Balls
- Session progression - Warm up, fun games, small-sided games
- Player equipment - Ball, cleats, appropriate clothing, shin guards, water bottle

The developmental characteristics of U6 players will have a major impact on the design and content of your training session. The session should include fun activities that encourage children to explore their physical abilities as well as emphasizing exploration and experimentation with the rolling, spinning and bouncing qualities of the ball. There should be no activities where players wait in line to perform an activity or movement.

Children at this age love to use their imagination when they play, therefore keep this in mind when designing your session. Activities should be short and simple as a U6 player's ability to stay focused is very limited. Give brief directions and repeat them when necessary. The main focus of every session should be individual activities with the ball, especially dribbling. A U6 player thinks about themselves 100% of the time and cannot conceptualize passing the ball or working with a teammate.

The U8 Coaching Session

- Session Duration 60 minutes
- All players must have a ball
- Necessary coaching equipment — Cones, pinnies, pump, extra Balls
- Session progression - Warm up, fun games, small sided games
- Player equipment - Ball, cleats, appropriate clothing, shin guards, water bottle

U8 players are still very young and although they can now remember what they tried at the last practice it is still very much about having fun.

The main emphasis of the session should be dribbling and shooting games that allow each player plenty of opportunity to experience the ball at his or her own pace. Games where there are multiple goals are perfect for this age group. Also encourage activities where there are multiple opportunities to change direction and to vary how fast the players run.

U6 and U8 Coaching Session — General Considerations

- The coach should arrive prior to the players and set up the practice area.
- Make sure the size of your training area is appropriate to the number of players at training and the physical capabilities of the players.
- No theme is needed in these age groups. A selection of different games and activities works well.
- Make sure you have pinnies, cones, ball pump, flags or larger cones for goals (or pop up goals) and extra soccer balls.

Start your session with simple ball and body movement activities to warm up (individually U6; in pairs U8) stretching is not necessary in these age groups, progress to fun games and finish your session with small sided games and an unconditioned 3 v 3 game (U6) and 4 v 4 game (U8).

Coaching Session Checklist

- *Are the activities fun?*
    - Players learn better in an enjoyable environment
- *Are the players involved in the activities?*
    - Players enjoy activities that present an achievable challenge. Activities that are too difficult will frustrate players and activities that are too easy will cause boredom. Players should be engaged at all times, and not waiting in lines to perform an activity.
- *Are the activities specific to the game?*
    - Sending the players to run around the field to warm up prior to the practice is not developmentally appropriate and, in addition, boring.
    - Warm up activities should include lots of movement and numerous touches on the ball.
- *Is the coach's feedback appropriate?*
    - It is important to encourage young players. Positive feedback will encourage players to continue to try.

6 Game Day Responsibilities

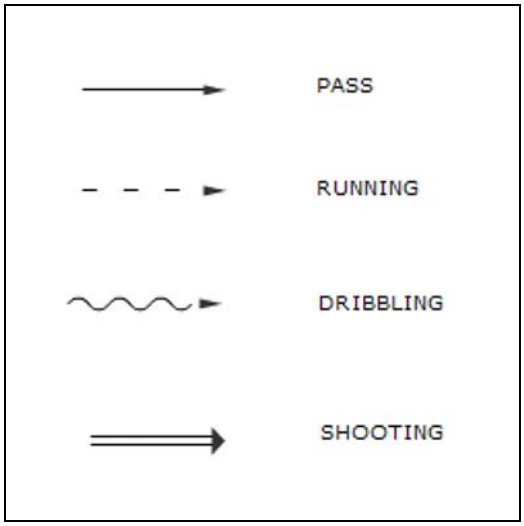
- Arrive at the field at least 15 minutes prior to the time you told the players to arrive.
- Make sure you bring player cards, emergency medical information and medical release forms for each player. A link to a sample medical release form is listed in the additional resources section on page 32.
- Check the playing surface and equipment for safety e.g. objects on the field, goals are secured. Make sure you have a game ball that is properly inflated.
- Confirm the number of players available.
- Organize a warm up for your players – lots of movement – not just kicking on goal.
- If you have a referee organize the players for referee check- in if not arrange which coach or parent will be the referee.
    - The parent should act as a referee but only to help point players in the right direction and to help with in and out of bounds.
- Let the players play. *Coaches should not be on the field of play at any time.*
- Coordinate your player rotation to make sure all players receive equal playing time.
- Make sure all your comments are very positive.
- Make sure each player drinks water and stays hydrated.
- Players should be aware of the direction they are attacking and team shape can be addressed.
    - The players can be set up in a triangle shape in U6 and a diamond shape in U8 to start the game and at other natural breaks (kick offs, goal kicks) however, during the game players must be allowed to run around freely – bunch ball is a natural occurrence in these age groups
- Positions are not necessary and although you may be tempted to leave a player back to defend the goal this is developmentally inappropriate.
    - U6s and U8s must learn to attack as a team and defend as a team.
- Under no circumstances should children be made to stand in a position, stand on a line or in a certain area.

7 U6 and U8 — Games and Activities

The following chapter includes games and activities for U6 and U8 players. The activities shown are age specific but in many instances the U6 activities can still be used for U8 players and vice versa. Therefore, coaches are encouraged to review both sections to find appropriate games and activities for their players.

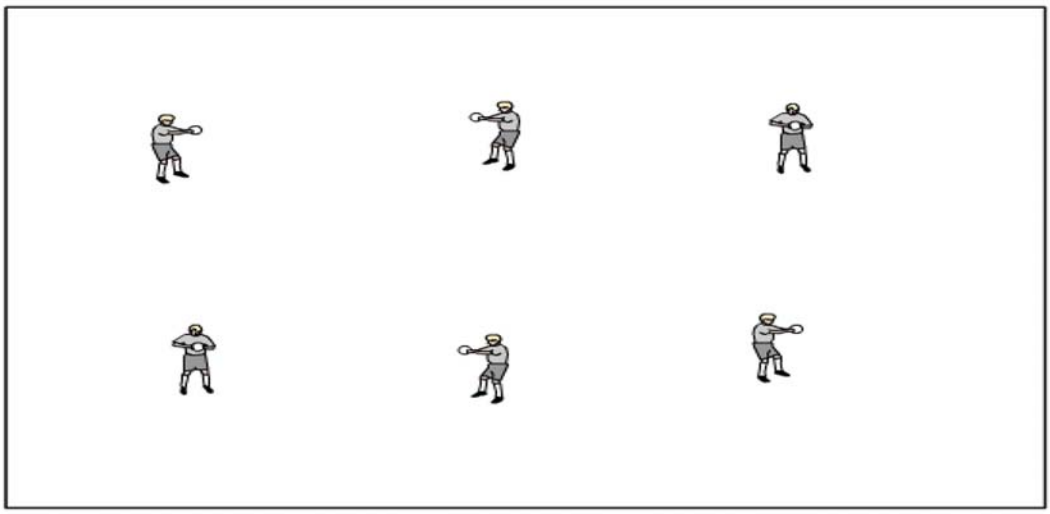
No training area sizes are listed on the activity diagrams; however as a general guide use a 25/20 X 20/15 yard training area for your practices. Adjust the size of the training area accordingly to make sure your practices work.

Activity Key:



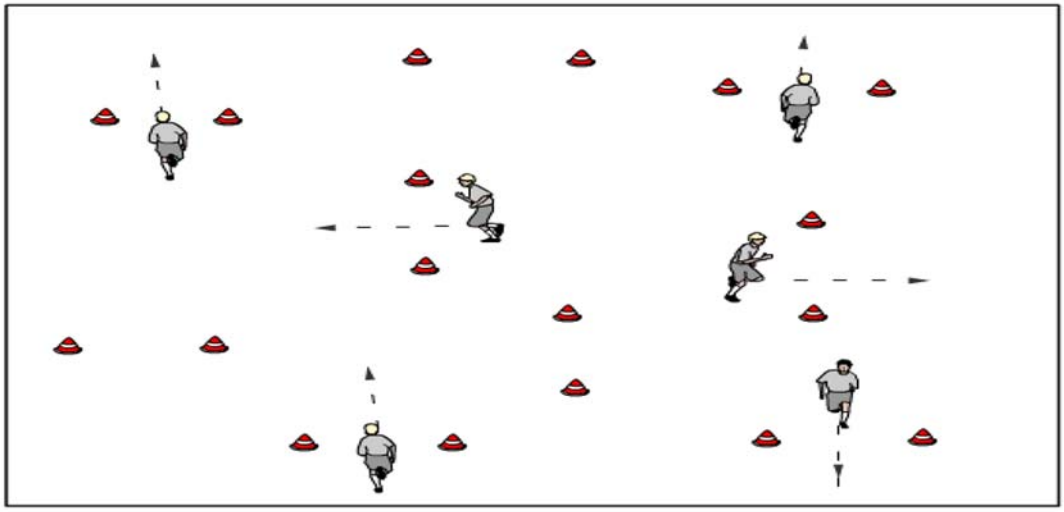
U6 — Warm Up Activities

1 Ballnastics



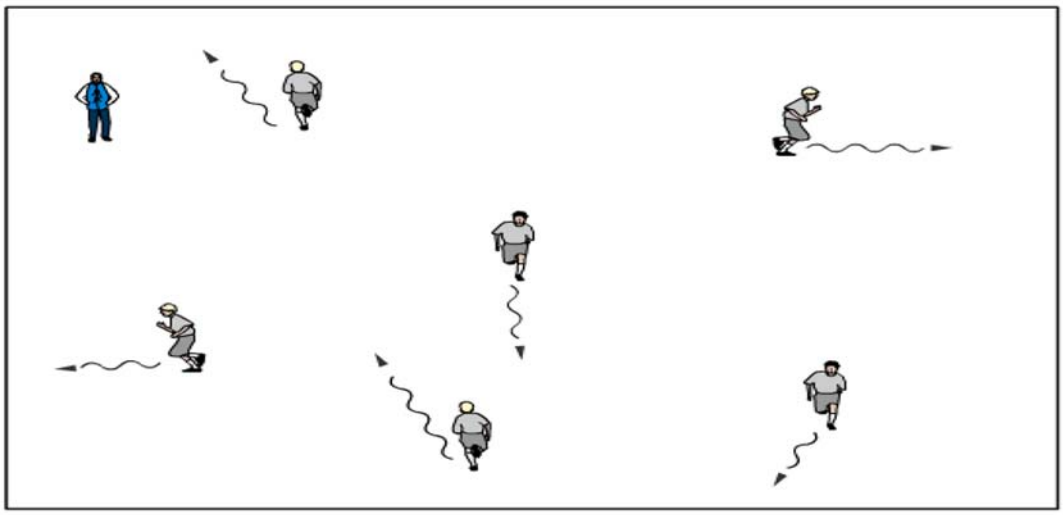
Organization: Ballnastics exercises should be performed individually with or without a ball. *Ballnastics examples:* **Movement Education:** *Running forwards and backwards, hopping, bouncing, skipping, crab crawling or bear crawling through and around the balls.* **Ball Movements:** Figure eight around legs, round the waist, throw and catch, thigh and catch. **Toe taps on the ball:** On top or side to side (play a game to see how many you can do in 10 seconds). Roll the ball around with the balls of your feet, jump back and forth over the ball.

2 Multi Goal Game



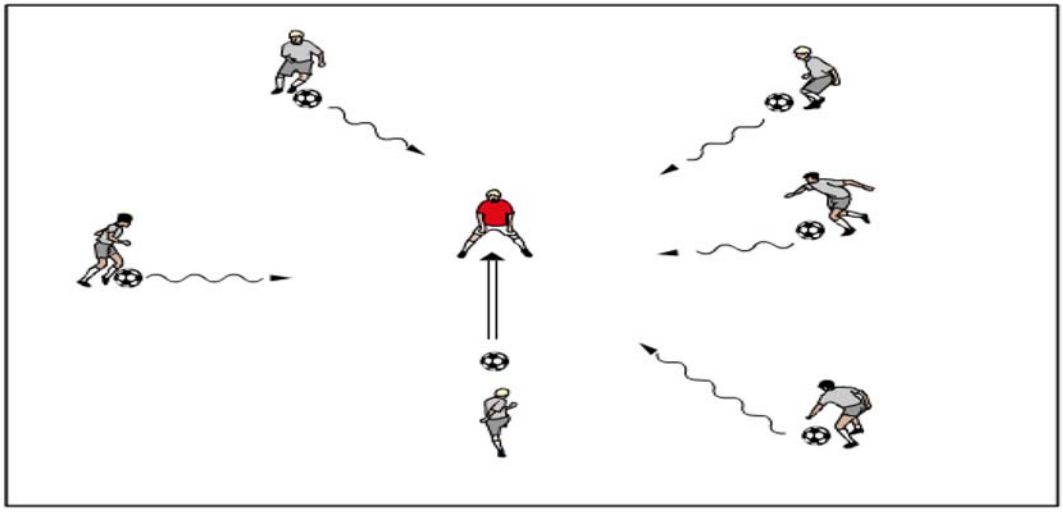
Organization: The coach places cones throughout the training area in pairs 3-4 yards apart. Make sure that there are at least 3-4 more goals than the number of players participating. The coach then challenges the players (for a set period of time 15-30 seconds) to get as many goals as possible by moving through the cones in various ways e.g. *running forward, running backwards, ball stuffed up shirt, ball above the head, bouncing the ball, hopping, skipping, dribbling*.

3 Identifiers



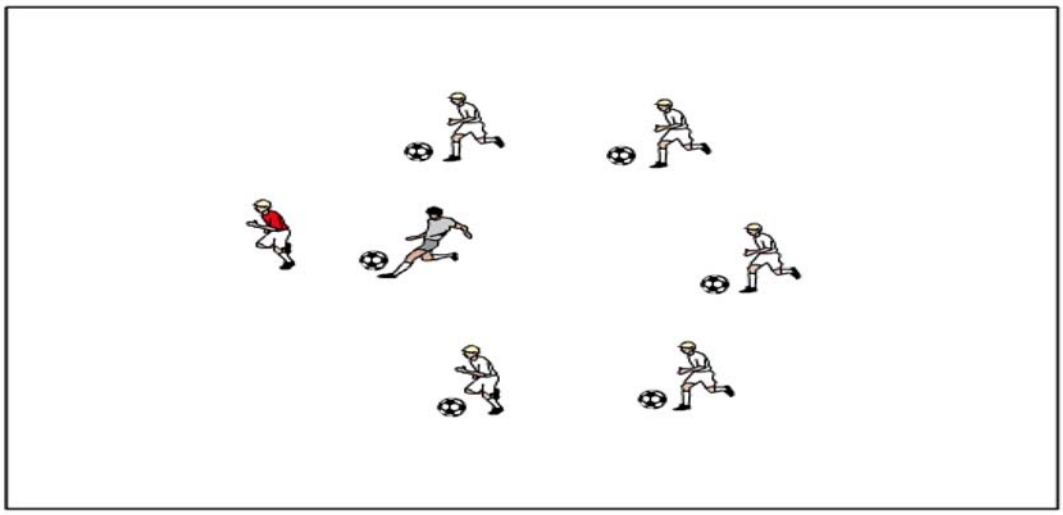
Organization: Players move around the training area in various ways — jogging forwards, backwards, hopping, skipping, running fast, slow etc. At random the coach calls out an identifier of a group of players or player, who then try to tag as many of the other players in a set period of time. **Identifiers examples:** t-shirt color, blond hair, sock color, names etc. You can play this game with or without a ball.

4 Tunnel Soccer



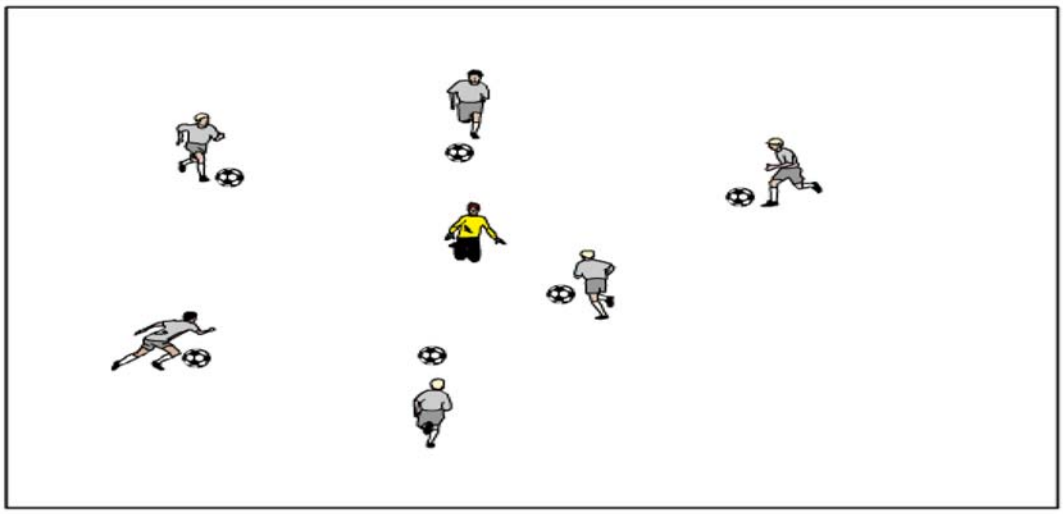
Organization: Each player has a ball. The coach moves around the field with the players and from time to time stops and spreads his legs to form a tunnel. The players dribble after him and try to shoot the ball through the tunnel whenever he stops. After a set period of time the coach moves again. The player who scores the most goals wins the game.

5 Ouch



Organization: Each player has a ball. The coach moves about the field with the players. Each player dribbles with their ball and tries to hit the coach with the ball. Whenever the coach gets hit he/she yells “ouch”. The player that causes the most ouches wins the game.

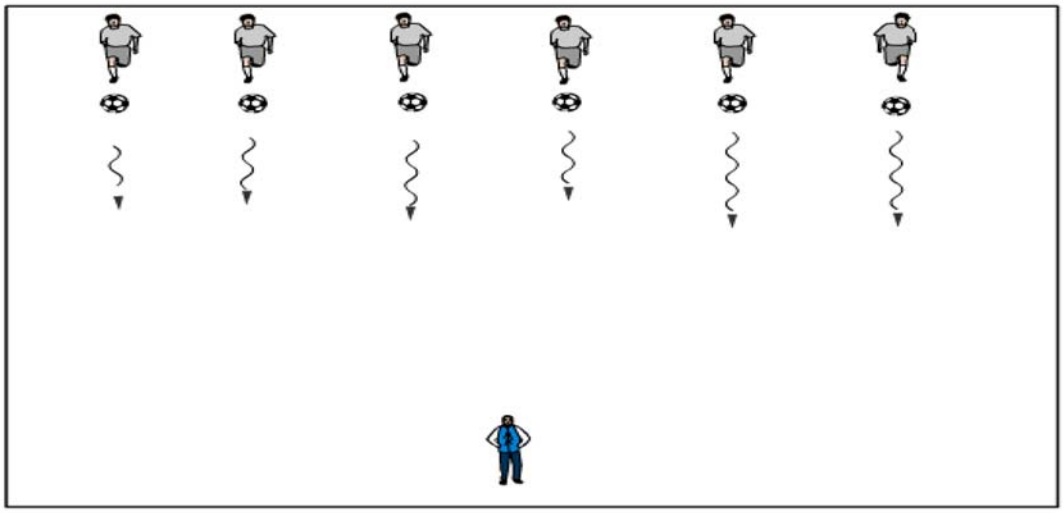
6 Ball Retrieve



Organization: The coach kneels in the middle of the training area with the players around him in a circle, with their ball in their hands. The coach takes one ball at a time and throws it away. The players must retrieve the ball and bring it back to the coach as quickly as possible. The coach then adds various conditions on how the players can return the ball e.g. balanced in one hand, with right or left hand, rolling the ball along the ground, ball between the knees, bouncing the ball, dribbling etc.

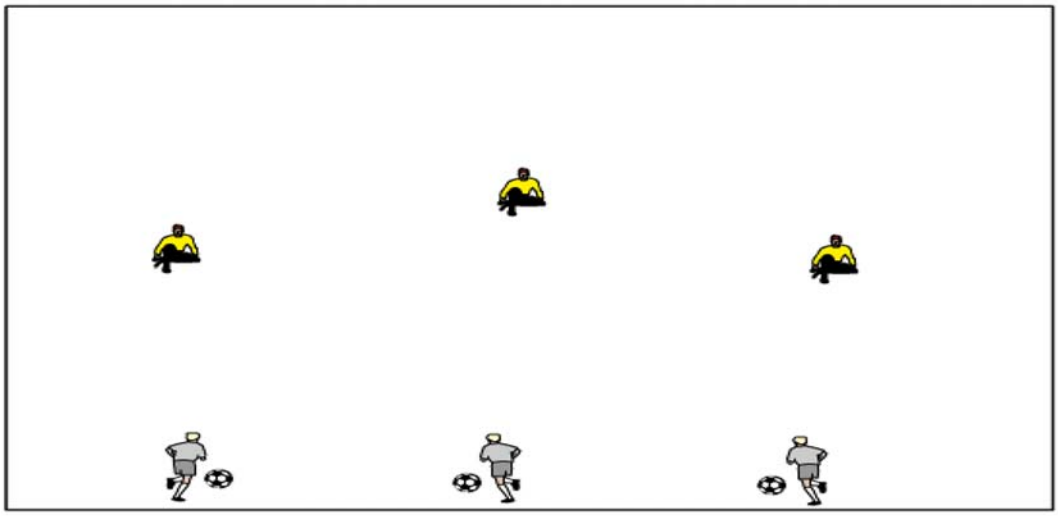
U6 — Fun Games

1. What time is it Mr. Wolf?



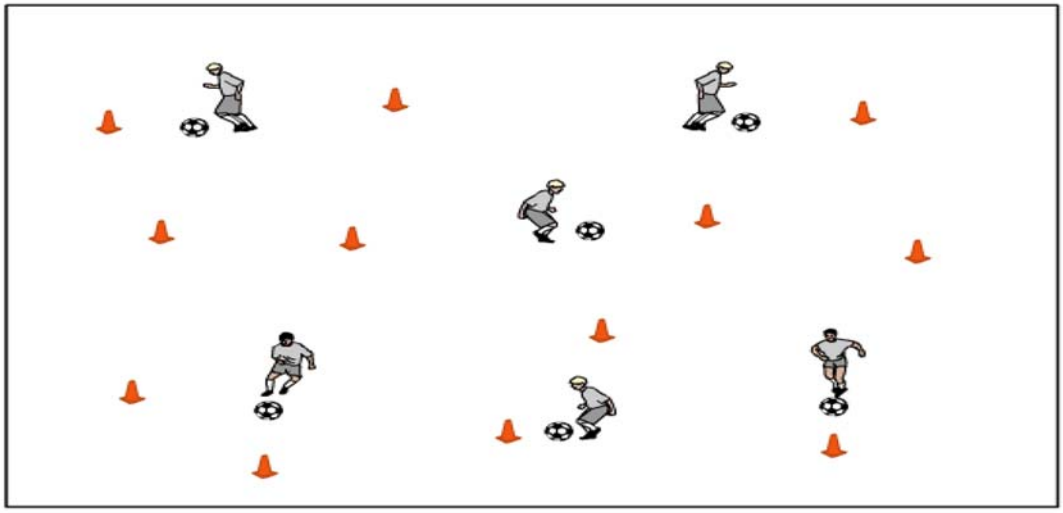
Organization: Each player has a ball and stands on one side of the grid opposite the coach/wolf. The coach/wolf has their back to the players. The players ask Mr. Wolf "What time is it, Mr. Wolf?" If Mr. Wolf says "8 o'clock," the players dribble 8 steps forward, 6 o'clock, 6 steps forward, etc. If Mr. Wolf says "Its dinner time," the Wolf attempts to tag the players before they can get back to the starting line. If a player gets tagged they become a wolf.

2. Shark Pool



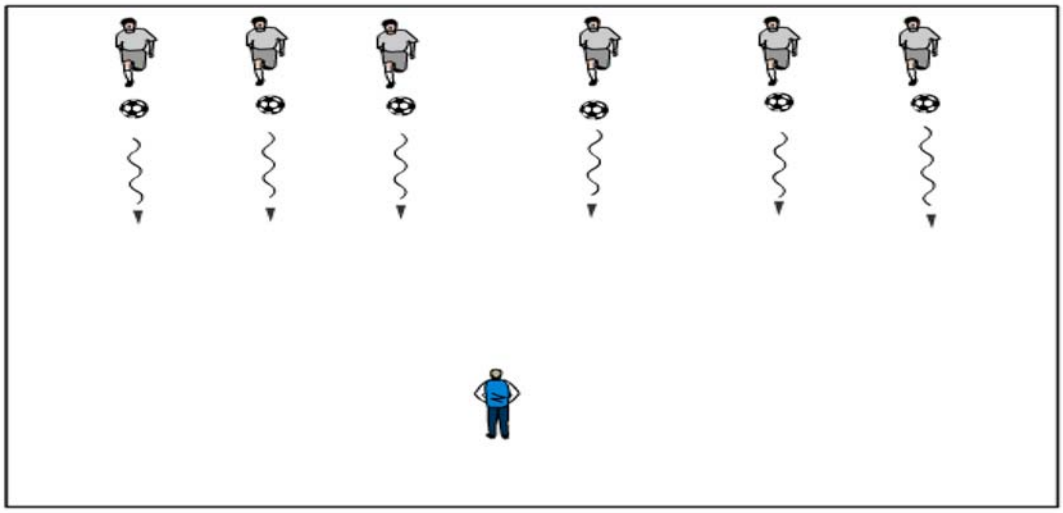
Organization: Half of the players (sharks) sit on the ground without balls. Each of the other players has a ball and they stand on one side of the training area. The players with a ball dribble from one end of the grid to the other. Each crossing scores one point. If a player loses a ball to a shark, the two players immediately switch roles. Sharks must stay sitting but can stretch and bend to try and steal a ball. See who can score the most points in a set time period.

3. Bingo



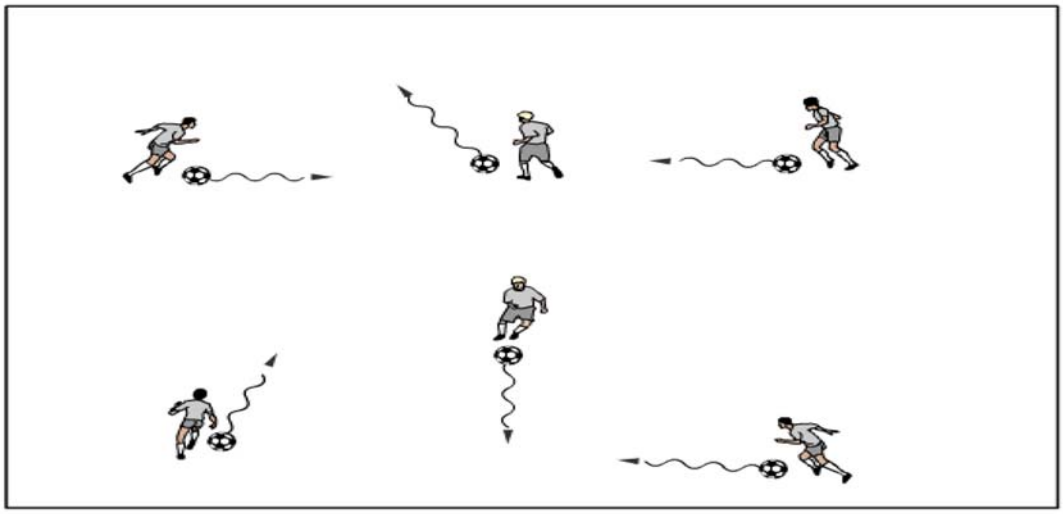
Organization: A number of cones are distributed throughout the training area. One player and the coach are the “replacers.” Each player has a ball. The players with the balls try to knock down as many cones as possible with their balls. The “replacers” (all players take turns in this role) set up the cones as fast as they are knocked down. When a player knocks down a cone they yell bingo. The player who scores the most bingos wins the game.

4. Red Light/Green Light



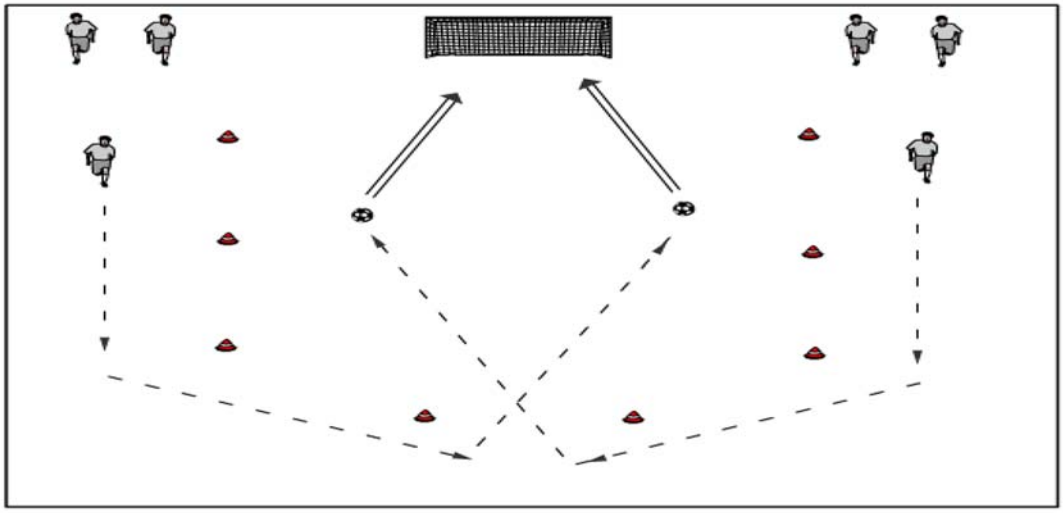
Organization: All players gather on a line. The object is to dribble their ball from one line to the other line. The coach calls out either green light or red light. Players dribble their ball and go when green light is called and stop when red light is called. If a ball is not stopped and controlled immediately, the player is sent back even with the last player, but not all of the way back. Progress to the coach holding either a green or red cone, or t-shirt. The coach now doesn’t say anything, simply holds up a color and the players have to look up and react.

5. Body Parts



Organization: All players have a ball dribbling inside the training area. When the coach calls out a body part the players must control the ball with their feet and then put that body part on the ball. Last player to put that body part on the ball does three toe taps.

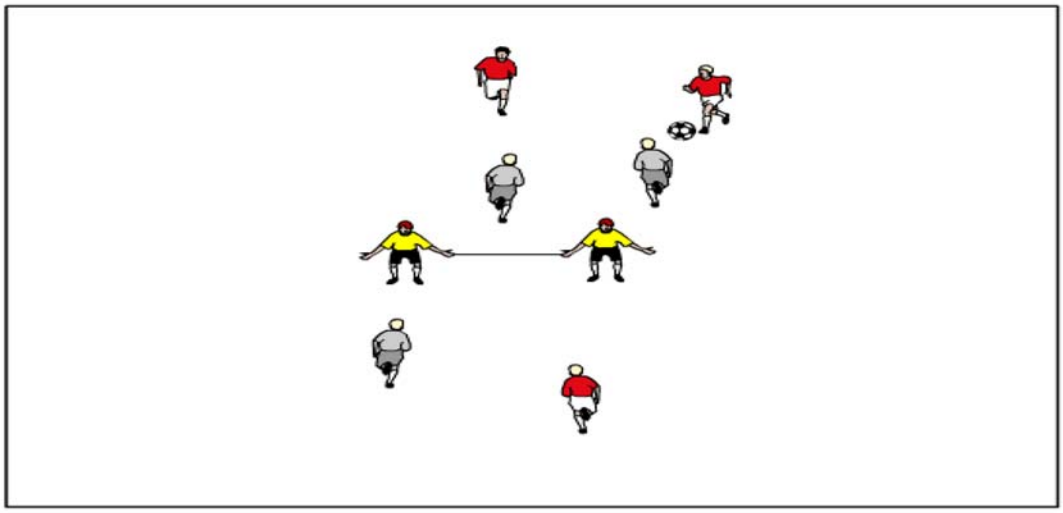
6. Disney Game



Organization: Two teams of equal numbers stand at either side of a goal. Give each player a Disney character name and make sure there is a matching character on the other side. The coach places two balls in the playing area and then calls out a Disney character. The two players run around the cones into the playing area and the first one to score wins one point. **Progression:** Place one ball in the training area and create a 1v1 situation.

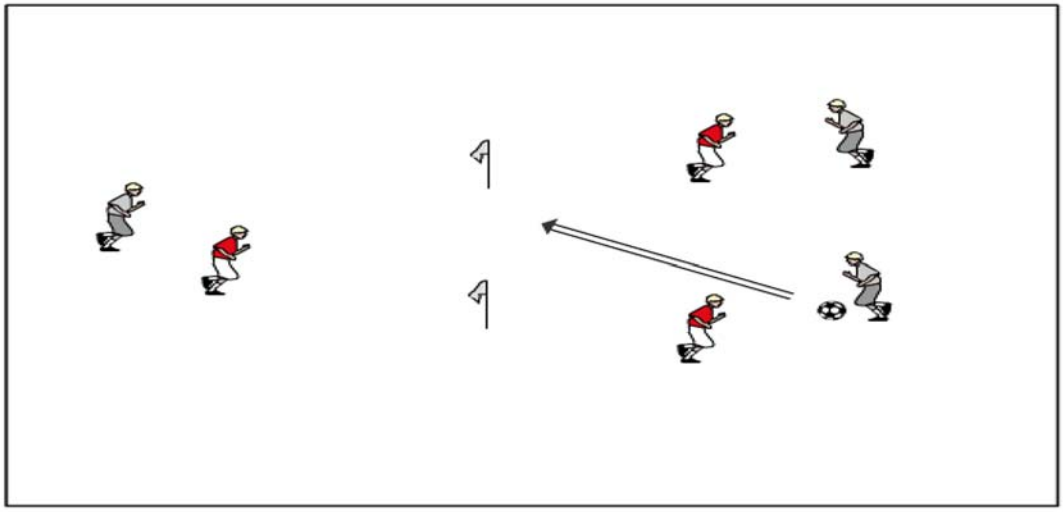
U6 — Small-Sided Games

1. Moving Goal Game



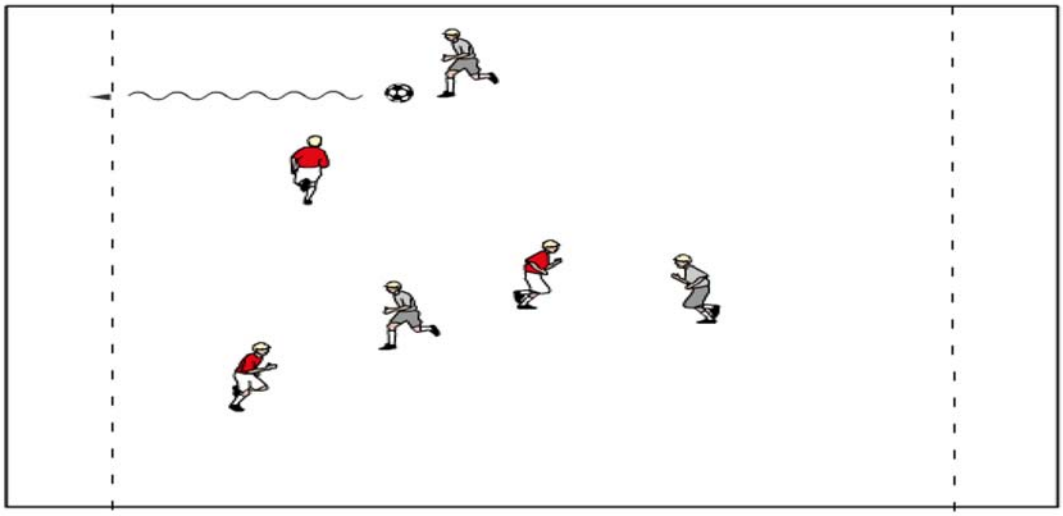
Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. Two coaches or parents hold a practice vest between them forming a goal. The players must then try to kick their ball through the goal (any side) while the goal is moving around. Both teams score into the same goal.

2. One Goal Game



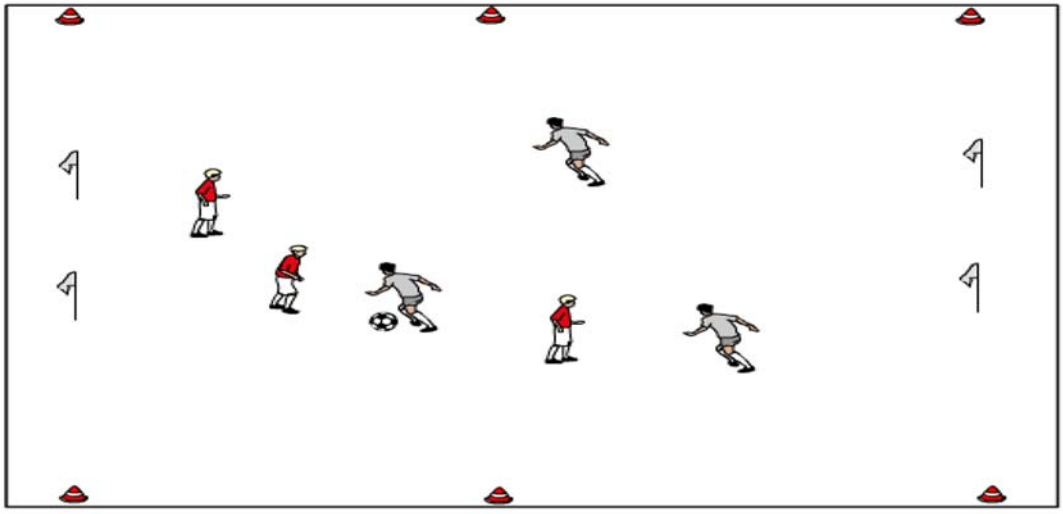
Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. Place a goal in the middle of a playing area. Teams can score from any direction. A variation would be to have teams score on opposite sides of the goal.

3. End Line Game



Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. A player scores a goal dribbling the ball over the other team's end line. Players do not get a point if they just kick it over the line. There are no throw-ins or kick-ins and if the ball goes out of bounds the coach feeds in a new ball. **Progression:** Give the players an extra point if they can stop the ball on the other player's end line.

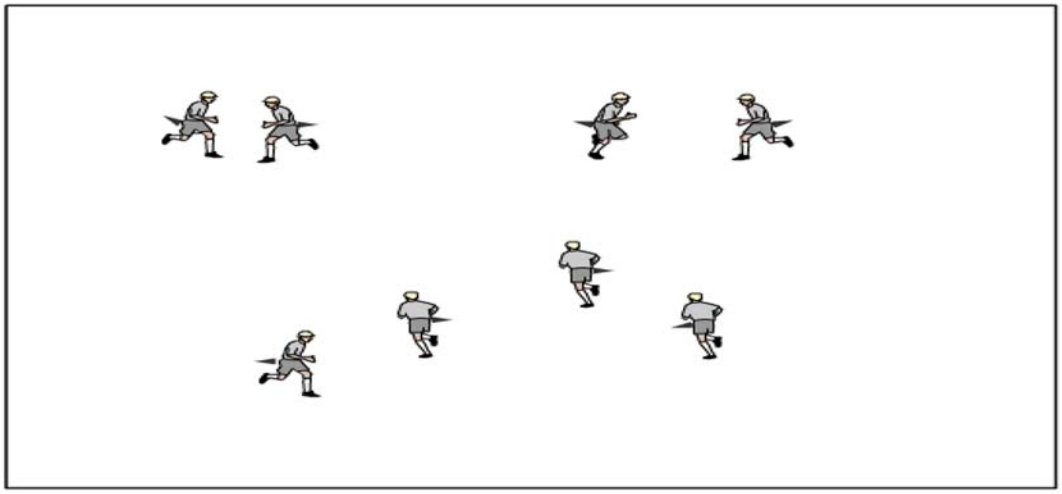
4. The Game — 3v3



Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. Play a regular 3 v 3 game with no conditions. No goalkeepers.

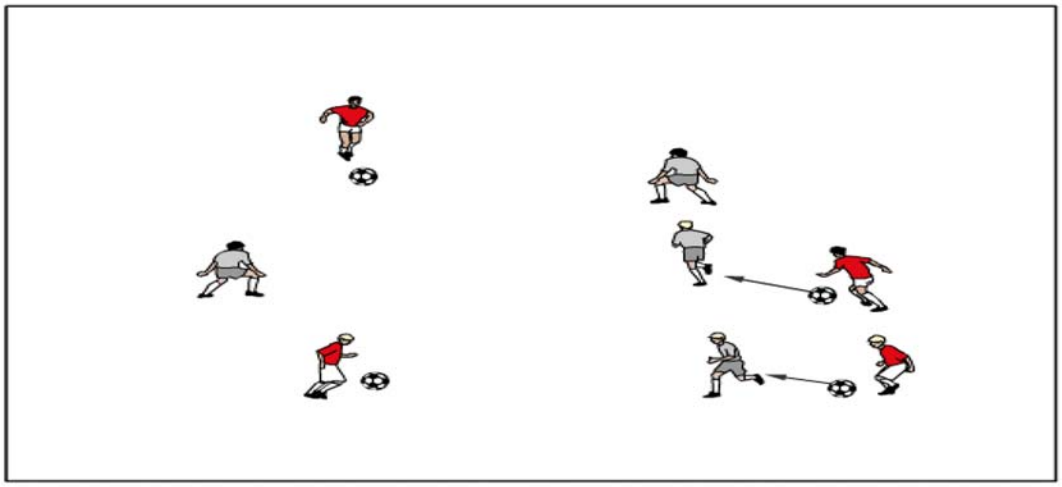
U8 — Warm Up Games

1. Tail Tag



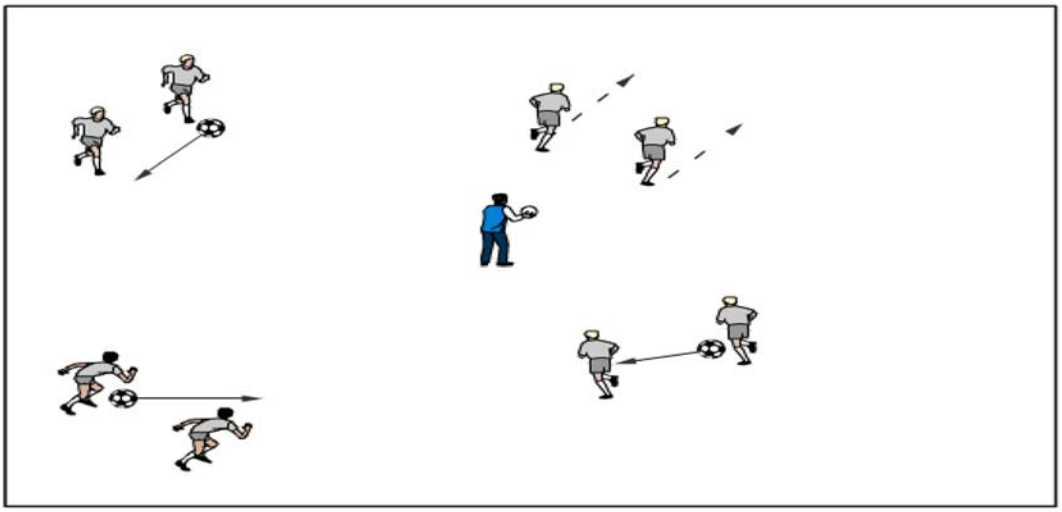
Organization: Each player has a tail (pinnie tucked into the back of their shorts). On the coach's command, each player tries to steal the other players' tails and if they win a tail they throw it on the ground. When a player loses their tail they continue to play as the winner is last player left with a pinnie. A variation is for player to keep the pinnies they steal and see who can collect the moist pinnies. Players cannot steal a pinnie from another player's hands.
Progression: Play the same game while dribbling a ball.

2. Defrost Tag



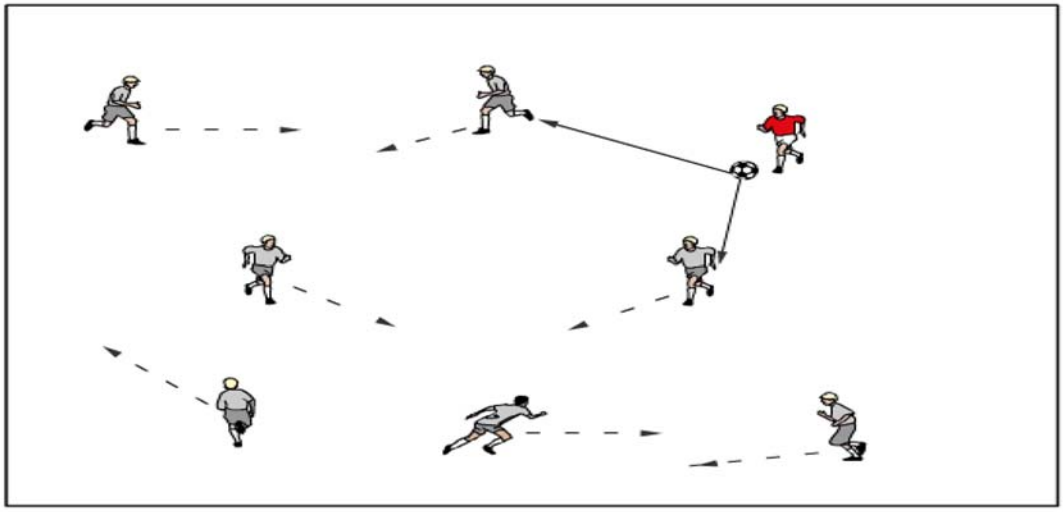
Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. One team starts on the outside of the training area, each player with a ball and the other team starts inside the training area without a ball. On the coach command the team outside the area dribbles into the area and tries to hit players form the other team below the knee. Players without ball do all they can to prevent being hit. Once a player is hit, they become frozen and must stand with their legs apart. The objective is freeze the entire team as quickly as possible. A frozen player can only get defrosted when a teammate crawls through their legs. When a player is crawling through a player's legs they are safe until the crawl is over. *See which team can freeze the other team fastest.*

3. Ball Retrieve in Pairs



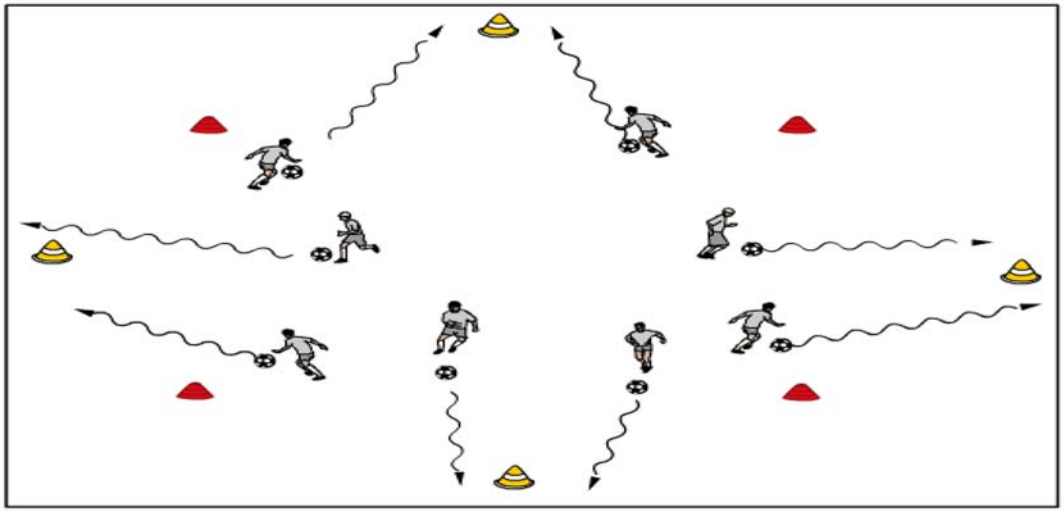
Organization: Each pair has a ball which in turn they give to the coach. The coach tosses the ball away and each pair must retrieve the ball as quickly as possible and bring it back to the coach. The players must bring the ball back a different way each time, e.g. balanced between two backs, balanced between two heads, throwing the ball to each other, passing the ball to each other. The coach can also limit the number of touches a pair may have when returning the ball. **Variation:** The coach may move and change position which encourages players to look up.

4. Pacman



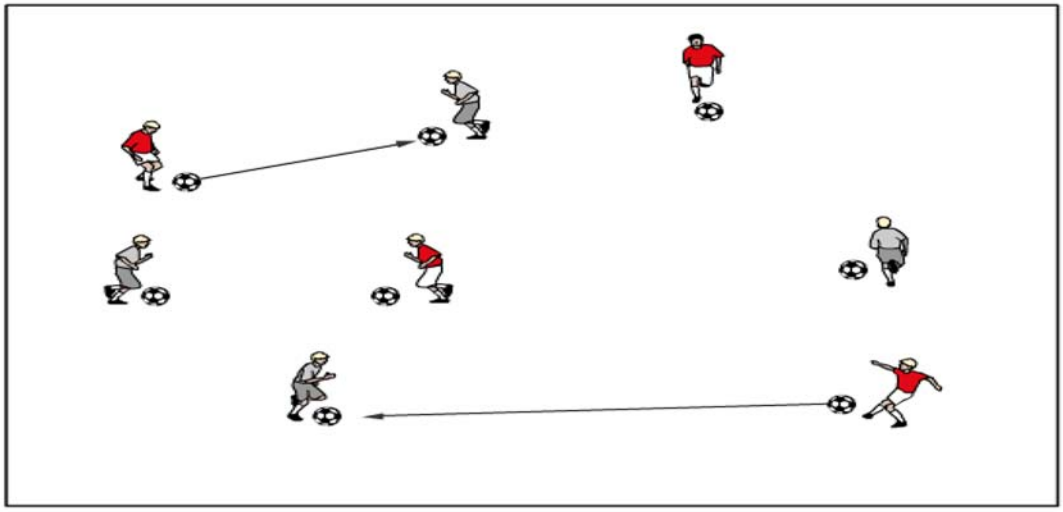
Organization: One player with a ball (Pacman) outside the area and the rest within a 20 x 20 yard area. All the other players run freely within the area. On the coach's command the player with the ball dribbles into the area and tries to hit the other players below the knees by passing the ball at them. Once a player is hit, they go outside the area to get a ball and become the second Pacman. Game continues until all but one player is left who is the Pacman for the next game.

5. Musical Balls



Organization: Place 4 cones outside the playing area. Players dribble in the playing area and on the coach's command, players stop their ball and then run around any of the four outside cones. The last player to get back to a ball scores a point or loses a life. Make sure all players are moving in the playing area not staying by the sides.

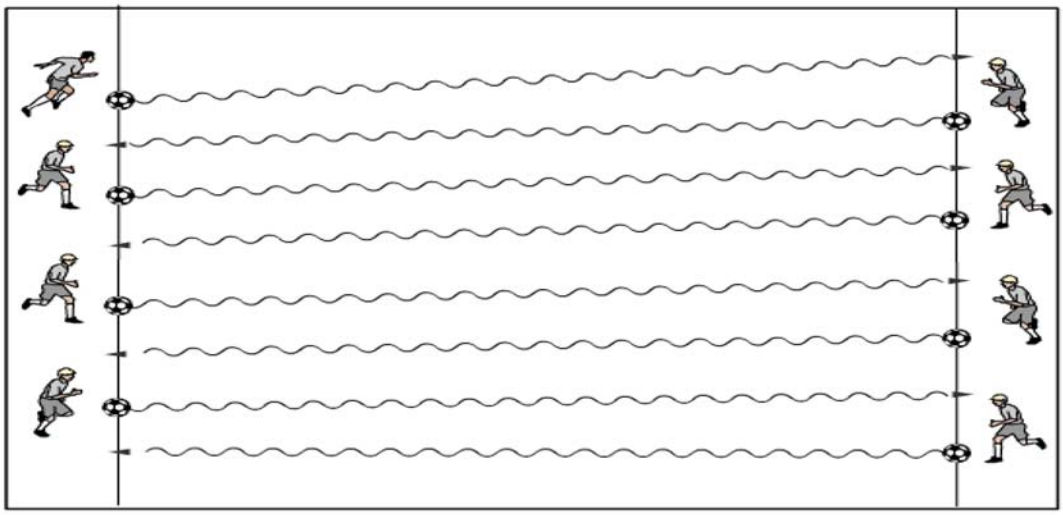
6. Moving Marbles



Organization: All players have a ball and are inside a playing area. Each player tries to pass and hit another players ball while they are moving. If they pass and hit someone else's ball, they get a point. **Variation:** Divide into two teams. One team is trying to hit the other team's ball. One team is designated as the passing team; the other is the dribbling team. After time, they switch roles. Play 3 rounds and see which team has the most total amount of hits.

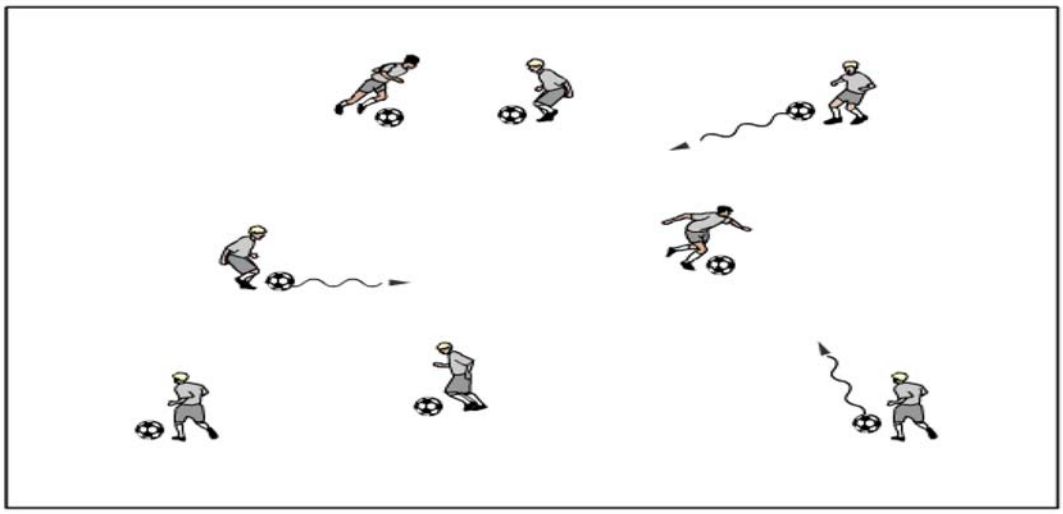
U8 — Fun Games

1. Braveheart



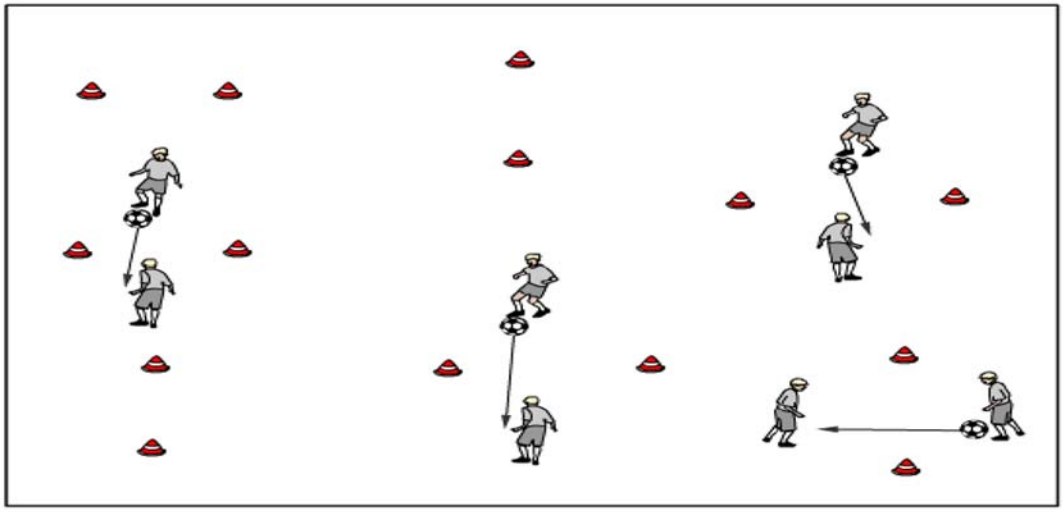
Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. All players have a ball and start on opposite end lines. When the coach shouts “charge,” they each dribble towards each other and try to get to the opposite end line and stop the ball on the line. The team that has 3 players on the line first gets a point. Start by walking with the ball, then progress to running with the ball.

2. Everybody’s It



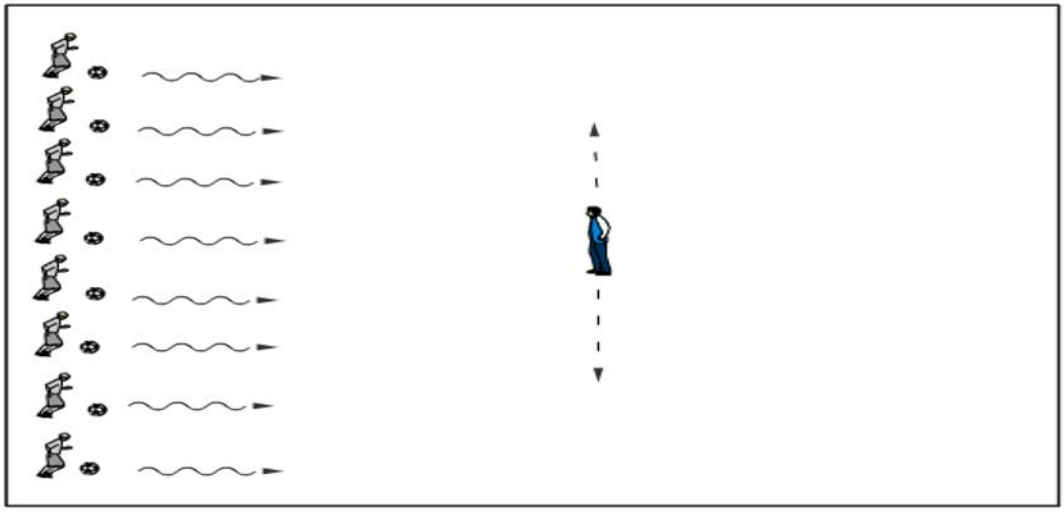
Organization: Each player has a ball. Players dribble around trying to tag as many people as possible while maintaining control of their own ball. Players get a point for each time they tag another player. Play each game for 30 seconds.

3. Multi Goal Dribbling and Passing



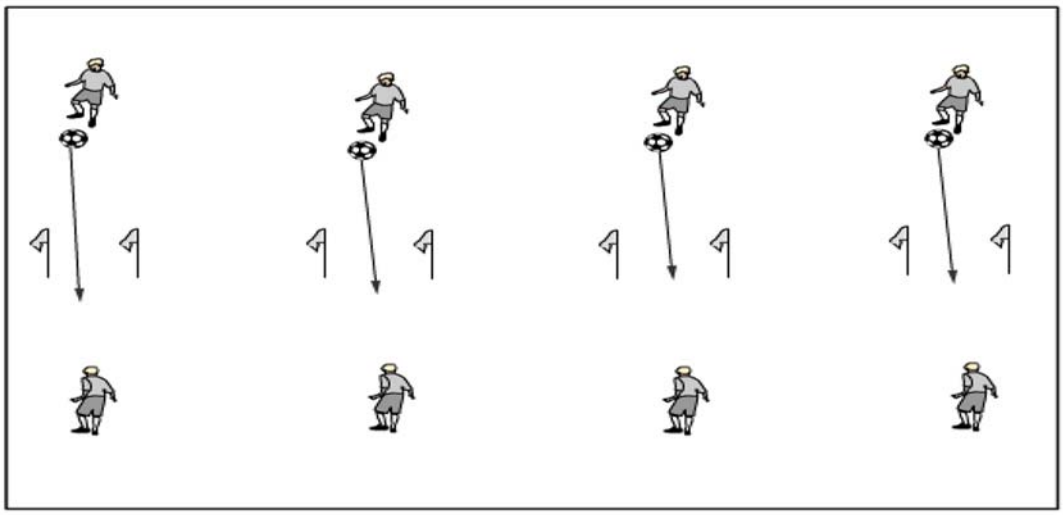
Organization: Set up random goals (cones 2-3 yards apart). Divide players into pairs with one ball between each pair. On the coach's command the players try and score as many goals as possible by passing the ball through the goals to their partner and then moving to another goal. Play 30-60 seconds each round. Players loose a point if they knock over a cone. Add conditions to the game such as pass with right foot only, outside of foot only, etc.

4. Bulldog



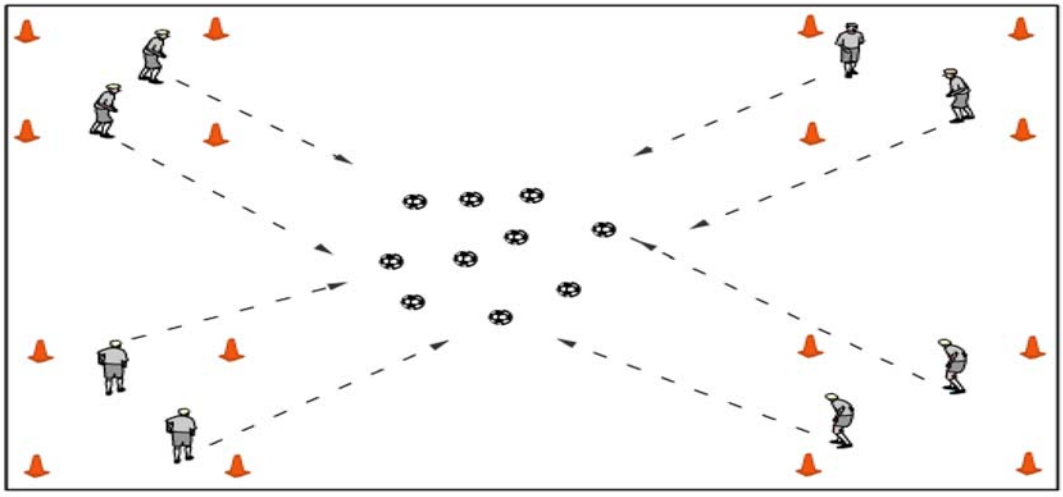
Organization: The coach starts as the bulldog in the middle of the playing area. All the players are at one end of the playing area with a ball. On the coach's command of "go bulldogs" the players must get to the opposite side of the playing area without their ball being kicked out by the coach. If a players ball is kicked out they become a bulldog . The last player with a ball wins the game and becomes the bulldog for the next game.

5. Pong



Organization: Although passing should not be focus at U8, Pong is a fun way to introduce passing to your team. Two players play against each other and share a ball. They place two cones anywhere from 2-8 yards apart. They choose! Players pass back and forth to each other. The rules are the ball must never stop, it must always stay on the ground, and it must go through the two cones without touching them. Whenever this is violated the other person receives a point. Because of the rule that the ball must never stop, players have to play 1 or 2 touch. The closer the two cones are, the closer the pairs are probably going to be. The farther apart they are, the more they will have to move laterally and look more like the old arcade "Pong" game. Play and see who can become the PONG Champ!

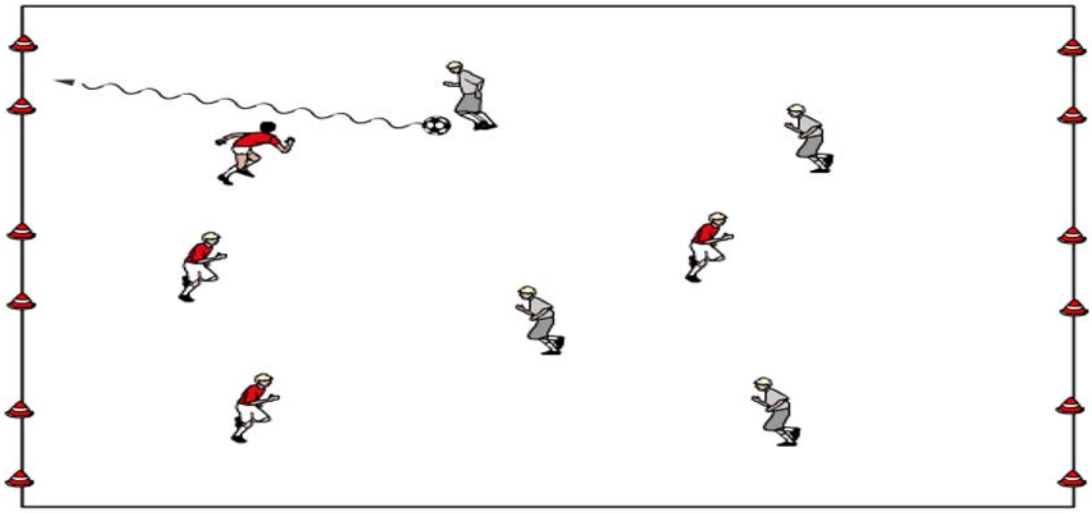
6. Four Corners



Organization: Divide the team into 4 groups of 2. Each group of two starts in their own corner. Eight balls are placed in the center of the training area. On the coach's command players run to the middle and dribble one ball back to their own corner. Players cannot defend their corner or tackle other players. After all the balls are gone from the middle, players can then raid the corners of the other teams. After a set time period the team with the most balls in their corner wins the game.

U8 — Small-Sided Games

1. Multi Goal End Line Game

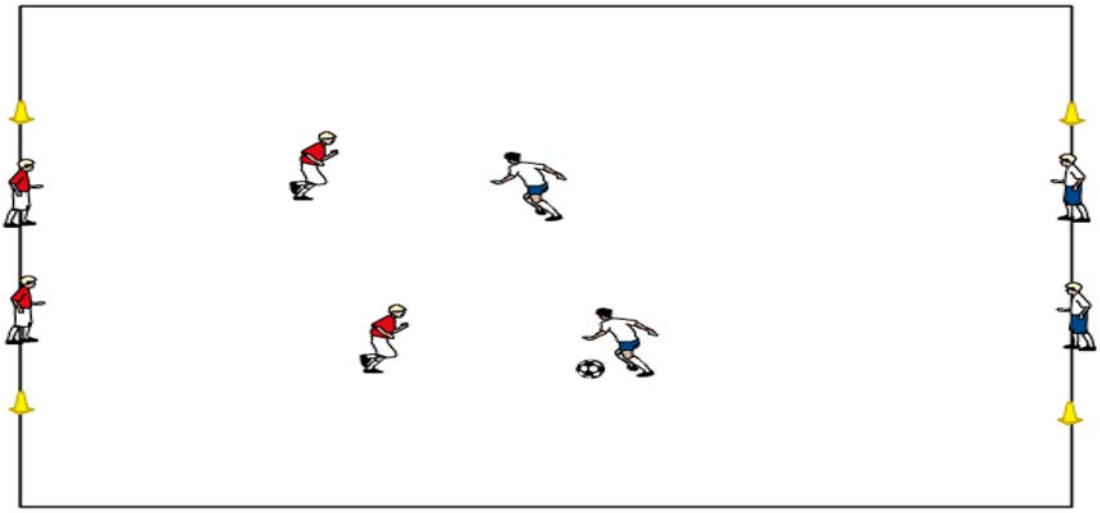


Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. Place three goals on each end of the training area. Players score by dribbling through one of the multiple goals on the opponent's end line.

2. Corner Gates

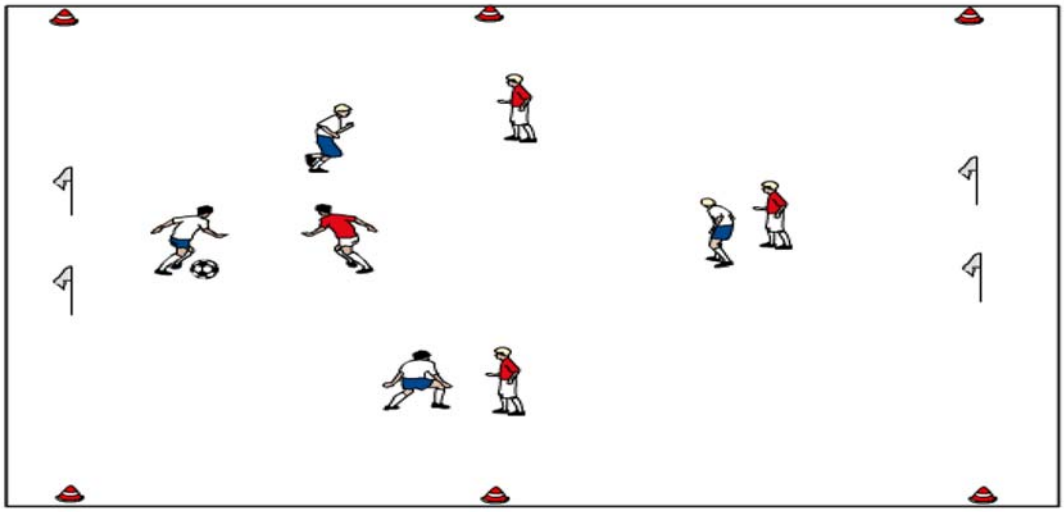
Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. Make diagonal goals with flags or cones in each corner of the field. When a goal is scored or the ball goes out of bounds, the coach plays in a new ball to keep the game flowing. The object of the game is to score through any of the 4 corner goals by passing or shooting. **Progression:** Assign each team two goals to attack and two goals to defend.

3. Change Game



Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. Create two goals on each end line. Two players from each team play out on the field, the other 2 players go into a goal. Play like a normal game. When the coach yells “Change” the players who are on the field switch with the players who are in goal. The players simply leave the ball where it is when the coach yells “Change”. Goals must be scored below shoulder height. The goalkeepers cannot use their hands to stop the ball, cannot step off of the goal-line and cannot score.

4. The Game



Organization: Divide players into two equal teams. Play a regular 4 v 4 game with no conditions. No goalkeepers.

8 Additional Resources

U.S. Soccer: Best Practices for Coaching Soccer in the United States

U.S. Soccer's Coaching Education Department has released a new publication designed to give youth and junior level soccer coaches in the United States a set of fundamental tools to help open up the game of soccer to young players in ways that celebrate the sport's spontaneous qualities. The 70-page Best Practices for Coaching Soccer is available at: www.ussoccer.com/articles/viewArticle.jsp_280734.html

Iowa Soccer Association Resources

A medical release form and coaching code of ethics, as well as many other team management resources are available at: www.iowasoccer.org/resources_content.htm

Rule books, additional lesson plans, and the opportunity to order a free Positive Parenting DVD is available at www.iowasoccer.org/coaches/coaching_resources.htm

Iowa Soccer Association U6/U8 Recreational Coaching Manual

By Ian Bradley, State Director of Coaching, Iowa Soccer Association

Special thanks to Sam Snow, Director of Coaching US Youth Soccer Association
and Frank Travato, Director of Coaching Alaska Youth Soccer Association
for their help and assistance with this manual.

If you have any questions, please contact Ian Bradley at 515-252-6363
or by e-mail at ibradley@iowasoccer.org.

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