
U6 - U8 Soccer Coaching Guide

**Practice Activities | Session Plans | Developmental
Info Coaching Tips | Philosophy | Methods**

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Instructional Coaching Manual

- Practice Activities
- Session Plans
- Developmental Info
- Coaching Tips
- Philosophy
- Methods

Preschool, U6 & U8

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Instructional Soccer Coaches Manual

Coaching 3-8 Year Olds

Preschool, U6 & U8

Introduction

In this coaching manual, there is general coaching information, age-appropriate ideas, developmental capabilities and practice sessions/activities.

Coaching these age groups are equally challenging and rewarding. It takes a great deal of patience, compassion and understanding to be an effective coach and positive role model for these younger players. Children this age are being introduced to the sport and entering a new social setting. There are many factors to consider in making a comfortable and fun environment for your players. This age group is the starting point in development for each player. The coach's role is very meaningful in enhancing the enjoyment of soccer for every child.

Every child learns in different ways and at different paces.

The three age groups covered in this manual (preschool, U6 and U8) have many similarities and differences. As a child gets older, they have different needs yet have more capabilities.

Important Coaching Qualities

- Patience
- Organization
- Positive & Encouraging
- Ability to connect with your players

Coaching Tips

- Always have a plan. Be organized
- Have fun- It's a game!
- You are a Teacher. Explain things in a way that players will understand.

Age Groups

Preschool

Preschool are children, 3 & 4 year olds, are new to soccer and to social settings. Every child is different; some may attend preschool/ day care or have already been involved in organized activities. For others, this will be their first experience socially and athletically. Children this age adapt in different ways and at different times. Finding ways to help them become comfortable is important.

Primary focus of practice sessions is dribbling activities. Keep instruction to a minimum.

U6

Kindergarten age children, 5 & 6 year olds, are more socially adjusted than pre-schoolers. Although, for some this will still be their first experience socially and/or athletically. Children this age are capable of more instruction and direction.

Primary focus is still dribbling activities, but now you are able to introduce the concept of passing and simple team tactics- directional play and team shape (attacking and defending)

U8

U8 players, 7 & 8 year olds, have various experience. Some have been playing for a few years and others are new to the sport. You will have a team or group of players with various abilities and developmental capabilities. All players learn in different ways and at different paces, regardless of the age group.

Primary focus is fundamentals – dribbling, passing & receiving and shooting. Practice sessions should be progressive and more structured.

FUN IS #1

Methods & Development

Child-Centred Approach to Coaching

Understanding where each child is developmentally gives a realistic expectation of what they are capable of physically and mentally. Coaching each child individually builds their confidence and trust.

Guided Discovery Method of Coaching

Teaches players by using the game as the platform and the coach to guide them and point them in the right direction. This gives players responsibility and ownership by asking them questions and allowing them to think for themselves and make their own decisions.

Field Set Up

Use lots of cones, so the players have distinct boundaries.

Similarities in All 3 Age Groups

- Keep instruction to a minimum. Short attention spans.
- Emphasis on fundamentals. Focus on dribbling.
- Repeat activities regularly to build familiarity.
- Players tire easily & recover quickly.
- Give positive reinforcements.
- Players are creative and use their imagination.

Progression

- Dribbling unopposed.
- Dribbling with pressure – a defender.
- Going to goal unopposed – 1v0
- 1v1 – ability and confidence to take on a defender (so important)
- Going to goal with teammate unopposed – 2v0
- Team Game – 4v4

Moving Forward

As you move forward in coaching, particularly if you move up to an older age group each year, it is important to adapt to your environment. Older players have more capabilities. As a coach, you must develop and advance with your players.

U6 & U8 Coaches Guide

Category: Psychological Practices

Difficulty: Beginner

Description

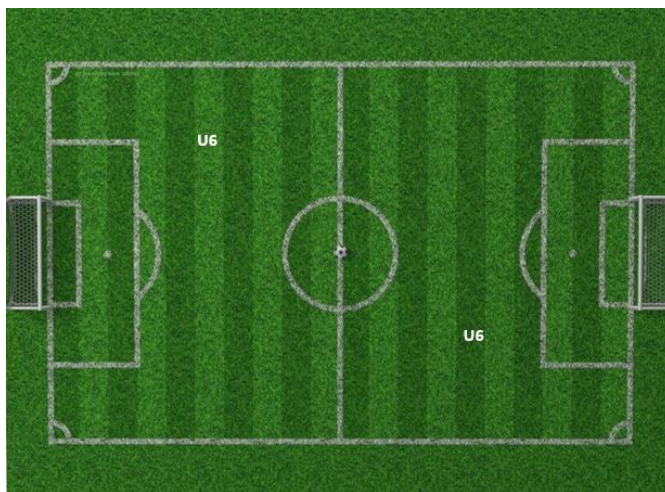
Ideas and Theories for the U6 & U8 age groups

U6

Fun is #1 Developing fundamental dribbling skills will give players a solid foundation at a young age. Understanding the capabilities of a 5 year old /U6 player helps coaches know why kids this age play the way they play. They have no sense of direction or boundaries. Their soccer vision is limited to what is around them. They play “bumble bee” soccer (every player wants the ball) and have tunnel vision to the goal.

Instead of teaching positions, try to teach your players to find open space (area) on the field. By allowing players to naturally move around the field they will start seeing the game on their own and will learn how to help (support) their team mates.

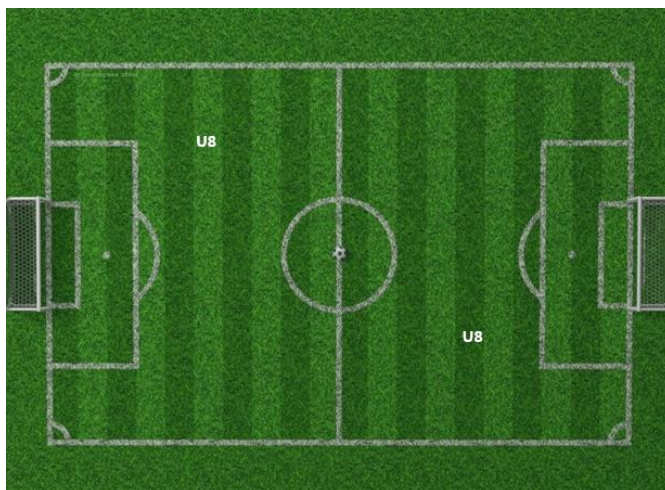
Kids this age need encouragement and validation, be their #1 cheerleader during practices and games!



U8

Fun is still #1! Building upon everything learned in U6. Players at U8 are developmentally capable of understanding more complex concepts. Dribbling skills is still the main focus.

Technical Skill Development. Players need to be comfortable with the ball at their feet and have confidence when they are on the field. Learning to dribble with different surfaces of their foot, change of direction (turning with the ball) and being introduced to passing & receiving are important U8 skills. Having an understanding of spatial awareness allows players to learn the concept of passing, moving into open space and defending principles. All players develop at different paces. The key is to find a balance to challenge players of different abilities in a team environment.



Field Positioning

I am a strong proponent of teaching roles rather than teaching positions. A team just needs to stay balanced and organized. At the U6 & U8 age groups, explaining the field by using “lanes” works well.

The field is like a highway: Right Lane, Middle Lane, Left Lane

Players starting on the Right are able to play in the Right and Middle Lanes.

Players starting on the Left are able to play in the Left and Middle Lane.

Players starting in the Middle are able to play in all 3 lanes.

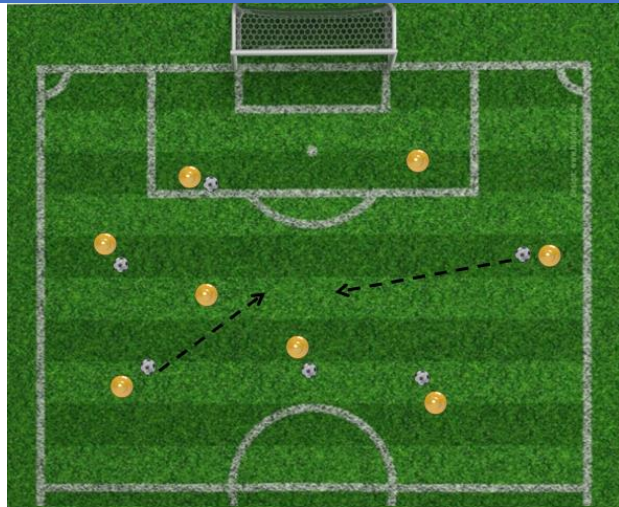


Description

Guide to follow for practice planning. The first step to a well-run practice is organization.

Warm Up

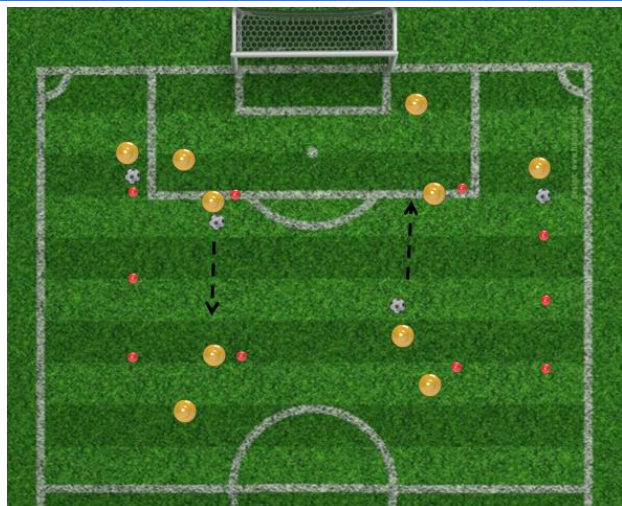
The warm up is a very important aspect of every team's practice session. At the U6 & U8 age groups, the warm up is similar to the other activities the group does throughout the session. At the U9 age group, you can begin doing specific warm ups to prepare for your session. Also, warming up prior to games is important. Players should be physically and mentally preparing for practice sessions and games.

**Skill Development**

Fundamentals are a key part of every player's development and needs to be incorporated in a team's practice session, at every age level. Allowing players the opportunity to get as many touches with the ball as possible in a practice session will build their confidence for game situations.

Fundamental Skills-

Dribbling, First Touch, Passing & Receiving, Attacking Moves, Turns / Change of Direction, Accelerating / speed Dribbling, Using different parts of feet to dribble and receive.

**Small Sided Games 2v2, 3v3, 4v4**

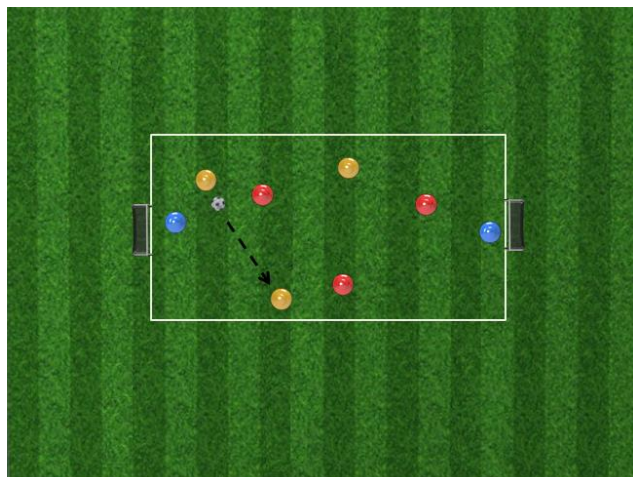
All teams benefit from integrating SSGs into their practice sessions. These are fast paced and continual flowing activities that are fun and constructive for the individual player and the team as a whole. There are so many aspects of soccer that you can focus on by playing SSGs. The different restrictions placed on a particular game will get your desired result.

Benefits of SSGs

Quicker decisions. More thinking. More touches. Everyone involved at all times. Teaches tactics in a simpler way. With small numbers, the best teacher is the game itself. With fewer players and a smaller field size, each player gets more touches on the ball.

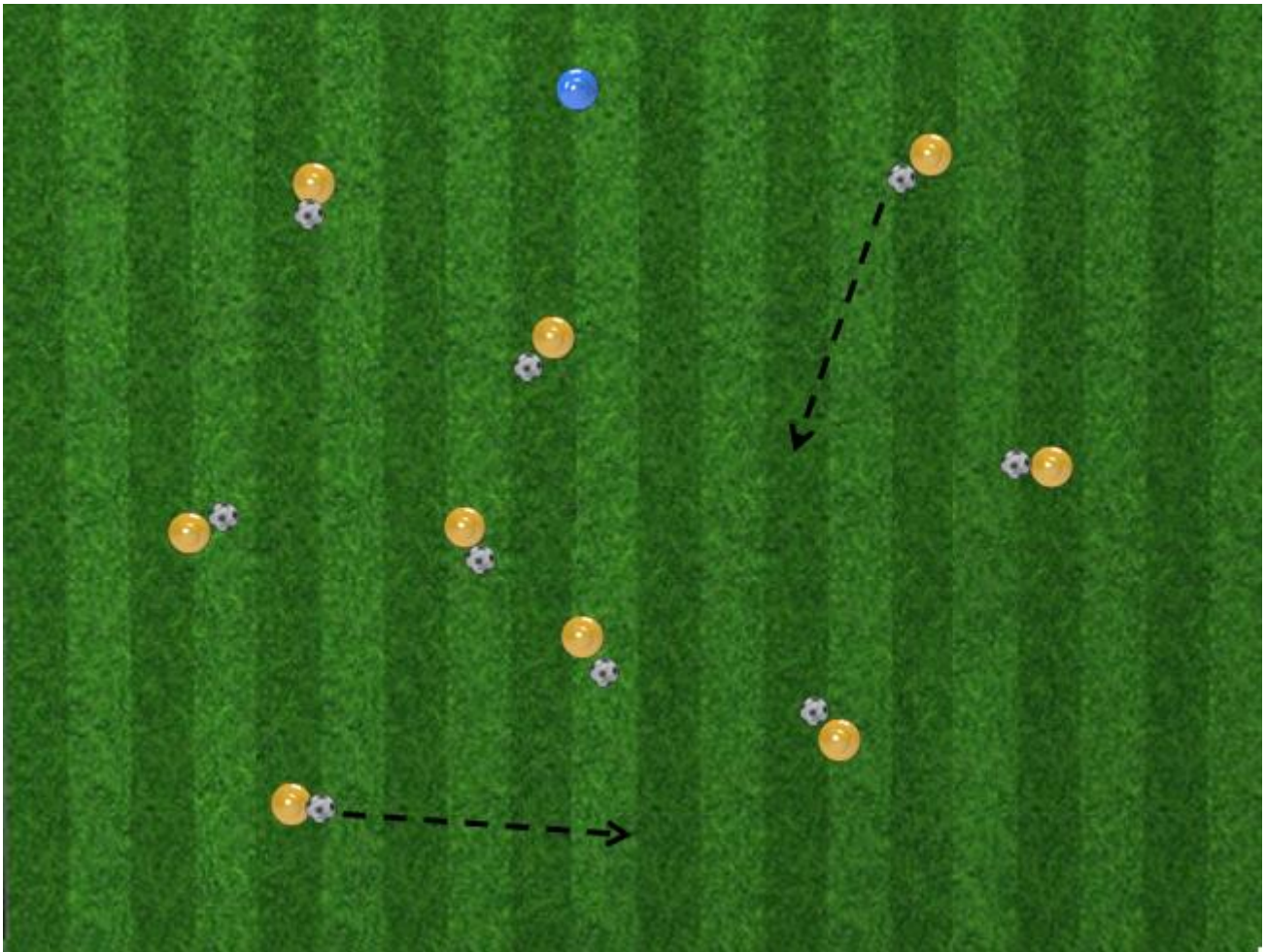
Allows players to make simpler decisions and develop an earlier, better understanding of the game. Smaller fields mean more players are directly involved in play. More goal opportunities.

Full Sided Games (7v7, 9v9 or 11v11) are another way to end your practice sessions.



Simon Says

The game that children play in preschool, day care or with friends. Now they will learn how to play Soccer Simon Says! All the same rules, but now we are adding a soccer ball.



Simon Says

Activity appropriate for Preschool, U6 & U8. A Classic game that most children are familiar with and a great activity to introduce fundamental skills.

Organization:

- Every player has a ball
- Grid size appropriate to the number of players

How to play:

- On Coach's signal/ perform skill or action

Variation:

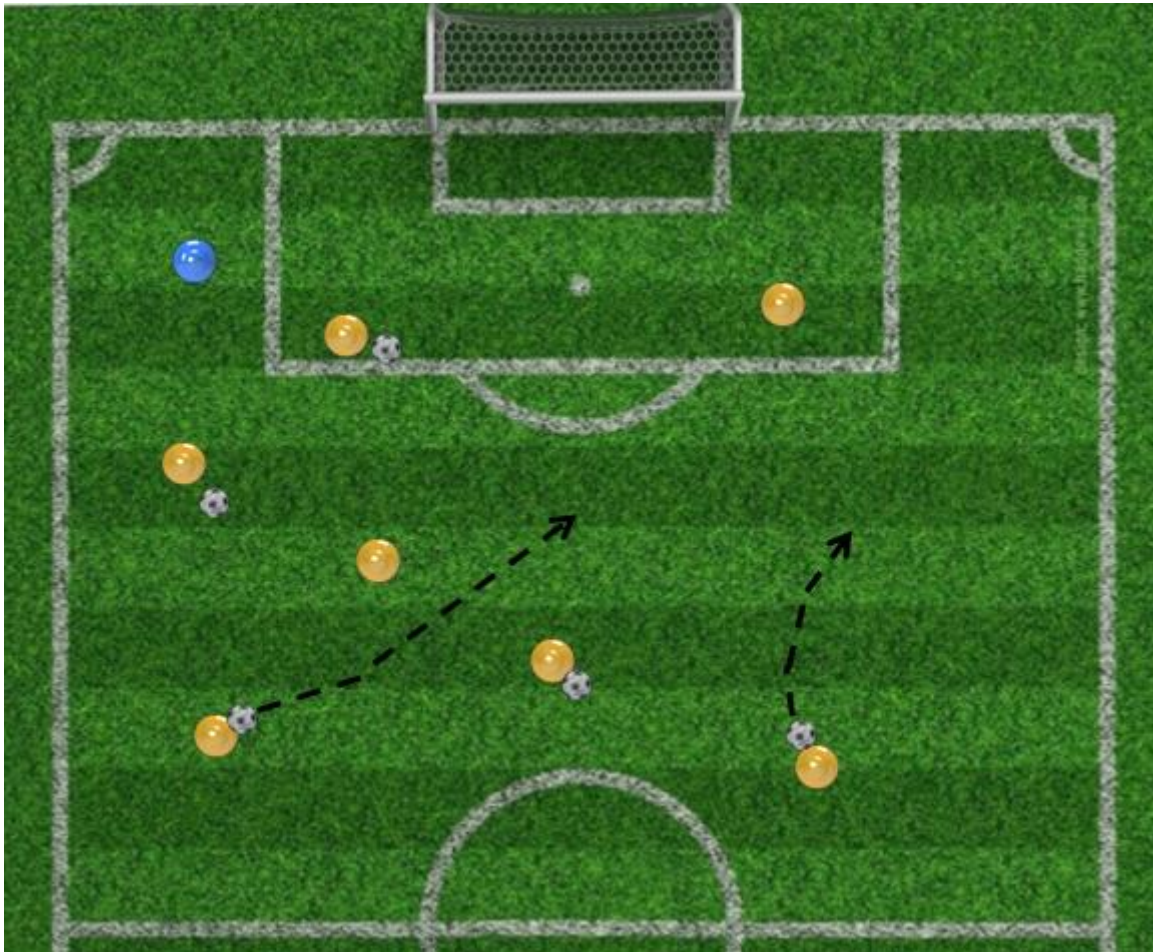
- Place balls in a different area of the field. Have all players start from the same location. Kids perform a skill on the ball then move to the next ball and so on.

Coaching notes:

- Add in surfaces dribbling, follow the leader, turn game
- Requires players to pay attention

Foxes and Bunnies

This is an activity that is appropriate for all age groups. In my experience, this is one of the kids' favourite games. Be animated when explaining the rules. Play multiple rounds to allow every child to start the game as a "Fox". Progression, the fox must steal the bunny's ball then steal their tail. Once the bunny loses their ball they continue to play by running. They do not turn into a fox until their tail is stolen.



Foxes and Bunnies

Fun game for U6-U8 Players

Organization:

- All bunnies start with a ball, Foxes do not have a ball.
- Bunnies tuck in a pinnie to the back of their shorts or to look like a tail.

How to play:

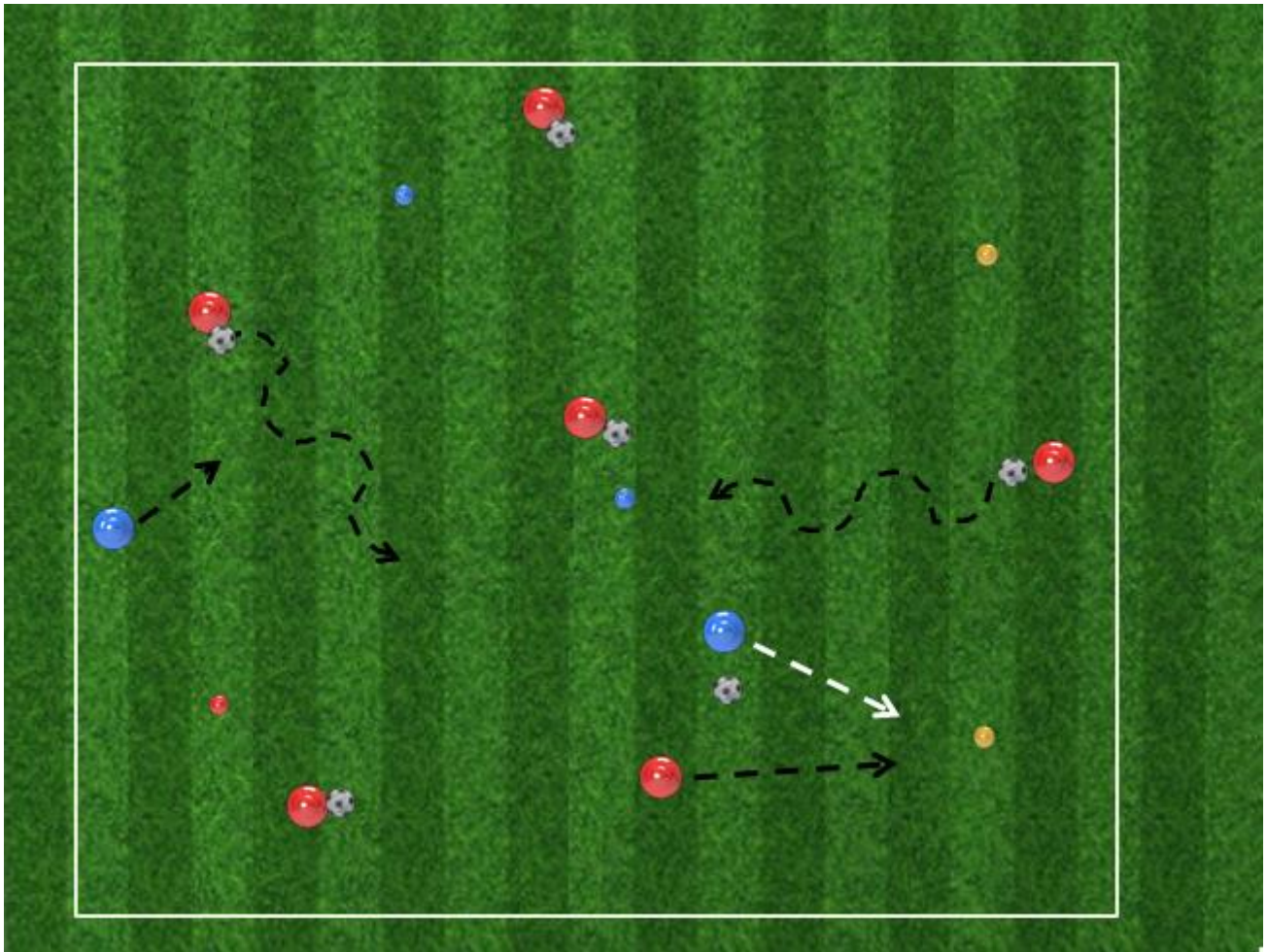
- Bunnies dribble freely round the field
- Foxes are trying to steal the bunnies tails by pulling them
- Bunnies turn into foxes if they lose their tail

Coaching notes:

- Bunnies need to dribble into open space, if a fox (defender) is near them they must dribble away with speed. Attempt turning with the ball and dribbling into a new direction.

Sharks and Fishies

A very fun and interactive practice activity that works for all three age groups. Basic dribbling activity with added pressure that makes it game-like. For the U8 age group, you could add extra sharks or goals.



Sharks and Fishies

Appropriate for all 3 age groups

Fun dribbling game that encourages basic 1v1 principles

Organization

- Every fishy has a ball, sharks are defenders and do not have a ball.
- Set up 4 to 6 cones randomly on your field
- Grid size is appropriate to the number of players

How to Play

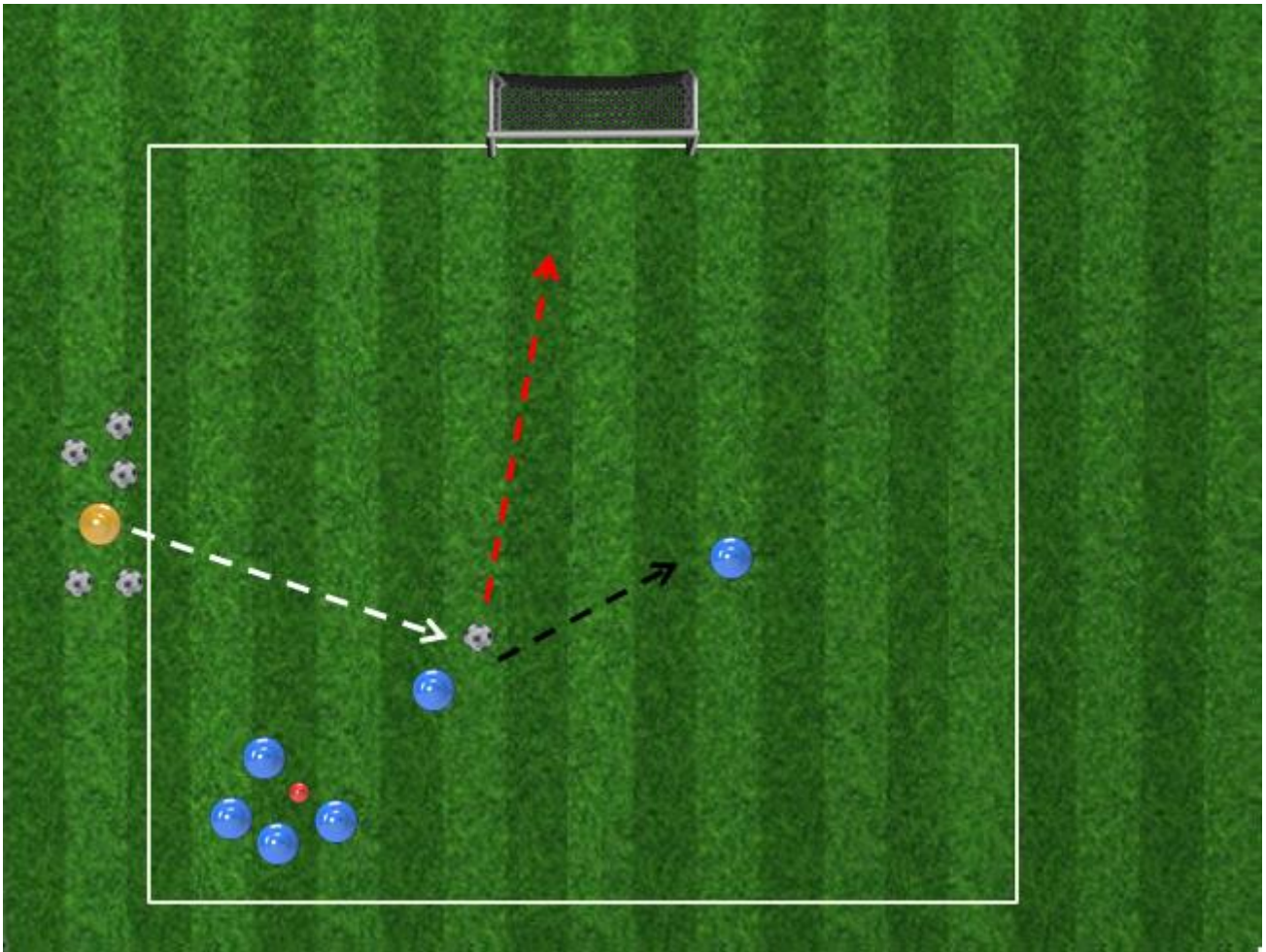
- Fishies dribble freely around the field (ocean)
- Sharks are trying to steal the fishies ball and dribble to one of the cones. The fishy tries to get their ball back before the shark reaches the cone.
- If a shark dribbles to a cone the fishy turns into a shark, if a fishy wins their ball back they remain a fishy

Coaching notes

- Dribble at speed away from pressure
- Game concept of applying immediate pressure if you lose the ball
- Win the ball back as quickly as you can

1v1 2v0

Activity appropriate for preschool and U6. This is the first step in developing 1v1 ability. With no defender, it gives the young player confidence to dribble to goal without fear of losing the ball.



U6 Activity- 1v0 & 2v0

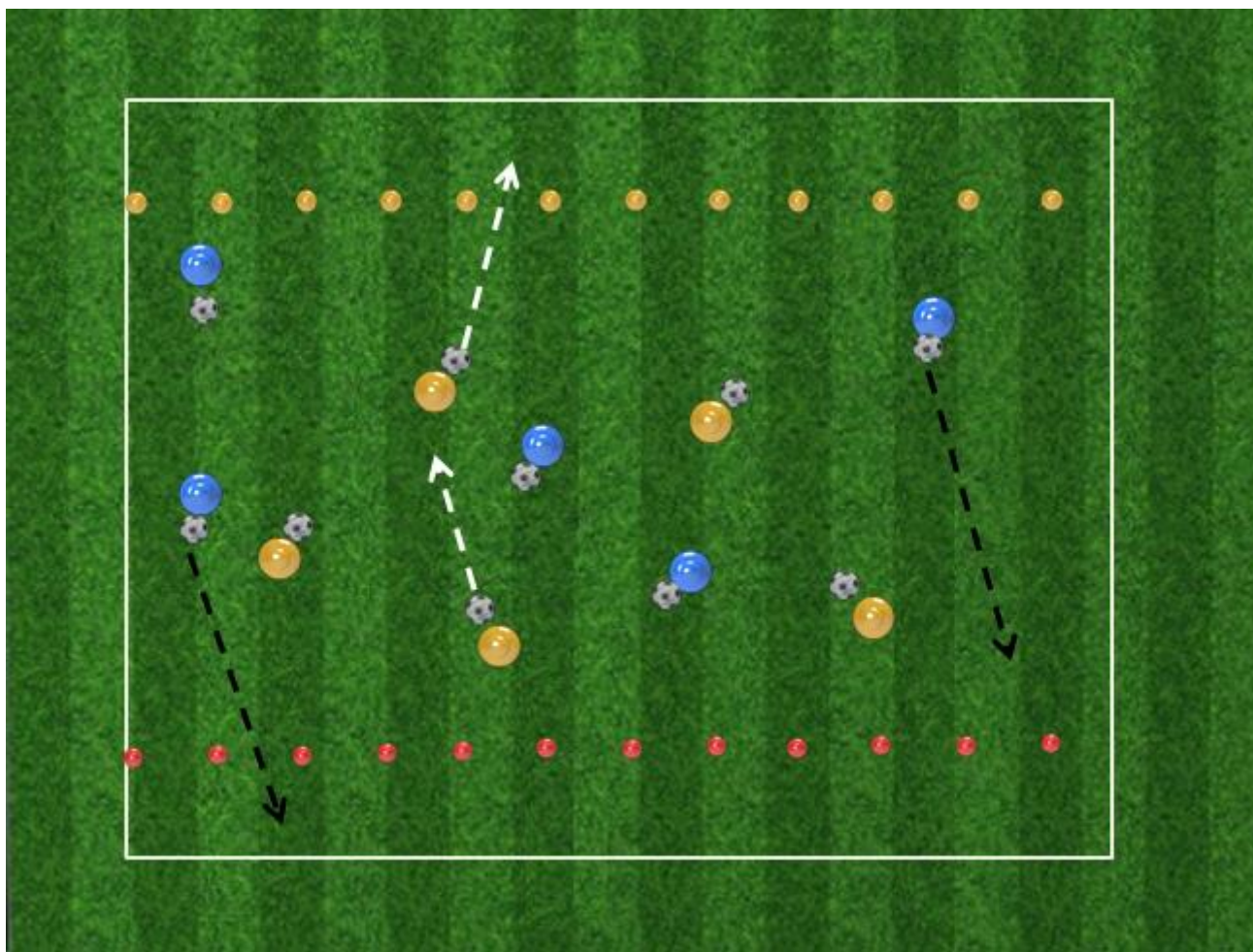
Game that allows players to go to goal unopposed, no defender

Begin with 1v0 and progress to 2v0. Not having a defender will guarantee success dribbling to goal. Adding a second player for 2v0 will encourage teamwork.

Organize players into small groups to minimize wait times

End Zone

Practice activity for the U6 and U8 age groups that introduces game concepts and age appropriate tactics through the various progressions



U6-U8 End Zone

Fun game-like activity for 3-8 year olds

Organization:

- Set up end zones using cones on each end line of the field
- Every player with a ball (depending on variation)

How to Play:

- Each team starts on a designated end line. On the coach's signal, dribble the ball to opposite "end zone" and stop your ball beyond the cones within the appropriate end zone.

Progression

- All players on one team have balls, the other team are sharks/defenders
- All players on both teams have ball, coaches are sharks
- Limit amount of balls to encourage teamwork and passing.

Coaching Notes

- Encourage players to look in front of them while dribbling
- Be creative when explaining the activity

Mad House

Activity that replicates a real game. It involves fundamental skills and game concepts, all in a fun, fast paced practice activity. The progression, simple to complex, allows players to work on age appropriate concepts – dribbling, 1v1s, teamwork, avoiding pressure and applying pressure.



Mad House

Fun game appropriate for all three age groups. Involves fundamental dribbling and 1v1 skills, in addition to the variations that implement game concepts. Objective is to score goals!

Organization:

- Separate group into 2 teams with 2 goals
- Field size should be appropriate to the number of players

How to Play

- Team game, playing to goal
- Number of different ways to play

Variations/Progressions

- Every player on both teams with a ball. Every player tries to score a goal
- One team starts with the balls, the other team are defenders
- Every player has a ball, coaches are the sharks
- Limit the amount of balls to encourage team work.

Coaching notes:

- Encourage players that lose their ball to steal back as quickly as they can
- When dribbling, head is up to look at the field

U6 & U8 – 4v4

4v4 is the recommended (US Soccer) number of players during league games, with a smaller field size to enable maximum involvement. At this age, players will still attract towards the ball whether their team is attacking or defending.

Offense- Teach shape, not positions

Defense- Stay organized/balanced and always pressure the ball.



4v4 Game U6 & U8

Teach shape, not positions

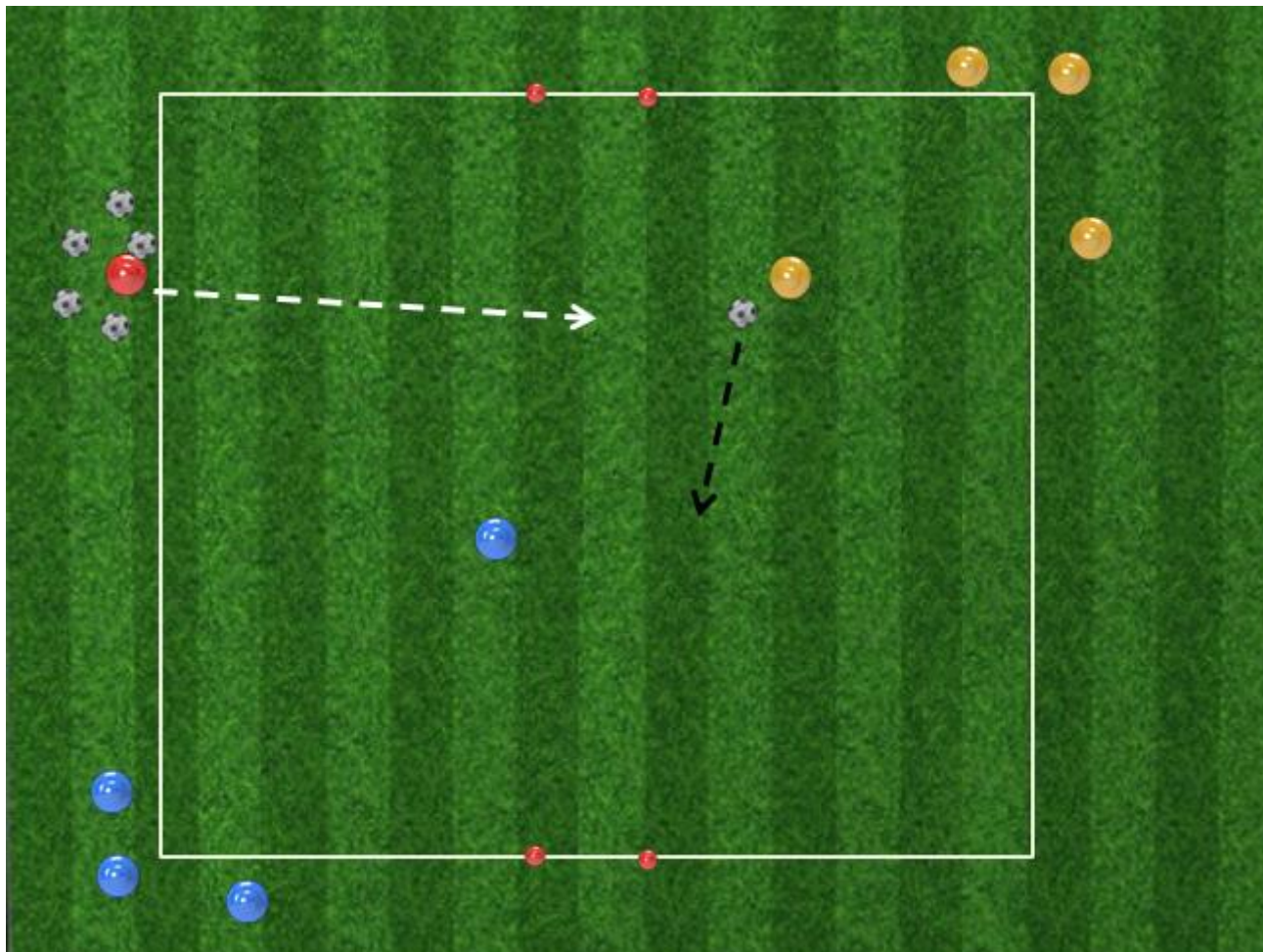
Attacking/Offense- Diamond shape

Defending- Pressure & balance, win the ball back.

Allow the game to be the teacher, the players learn through playing the game

U8 1v1

Developing a player's 1v1 ability at a young age builds confidence. 1v1 activities should be part of every team/group practice. Implementing this in practice will prepare your players for game situations, where 1v1's happen frequently for all players.



1v1 Activity- U8

Very important component in player development

Organization

- Separate groups into 2 teams, starting on opposite sides of the field
- 10x10 or 15x15 yard grid
- 2 goals

How to Play

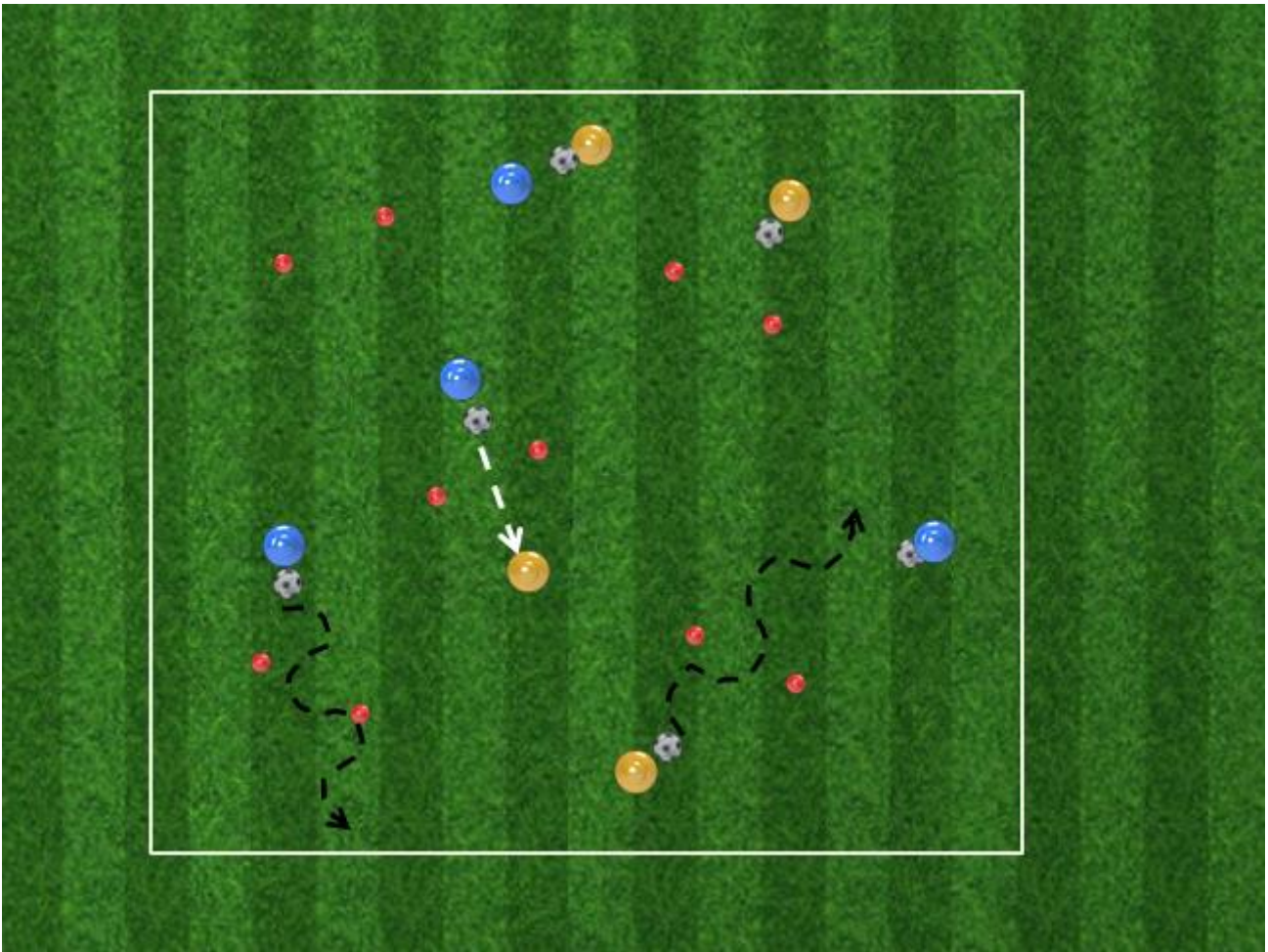
- Balls are served by coach, alternating which team starts as the attacker
- Play to goal
- Attacking player tries to use moves to beat a defender

Coaching notes

- Always use 2 goals for transitional play
- Encourage players to be creative with the ball and have confidence to beat the defender
- If you lose the ball try and win it back straight away
- Defensively, apply pressure, stay in front of the ball, force the attacker wide

U8 Gates

U8 practice activity that works on age appropriate skills and tactics. Developing 1v1 ability at a young age is very important.



Gate Games

U8 activity with multiple progressions that involve fundamental skills and SSG

Organization

- Set up area appropriate to the number of players
- Set up gates (cone goals) randomly around your field
- Number of balls depends upon variation/progression

How to play

- Perform different skills at each gate
- Dribble or pass through the gates

Progressions

- Dribbling
- Passing and receiving
- 1v1's
- Team (3v3, 4v4)

Coaching notes

- Focus on different dribbling patterns and moves, progress to basic passing and receiving
- 1v1 is a critical part of the game. Encourage players to take on defenders and be creative
- In the 3v3/4v4, given the multiple goals players must think and react quickly

Description

3-5 Year olds. Topic: Dribbling

Warmup

Dribbling Maze

Fun dribbling game that gives players freedom to dribble in different directions. The cones and other players make everyone think about which way they will dribble and change direction.

Organization:

Every player with a ball. Set up cones randomly around the field.

How to Play: It's a soccer maze! Explain the game in a fun way describing a maze.

Players dribble in any direction trying to avoid the cones and other players. Each time someone's ball or foot touches a cone, have them do something fun to re-join the game (touch the sky, jumping jack, toe taps, place ball on head).

Coaching points:

Dribble with heads up, keep the ball close to feet

Variations: Running game-Add defenders-Races



Fun Game

Cross the Ocean

Dribbling game that is similar to "Fishy Fishy cross my Ocean" with the difference being this is a non-stop game from one beach to the other (end line to end line).

Organization:

Every player has a ball. Set up 2 beaches (end lines)

How to play:

Describe the game to the players in an imaginative way!

Players dribble across the ocean. The objective is to get to as many beaches as possible. Each time a player gets to a beach they score one point.

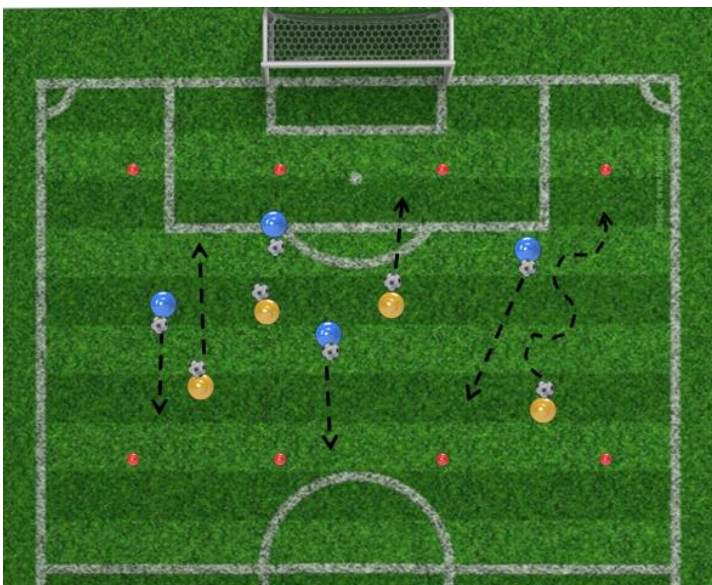
Coaching points:

Keep control of the ball while dribbling

Try to be the fastest fish!

Variations:

With the ball, without the ball, add sharks



U6 Kicking/Passing Session

Category: Technical Ball Control

Difficulty: Beginner

Description

First stages for players to learn how to kick properly, which prepares them for passing and shooting

Bulldozers and Builders

Fun passing/kicking game

A great way to explain the game is Bob the Builder (TV Show)

Organization:

Set up tall cones randomly on your field, have players help with set up. Every bulldozer needs a ball. The builders do not need a ball.

How to Play:

The objective for the bulldozers is to knock down as many cones as they can by kicking their ball into the cones. The builders' job is to stand the cones back up.

Select 2 or 3 builders for each round. Make sure every player has the opportunity to be both builder and bulldozer.

Coaching Points:

Keep the ball under control at all times.

Use instep when striking the ball.



Clean the Yard

Fun team passing/kicking game.

Organization:

Split your field in half with a line of cones.

Make 2 teams. Use all the soccer balls you have available.

How to play:

Explain the field as your backyard and you have to keep it clean of soccer balls.

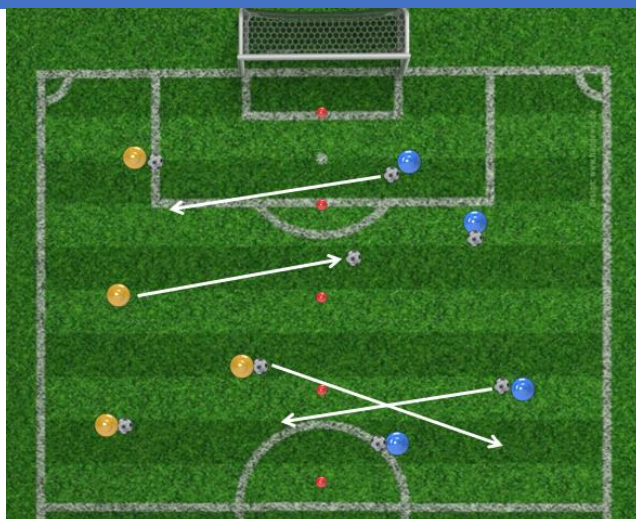
Objective is to kick soccer balls into the opposing teams' yard.

Fast paced game, any time a ball comes on to your side kick it back to the other side.

Coaching points:

Use proper technique, point toes to the ground and hit with laces or use your instep.

Be active, look for soccer balls to kick, work together with your team mates.



Mad House

Fun game that involves scoring goals. Implements game-like situations.

There are a number of different variations that can be used in this activity.

Organization: Separate group into 2 teams. Set up two goals.

How to Play: This is a team game, with a number of different variations.

Game starts with both teams on their end line, all with their own ball. On the coach's signal, all players dribble to the opposite end and score.

Variations/Progressions: Yellow team has soccer balls and blue team do not (attack vs defense)

Limit the amount of soccer balls to encourage team work/passing.

Coaching points: Keep the ball close to your feet, under control at all times. If you lose the ball, try to win it back quickly. When shooting, try to use your laces, encourage proper technique.



Description

Fun themed practice activities based on video games

U6- Super Mario Bros.

Fun dribbling game. Similar to “Dribbling Maze”.

Organization:

Set up cones (the mushrooms) randomly around your field. Every player has a ball.

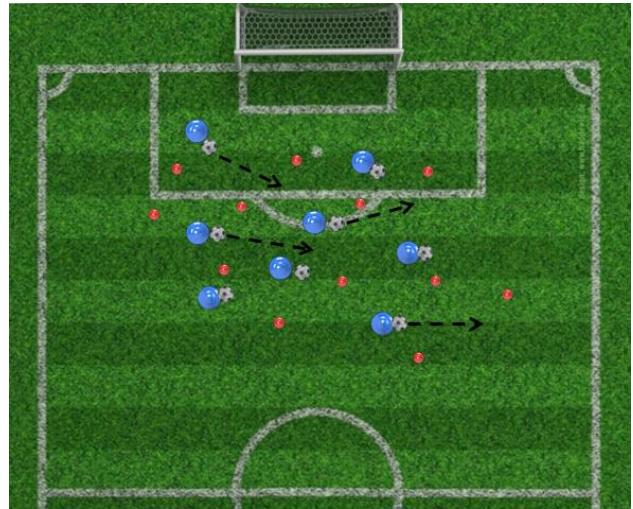
How to Play:

Have your players pick a Mario Bros Character- Mario, Luigi, Yoshi, Princess, Toad Etc...

Players will then dribble from one side to the other trying to avoid the mushrooms. If a player hits a mushroom, they must do 2 toe taps and continue playing.

This game can be played with (dribbling) or without (running) a ball. If you play the game without a ball players must do 2 jumping jacks if they hit a mushroom.

Add Bowser as a villain to the game to try and steal soccer balls.



U8 – Pacman

Fun game involving dribbling and passing, with some competition!

Organization:

Set up cones (pac-dots or pac-cones) around your field.

Ghosts have a soccer ball, pacmen do not have a ball.

How to Play:

Pacmen are trying to pick up all the cones. The ghosts are dribbling around and trying to catch the pacmen by passing their soccer ball with their instep and hitting a pacman below the knee. If a pacman gets hit they must return their collected cones to coach who redistributes the cones around the field. The pacman then collects a ball and becomes a ghost.

Round ends on coach's signal or when all the cones are collected. Allow everyone to have a turn at all roles.



Coaches Notes

- Be organized
- Give simple directions
- Join in the game with your players. They like trying to beat the coach.
- Both activities are appropriate for both age groups. Kindergarten and 1st and 2nd grade.
- Use creative game names that your players can relate to, this is very important to engage players in your practice and for everyone to have fun. Instead of players thinking they are dribbling a ball they are learning through 'adventure soccer' by imagining they are in a video game.
- Be animated when explaining games, have fun!



U8 Session

Category: Technical: Ball Control

Difficulty: Beginner

Description

U8 (6-7 year olds) Practice Plan

Warm Up

Cross the Ocean

Great warm up for a U8 group. Players get the opportunity to dribble freely while working on attacking moves, turns, and beating defenders.

Organization:

Lines of cones set up 15-20 yards apart (which makes the 2 beaches for the ocean) every player has a ball.

How to Play:

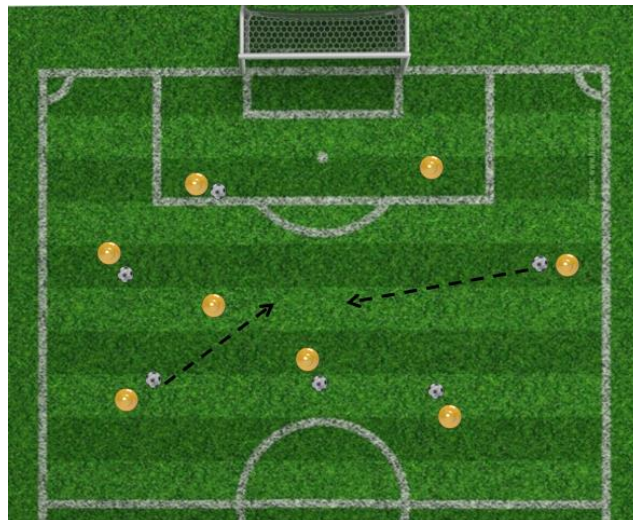
Players dribble from one end line to the other. Each time a player reaches a beach they score a point. Add in different moves and dribbling patterns. Perform a turn each time you reach an end line. Add defenders to make the warm up more game like.

Coaching Points:

Dribble with control

Perform moves and turns at your own pace.

Dribble away from pressure.



Skill Development

Free dribble to cones

Simple activity that players of all abilities can understand.

Organization:

Set cones randomly in your space, every player has a ball.

How to Play:

Players dribble freely and perform moves or dribbling patterns at each cone: toe taps, tick tocks, turns, attacking moves. This activity can be turned into dribbling races and running races.

Progression:

Freeze tag game (freeze monsters): Defenders are added as the Freeze Monsters. Players must dribble to a cone without being tagged. If they are tagged, they must do whatever coach assigns.

Coaching Points:

Keep the ball close to feet, dribble with head up.

Use different parts of both feet when dribbling.



Final Game

1v1 to Goal

Fun way to end practice! Players get to use the dribbling skills they worked on all session in a fun 1v1 game to goal.

Organization:

Attacking players and defenders start at opposite sides.

How to Play:

Coach serves a ball into play and acts as a goalkeeper. Players play 1v1 to goal, after a few rounds attackers and defenders switch roles.

Coaching Points:

Use attacking moves that we learned

Create space and take a shot on goal

Defenders- Keep the attacker in front of you.



U8 Passing Session

Category: Technical: Passing and Receiving

Difficulty: Beginner

Description

Topic: Passing- U8

Warm Up

Passing Gates

Simple drill to improve passing and teamwork!

Organization:

Split team into two groups. All players pair up with a player in the opposite group. One ball per pair. Set up gates (coned goals) around your field.

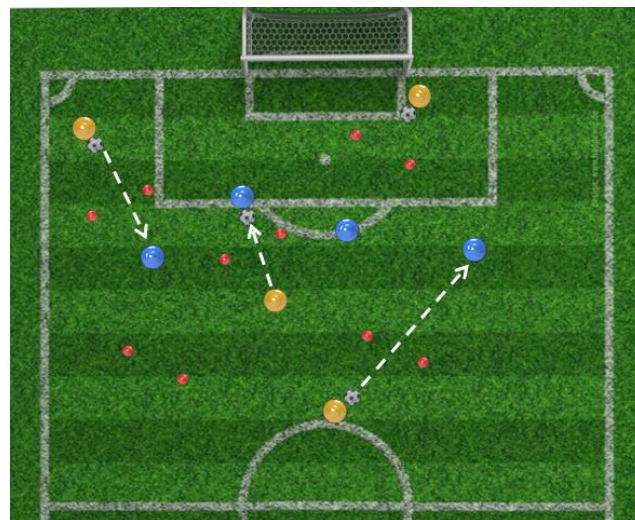
How to Play:

Game starts with every yellow player having a ball. The blue player runs to a gate, yellow player follows. Yellow passes to blue in between the gates. On the release, yellow runs to a new gate, game continues.

Coaching Points:

Proper technique of passing- Plant foot next to the ball pointing the toes of your standing foot towards the target. Pass with the instep and follow through.

Variations: Pass ball twice at each gate, receive a pass with the same foot, receive across your body and pass with the opposite foot.



Skill Development

Who is Open

Passing and moving drill.

Organization:

Split team into two groups, one ball per group.

How to Play:

Your team is passing and moving within the grid. Player with the ball needs to pass to the closest available player. If you do not have a ball your job is to move to free space on the field to receive a pass. After completing a pass, continue to move in order to receive the ball back.

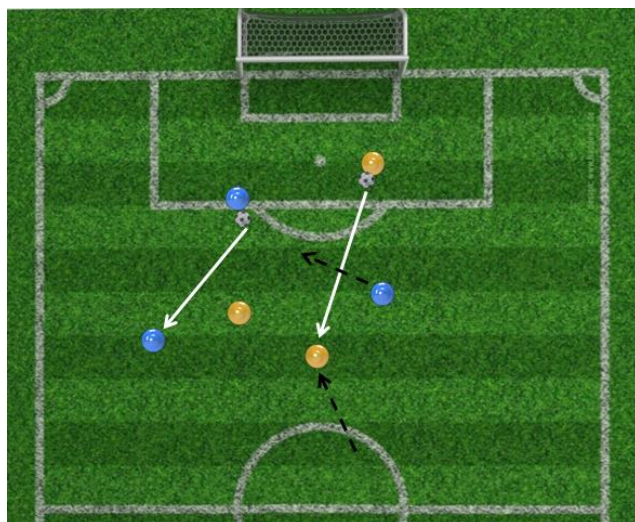
Coaching Points:

Complete passes to your team mates' feet.

Have proper body shape when receiving a pass.

Use both your left and right foot when passing.

Move with a purpose to free space.



Final Game

2v1

A great way to end practice in a game like situation that encourages passing.

Organization:

Divide teams into 2 groups. Coach serves a ball to the attacking team. Attackers start up top and defenders start near the goal.

How to Play:

Once a ball is played onto the field 2 attackers and 1 defender play a 2v1 to goal, this is a rapid fire continuous game. Once a goal is scored or the ball goes out, the next game begins.

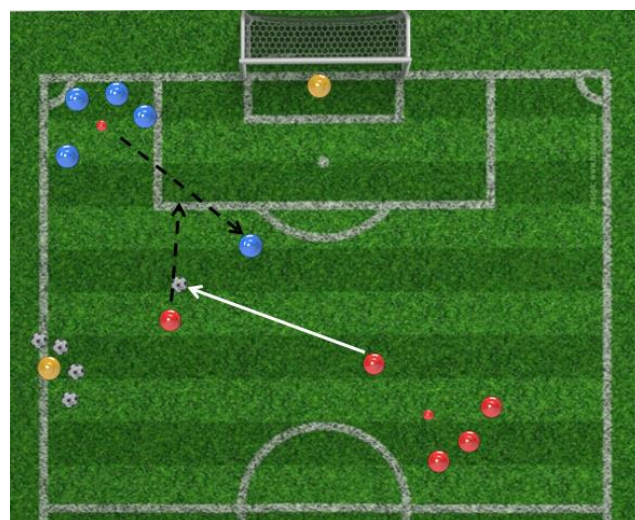
Coaching Points:

Complete accurate passes

Receive the ball effectively under pressure

Move to space

Penetrate through dribbling or passing



U8 SSGs

Category: Small Sided Games

Difficulty: Beginner

Description

Small Sided Games for U8 Players

Rapid Fire

Rapid Fire

Fun Fast-Paced game, can be played as 1v1, 2v2, 3v3 etc...

Organization:

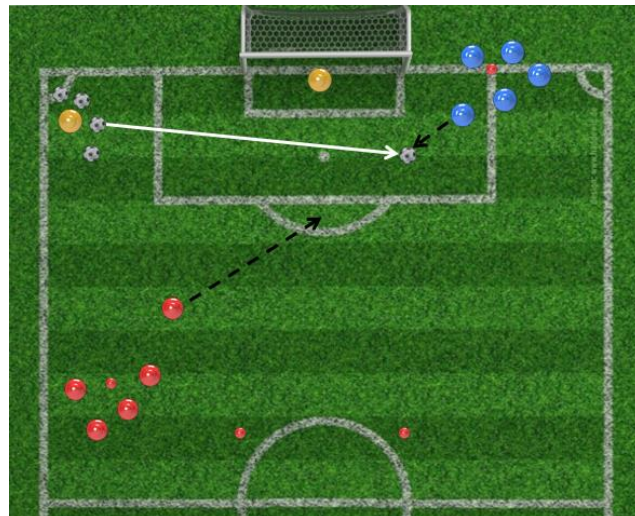
Separate the group into two teams. Set up Diagonally from each other on the end lines. All soccer balls are on the side line with coach.

How to Play:

Start with 1v1, progress to more numbers to encourage small group play.

Coaching Points:

1v1: Attacking player, go straight to goal, defensive player must close down/pressure ball straight away. Force the attacker away from the goal. 2v1: Attacking players have the option to pass or dribble, the defender should force the player with the ball to make a decision. Apply pressure and force mistakes. 2v2: Attackers need to support each other, defenders must stay organized.



Team Gates

Team gates

Game with multiple goals set up throughout the field. Forces all players to always be involved in the play, due to having many goals set up on different parts of the field.

Organization:

Separate group into two teams. One ball (progress to two balls)

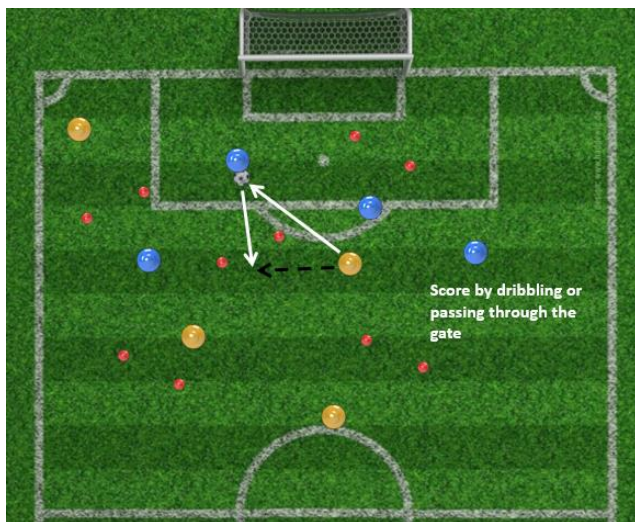
How to Play:

Can be played with any number of players, should be even numbers on each team.

1v1, 2v2, 3v3, goals are scored by dribbling or passing through the gate. One goal for dribbling through, two goals for passing through.

Coaching Points:

Teamwork, field awareness and effort.



Four Goal Game

Four Goal Game

A game in which both teams are able to score on two or more goals.

Organization:

Split group into two teams, set up field as shown.

How to Play:

Tall red cones set up: goals on opposite sides of end line to encourage spatial awareness and encourage better basic team shape both offensively and defensively.

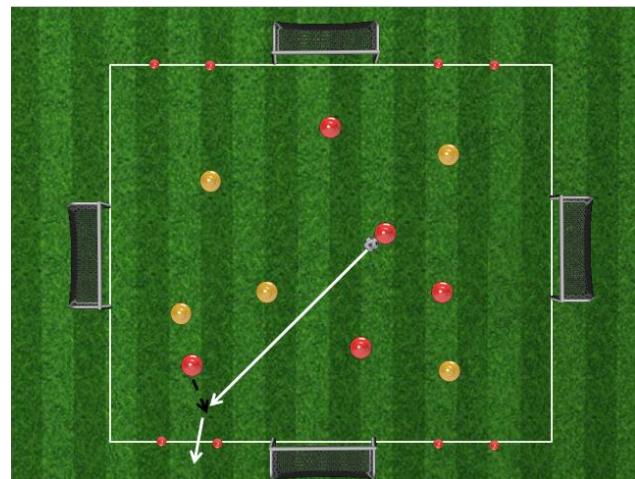
Big goal set up: goal set up on each side of the field, both teams can score on either goal.

Coaching Points:

The different variations help achieve different results.

Give coaching points during the flow of the game.

The game is the greatest teacher; let the kids play and learn on their own.





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