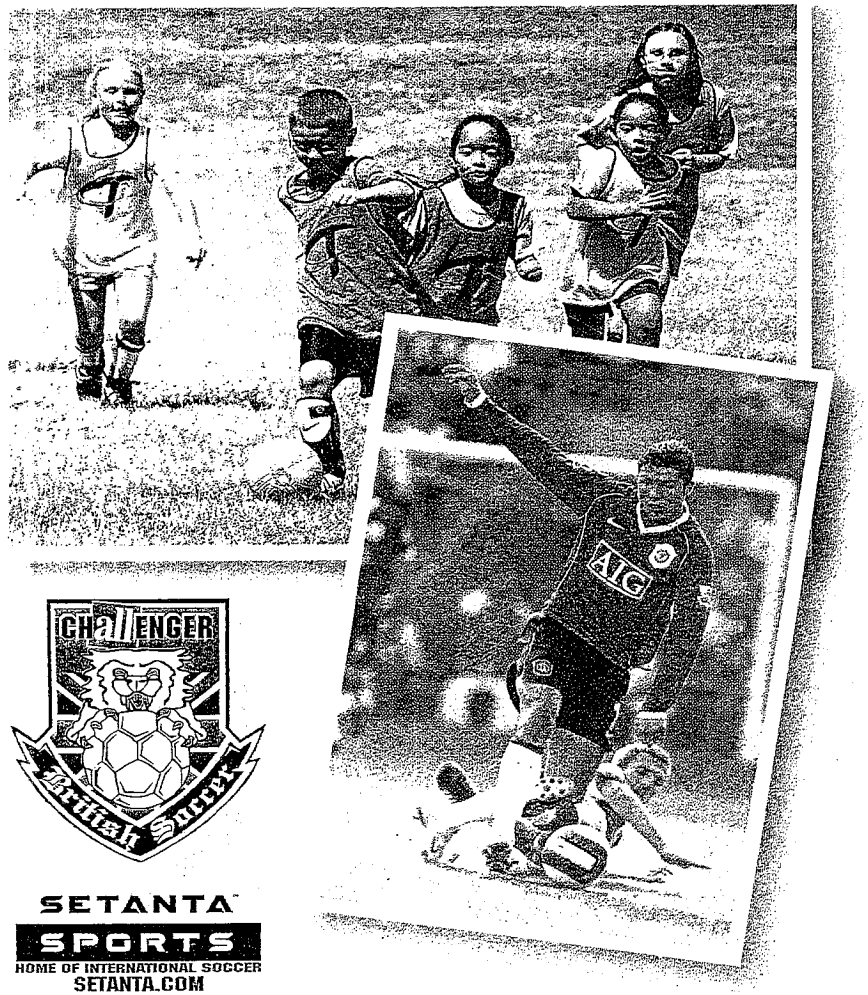
Challenger Sports

Youth Soccer Coaching Handbook



SETANTA SPORTS
HOME OF INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
SETANTA.COM

Coaching tips, skill development activities and fun games for players ages 4-6 years old, plus a selection of passing, shooting and dribbling practice sessions for under 8-14 year old teams

Introduction..... 3

Section One - Ages 4-6 years old

Coaching Young Players..... 4
Warm Up - Number Runaround..... 5
Warm Up - Pairs Tag..... 6
Warm Up - Circle Chase..... 7
Ball Familiarity - Ball Ballistics..... 8
Ball Familiarity - Freeze Dribble..... 9
Ball Familiarity - Change Balls..... 10
Ball Familiarity - Funny Bones..... 11
Fun Games - Through the gates..... 12
Fun Games - Monster Turnaround..... 13
Fun Games - Shadow Dribble..... 14
Fun Games - Clean Your Room..... 15
Fun Games - Stuck in the Mud..... 16
Fun Games - King of the Jungle..... 17
Fun Games - The Numbers Game..... 18
Under 6 Small Sided Games..... 19
Under 6 Team Shape..... 20

Section Two - Under 8-14 Teams

Coaching U8-14 Players..... 21
Practice Progression..... 22
Unopposed Passing - Pairs Passing..... 23
Unopposed Passing - Pass & Move..... 24
Opposed Passing – 6 vs 1..... 25
Passing Game – Combination game..... 26
Unopposed Lofted Passing - Long Passing..... 27
Unopposed Lofted Passing - Short, Short Long..... 28
Opposed Lofted Passing - End to End..... 29
Lofted Passing Game - 6 vs 6 to Keepers..... 30

Section Two - Under 8-14 Teams

Unopposed Shooting - 2 Way Shooting..... 31
Opposed Shooting - Shoot Out..... 32
Opposed Shooting - 4 Goal Shooting..... 33
Shooting Game - 2 Goal Game..... 34

Unopposed Dribbling - Dribble Stop Dribble..... 35
Opposed Dribbling – One v One Dribble..... 36
Opposed Dribbling – 4 v 4 to end line..... 37
Dribbling Game – Counter Attack Game..... 38

Challenger Coaching Materials..... 39
Virtual Soccer Skills DVD 40

© 2008 Challenger Sports, 8263 Flint, Lenexa, KS 66214
Any unauthorized duplication of this coaching booklet is strictly prohibited.

The booklet is designed to help the many volunteer youth soccer coaches working with Challenger's partner soccer organizations throughout the USA and Canada.

We know that one of the biggest challenges for youth coaches is to come up with new practices and games to play with your players every week. Players can quickly become bored if they are not challenged or are forced to repeat mundane drills week after week.

Most soccer organizations we work with have large numbers of first time coaches in their programs for 4-6 and 7-12 year olds. In this booklet we have included material primarily for these coaches, however as with most soccer practices, the activities can be adapted for players of all ages and abilities.

Within each age group the coach will be faced with significantly differing levels of intellectual, emotional and physical development within the age group. The coach will be required to tailor the practices to suit both the overall ability level *of* the group and also to the different levels *within* the group - this is no small task and one which even the most seasoned coaches find challenging.

The first section of the booklet features information, tips and a number of fun games and practices for players ages 4 - 6.

The second section contains technical practices and small sided games that can be used by coaches of U8-U14 Teams.

These games and practices are a small sample of Challenger's vast coaching library. Please visit our on line shop www.challengersports.com to check out the full range of Challenger coaching books and DVD's.

Practice sessions for 4- 6 year olds should run for no more than one hour. It is important for coaches to make sure that the parents understand what you are trying to accomplish, how you will be going about it, and how much help and support you will need. An assistant coach is invaluable at this age group and even parents with zero soccer knowledge can be of great help.

Warm up

The coach can use a combination of fun playground games to get the children warmed up. These warm up activities will involve running, chasing, jumping and will help the coach get the group settled down and ready to listen to instructions.

Ball Familiarity

The players should be provided with an opportunity to become familiar with the ball without having to worry about specific directions, game rules or opponents.

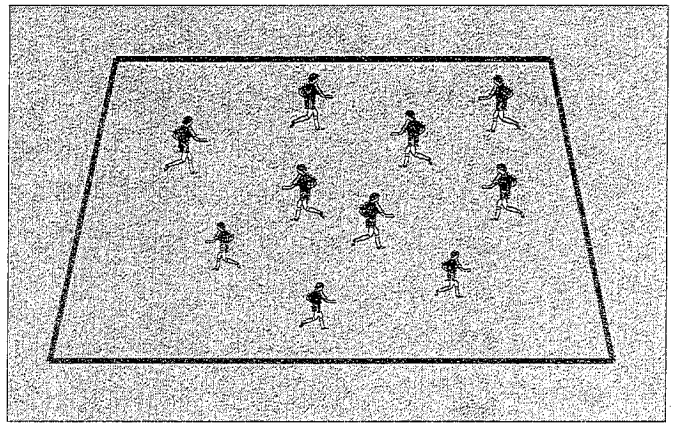
Fun Games

As the players become more comfortable with the ball, the coach can create games that allow the players to practice fundamental techniques within a fun and often competitive setting.

Small Sided Games

The coach should conclude each practice by playing a small sided game using the appropriate number of players, field size and rules that will be used throughout the season.

Number Runaround



Organization:

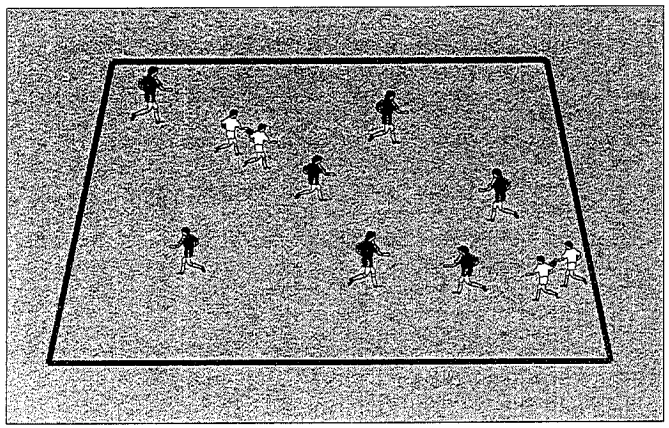
All of the players run around the inside of a 20yd x 20yd grid, weaving in and out of each other. The players can be encouraged to make sharp turns, skip, spin, and change pace as they run.

The coach will call out a number and the players must immediately get into groups of that number. Any player left outside of the correct numbered groups loses a life.

Coach Notes:

Players need to react quickly and communicate with each other.
Players can try to get players from another group to join theirs.
The coach can add math problems such as “6 divided by two”.

Pairs Tag

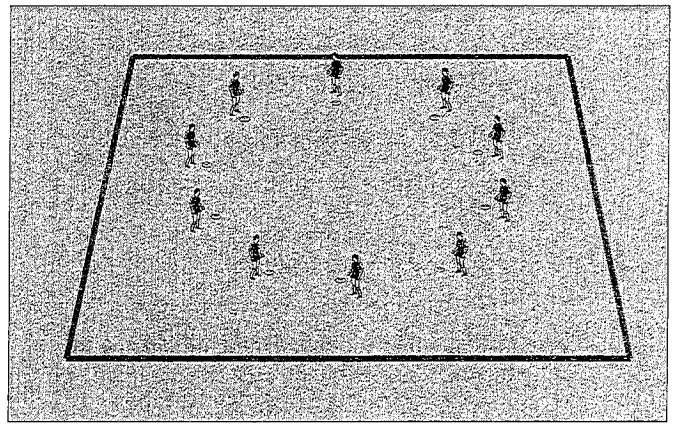


Organization:
Two sets of two players are connected by each holding on to the end of a pinnie. They cannot let go of the pinnie until the game is over. The other players all round the inside of a 20yd x 20yd grid.

The two sets of pairs have to chase after the other players and tag them. Once tagged the players run over and stand by the coach until all of the remaining players have been tagged.

Coach Notes:
The players holding the pinnie need to communicate with each other and determine which direction they are going to run in.
The two sets of pairs can communicate between each other and work as a team to corner the players they are chasing.

Circle Chase

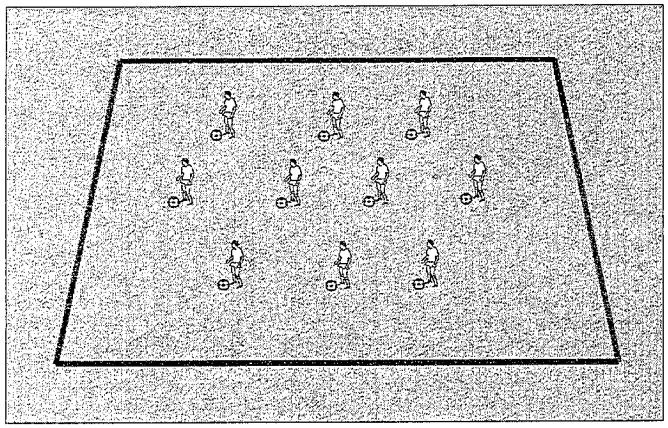


Organization:
The players stand next to a cone on the perimeter of a large circle. The coach walks round the circle and gives each player a number - either one or two. (Make sure after numbering that the players know which one they are!)

The number one players sit down and on the coaches command the number two players all run one lap of the circle and try to catch up with the player ahead of them. The groups then switch places.

Coach Notes:
For variation, try having the players weave in and out of the cones; run backwards; hop etc.

Ball Ballistics

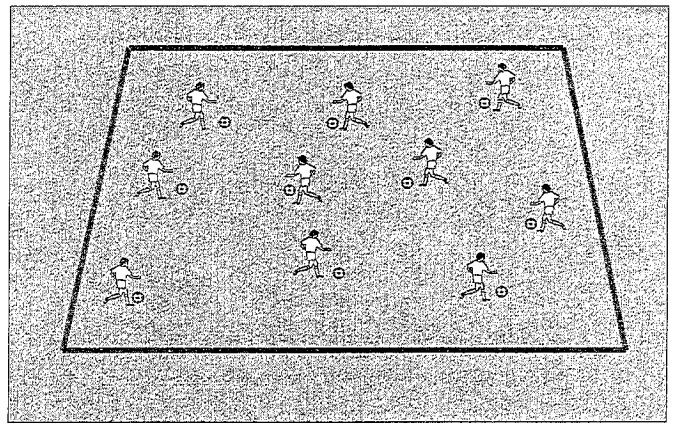


Organization:
Each player stands with a ball at their feet. The coach stands in front and demonstrates each movement that he wants the players to copy.

1. Put one foot on the ball and roll it backwards and forwards with the sole of the foot. Also try with the weaker foot.
2. Place the ball between the inside of both feet and try to pass the ball back and forth between each foot.
3. Place one foot along side the ball and the other on top of the ball. Quickly change the standing foot and the foot on the ball.

Coach Notes: You can create a number of basic ball ballistic activities that allow the players to become comfortable using various surfaces of the feet.

Freeze Dribble

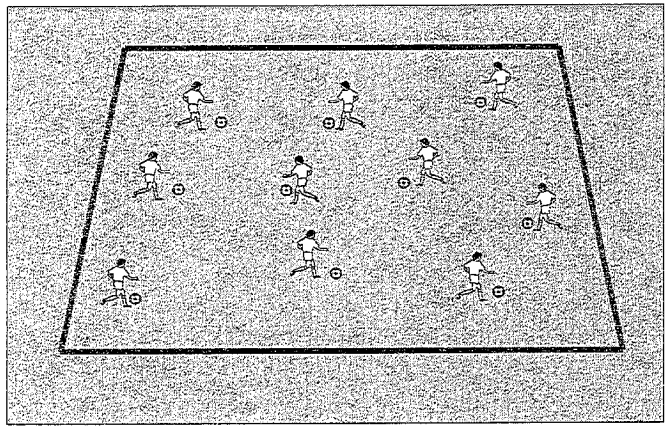


Organization:
Each player moves around the grid with a ball at their feet. They should experiment using the insides, outsides, bottom and top of the feet while dribbling.

The coach will call out "Freeze" and the players must come to a complete stop putting one foot on top of the ball. Anyone who moves loses a life. The coach can add other commands such as fast, slow, towards me, away from me, etc .

Coach Notes:
Children can imitate cars, trucks, boats and can make the sounds of their vehicle as they drive around the grid. They can also stop to refuel by doing toe taps on the ball.

Change Balls

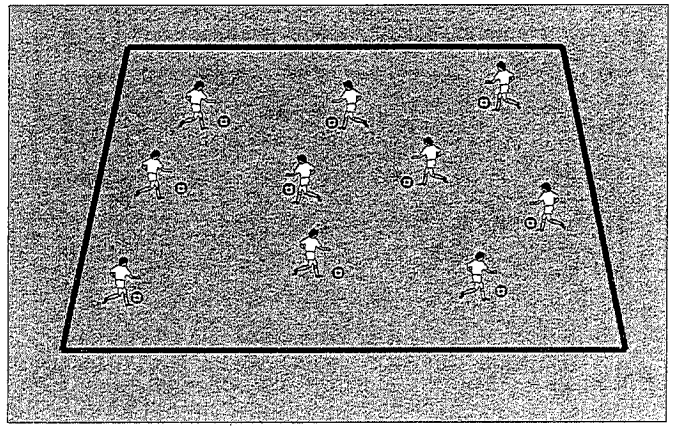


Organization:
Each player moves around the grid with a ball at their feet.
The coach gives instructions regarding how he wants the players to dribble, "slow", "fast", "twisty", "straight" etc. The coach then calls out "Change" and the players must leave their ball and go and find another one and immediately start dribbling. The last one to find a ball loses a life.

The coach can then repeat the game and take one ball away as the players change. The player who does not find a ball loses a life.

Coach Notes:
The players should be encouraged to look up frequently between touches as they dribble the balls around.

Funny Bones



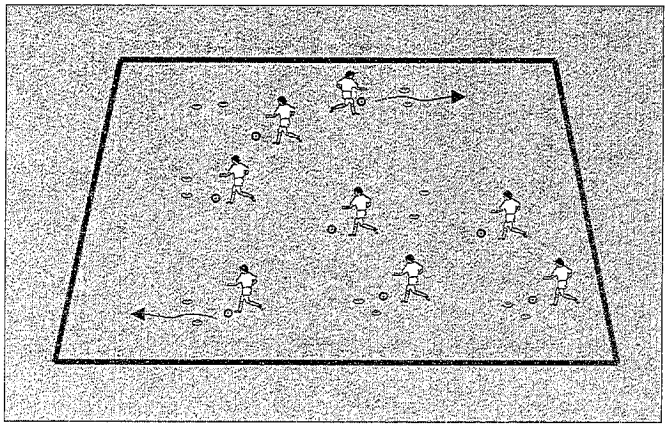
Organization:
Each player moves around the grid with a ball at their feet.
The coach gives instructions regarding how he wants the players to dribble, "slow", "fast", "twisty", "straight" etc.

The coach then calls out a specific part of the body such as "Elbow" or "Knee" and the players must come to a complete stop and put that part of their body on the ball.

Young players can be encouraged to dribble like certain animals and can make the relevant noises as they move around the grid.

Coach Notes:
These types of games are a great help in developing balance and coordination in addition to dribbling skills.

Through the Gates

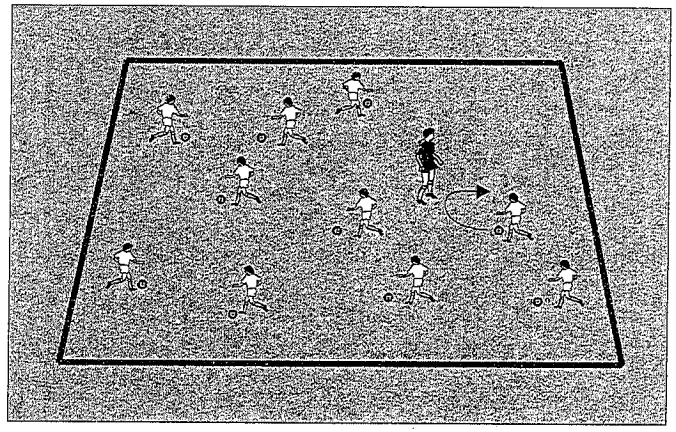


Organization:
Each player has a ball in a 20yd x 20yd grid. Cones are placed around the grid in pairs making gates approximately 2 yards wide.

The players attempt to dribble through as many gates as possible in one minute. As the older age groups get used to playing this game, the coach can specify that they must use a specific foot or must pass the ball through the gate with the inside of the their foot.

Coach Notes:
The players should be encouraged to take lots of soft touches so that the ball remains close to them and must look up frequently between touches as they dribble.

Monster Turnaround

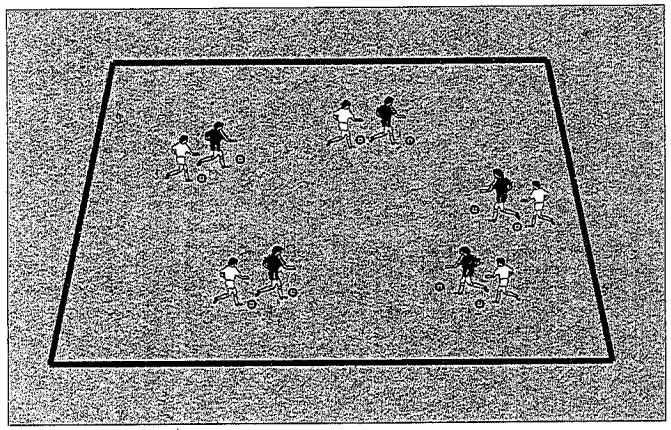


Organization:
Each player dribbles a ball throughout a 20yd x 20yd grid. Players experiment by dribbling with the inside and outside of their foot and when the coach calls "Turn" they practice quickly turning around.

After a few practice runs, the coach enters the grid and starts to chase after the players, roaring like a monster as he approaches each one. If the coach runs towards the player, they must turn quickly and dribble away in the opposite direction.

Coach Notes:
The players should be encouraged to use the inside of their lead foot to cut the ball back away from the coach as they turn.

Shadow Dribble

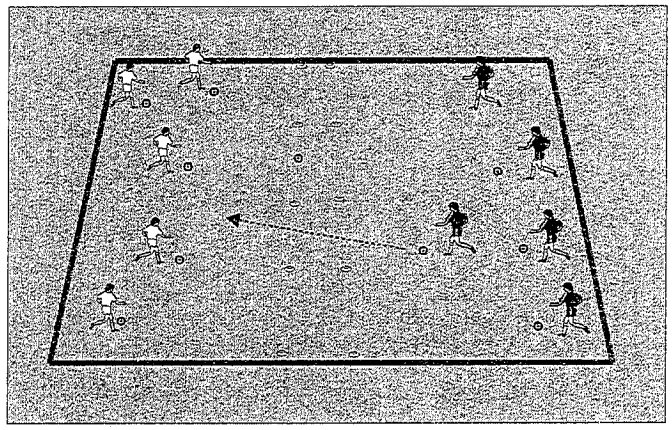


Organization:
The players are divided up into pairs and are numbered one and two. The number one players will start as the leaders and dribble their ball anywhere throughout the grid. The number two player must follow them, dribbling their own ball and must copy the moves of number one.

After 30 seconds the players change roles. After a couple of runs, change the pairings.

Coach Notes:
The players should be encouraged to experiment by dribbling with different parts of the feet and by twisting and turning to try and lose their shadow.

Clean Your Room

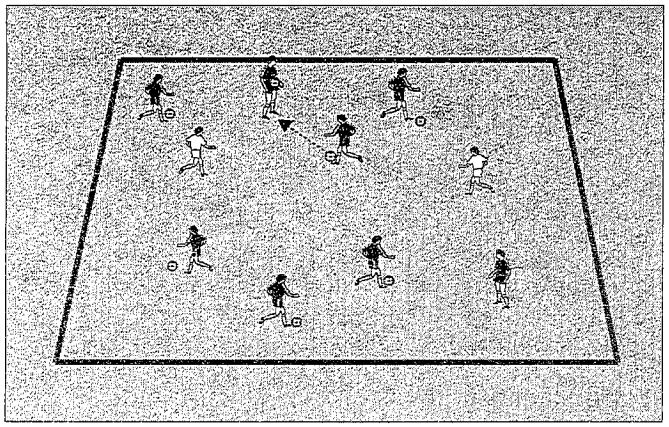


Organization:
The players are divided into two groups and each player has a ball. The two groups stand at either end of a 20yd x 25yd grid, there is a 3 yard "no go" zone marked down the middle of the grid with cones.

The object of the games is to kick as many balls as possible into the opposite half of the grid. As soon as the opponents kick a ball into one half, the other team can kick it straight back. No one can touch balls that end up in the "no go" zone.

Coach Notes:
You should initially allow the children to kick the ball however they wish so that they get the hang of the game. You should then gradually introduce them to striking the ball with the upper part of the foot, keeping the toes pointed.

Stuck In The Mud

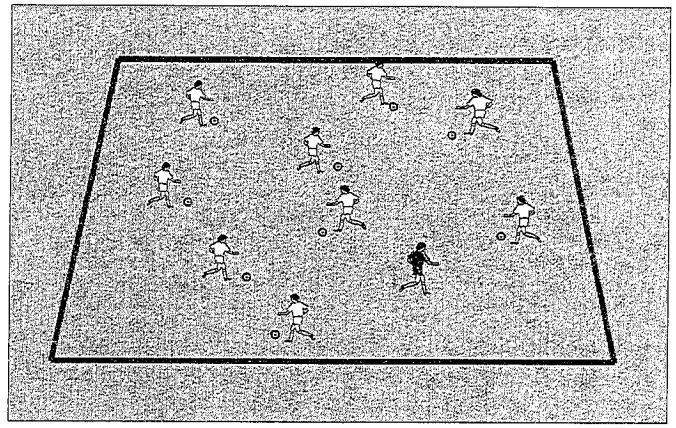


Organization:
The players dribble their ball around the inside of a 20yd x 20yd grid, weaving in and out of each other.

Two players wearing contrasting color pinnies will chase after them and try to tag them. Once they are tagged they are "frozen" and must pick up their ball and stand with their feet apart until a teammate can unfreeze them by passing their own ball through their legs.

Coach Notes:
Players who are tagged should try to call teammates who are in space and not in risk of being tagged them self to come and unfreeze them.

King of the Jungle

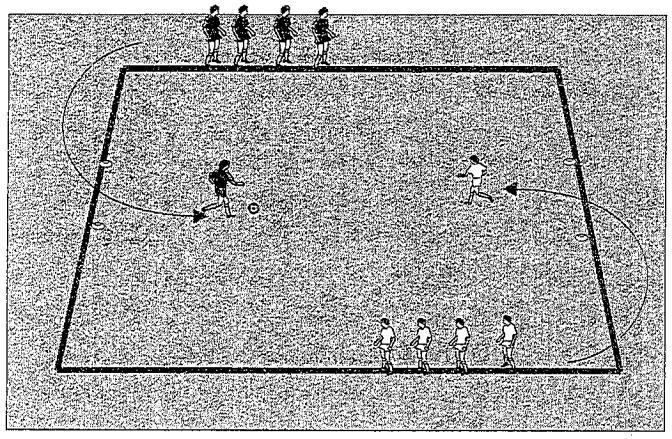


Organization:
The players dribble their ball around the inside of a 25yd x 25yd grid, practicing looking up between every 2nd or 3rd touch.

When the coach shouts "Go" one player wearing a contrasting color pinnie attempts to kick the other player's balls out of the grid. Players should be allowed to renter the game for the first one minute, and then when the coach announces that it is "Knock Out" time, they are eliminated if their ball is kicked out.

Coach Notes:
Encourage the players to keep the ball close by using soft touches and keep looking up so that they are aware of where the "tiger" is at all times.

The Numbers Game



Organization:
Divide the players into two teams and give each player a number. Both teams should have matching numbers. If you have an odd number of players, designate one player to have two numbers. Set up 3 yard goals on either end of a 20yd x 25yd field.

The coach will throw a ball into the middle of the field and call out a number. Those corresponding players run from half way, through the back of their own goal and will attempt to score in the opposite goal.

Coach Notes:
Change the players' numbers every few minutes so that the same players do not compete against each other every time. Progress to calling out more than one number and explain how passing to an open teammate can help their team win the game.

Children of all ages and abilities love to scrimmage and coaches should be aware that a great deal of learning can take place within a structured game without their constant interruption and coaching. Some children don't want to learn. Some don't care about winning. A few have no interest in hard work and one or two can't remember which goal they're attacking. In spite of all of their different agendas they all want to have fun and play a *real* game.

Most youth soccer organizations will play 3 v 3, 4 v 4 and 5 v 5 at Pre K, Kindergarten and First grade. This small sided organization provides more contact with the ball within a space that is more appropriate for the age and size of these youngsters. It also creates more opportunities to learn as the players will be faced with dozens of situations where they must make a decision during every game.

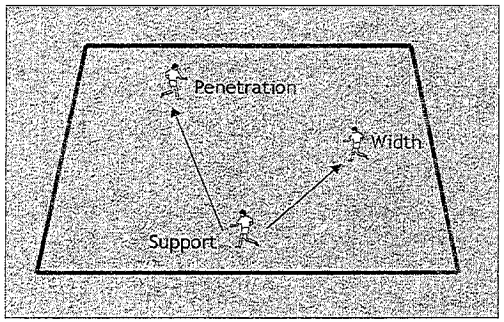
The players will initially run all over the field chasing the one thing that they focus on, the ball. They will have poor spatial awareness and will often not even notice cones and lines that are marking the field. Games will be dominated by the biggest, fastest children and the thought of passing the ball will not willingly enter the child's mind.

Experience teaches the coach when to step in. Over coaching kills the game and ruins the fun and in general, the players should be allowed to learn through discovery, trial and error.

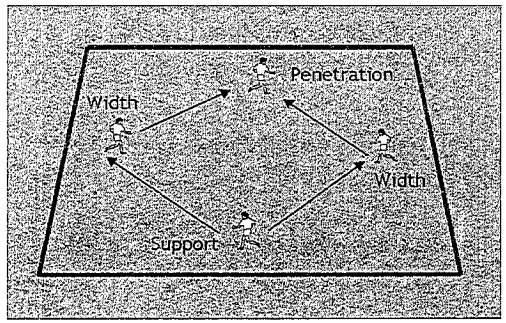
The coach should provide encouragement and basic instruction, however you should avoid mass explanations and constant commentary as it generally will fall on deaf ears. Addressing individual comments to specific children during the break and after the game is much more effective and efficient.

There is however an opportunity for coaches to create a good environment for learning to take place. When the ball goes out of bounds over the end or side lines, the coach can spread the players out in the most appropriate shape for the size of game.

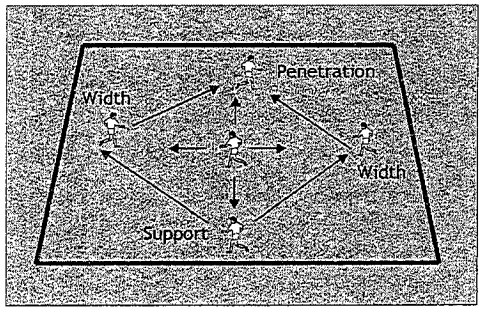
When playing 3 v 3, the most effective team shape is a triangle - the basic building block of soccer.



For 4 v 4 this will be a diamond providing width on both sides.



For 5 v 5 this will be a diamond plus one - support in all directions.



Practice sessions for U8 - U14 players can be increased in length gradually through the age groups up to a maximum of an hour and a half.

Challenger has developed the following progressive program of coaching that allows players to learn, practice and master new techniques before putting them to the test in a competitive setting.

- Warm up
- Unopposed practices
- Gradually add opposition
- Create a game related situation with goals
- Scrimmage

The Warm Up

The goal of the warm up is to get the players physically and mentally prepared for the session ahead. You can begin gradually, both physically and technically, and progressively build up so that the players a raise their heart rate, breathing rate and body temperature.

Unopposed Practice

In this stage, repetition is the key to skill development so set up your practices to enable players to work as individuals, pairs or small groups. The practices should repeatedly use the technique that you are focusing on and the organization of the group should provide the maximum opportunity for each player to be involved. Once the players have a good understanding of the basic technique you can begin adding pressure by restricting space or adding time limitations.

Opposed Practice

The degree of opposition should be appropriate to the age and ability of the group and also to where they are in the learning process of the

particular skill. The coach may even begin with limited opposition by restricting to the movement of the opponents e.g. have them walk, hop, jog, play like crabs etc. Throughout the session the coach should remember what the goal of the practice is and should reduce the level of opposition if the players are not repeatedly executing the desired skill under pressure. Adding pressure too early will destroy any confidence they have and will lead to a lack of motivation and achievement.

Game Related Stage

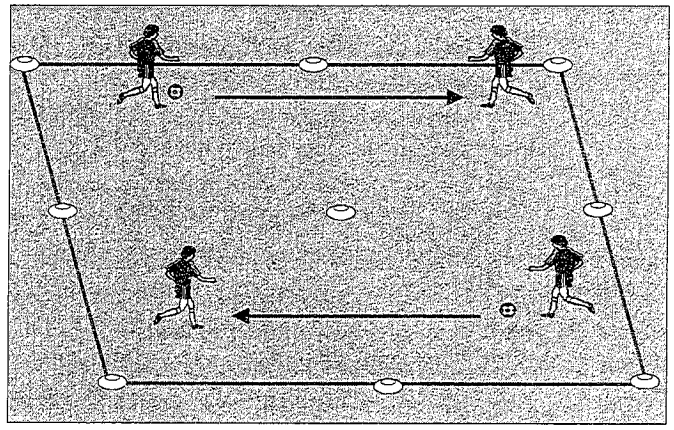
Having performed the skill under pressure, the players should then be required to do the same in competitive game like conditions. The game related practice should have specific direction towards goals or targets, should involve two teams (not necessarily equal) and should place the players in situations where they are forced to make game like decisions and react both offensively and defensively. The coach should place restrictions on the practice that continue to allow successful repetition of the skill.

Game or Scrimmage

Where possible, use the appropriate number of players per team, assign goalkeepers and set players in positions as they would be in a normal league game. Players now should be encouraged to make decisions about how, where and when they execute the specific skill on the field. Try not to break the flow of the game by repeatedly stopping it to correct bad technique or incorrect decision making.

The following section contains a number of unopposed and opposed practices for passing, shooting & dribbling, along with some ideas for small sided games. The practices contain notes on how to progress beyond the basic set up and will allow you to use many of the same practices with players throughout the age range.

Pairs Passing



Organization:

Pair up the players and practice passing the ball across a 10 x 10 grid. Each player must first cushion the ball with the inside of their foot and then pass back, again with the inside of their foot.

Progressions:

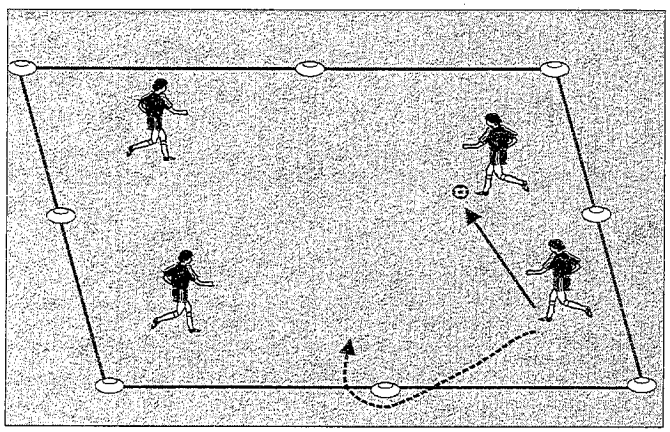
1. Upon receiving a pass, the players should use the inside or outside of their foot to control the ball to the side, and then pass back.

2. The players can move around their grid playing two touch passes.

Coaching Points:

Move towards each pass, do not pass from a standing position.
Lock the ankle and turn the toes outward. Plant the non kicking foot along side the ball. Bend the standing knee slightly.
Push through the ball and finish with your foot in the air - ankle locked.

Pass & Move



Organization:
Four players move around a 20 x 20 yd grid passing and moving. Each player may use one or two touches. Players should not stop moving during the duration of the drill. Encourage all of the players to call for the ball.

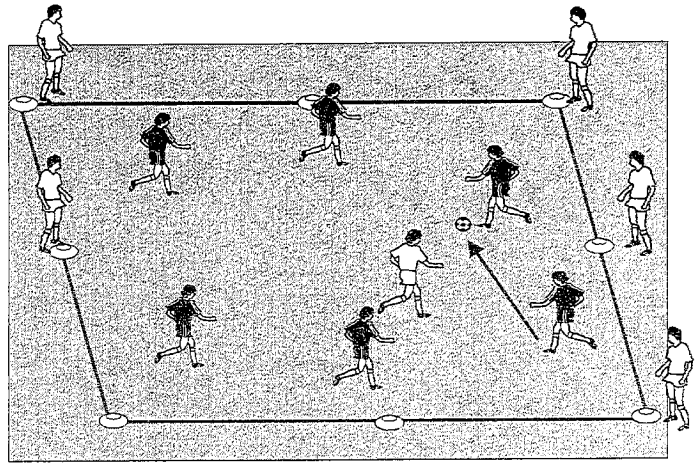
Progressions:

1. Now, after making a pass to a teammate, the passer must run around any cone before they can re enter the grid and receive another pass.

2. Introduce simple combinations such as a give & go followed by a long pass.

Coaching Points:
Each player should know where their teammates are.
Use the first touch to push the ball in the direction you wish to pass.
Your hips should face the inside of the grid when you receive a ball.

Six v One Keep Away



Organization:
Players are divided into two groups, with one half inside the 25yd x 25yd grid, and the other half around the perimeter. The inside players pass and move around the grid. Each perimeter player takes a turn defending the inside players for 15 seconds. Points are scored if the defender touches the ball or if the passers complete five passes.

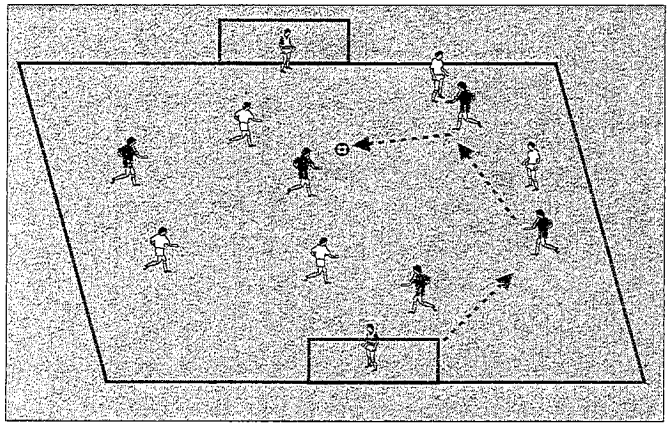
Progressions:

1. Make the drill more challenging by limiting the offensive players to two touches.

2. Bring a second player in to the grid to help the defender.

Coaching Points:
Continually move and communicate so that the player on the ball has at least two wide passing angles.
Be aware of where the defender is positioned and use your first touch to control the ball away from their pressure.
Move the ball quickly to avoid be caught in possession.

Combinations Game



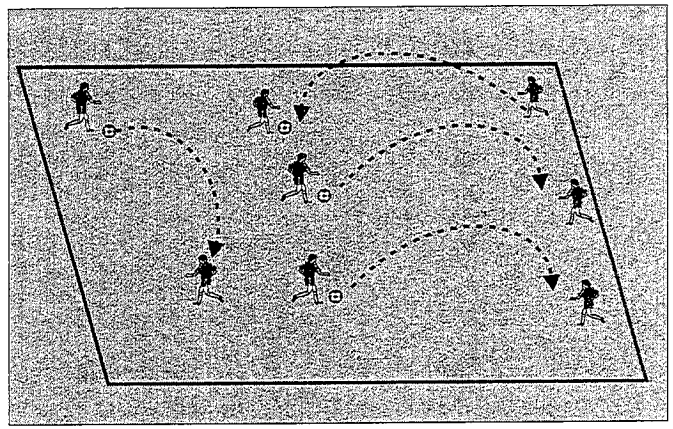
Organization:
Set up a small sided game on a 30 x 40 yard grid between two equal teams with goalkeepers. The teams must make four consecutive passes before they are allowed to shoot at goal:

Progressions:

1. Teams must make a give and go around a defender
2. Teams must make a double pass with another player
3. A player must make an overlap

Coaching Points:
As soon as you win possession, move the ball quickly to prevent defenders retreating into covering positions.
Move around and communicate.
Use quick short passes to break down the last line of defense.

Long Passing



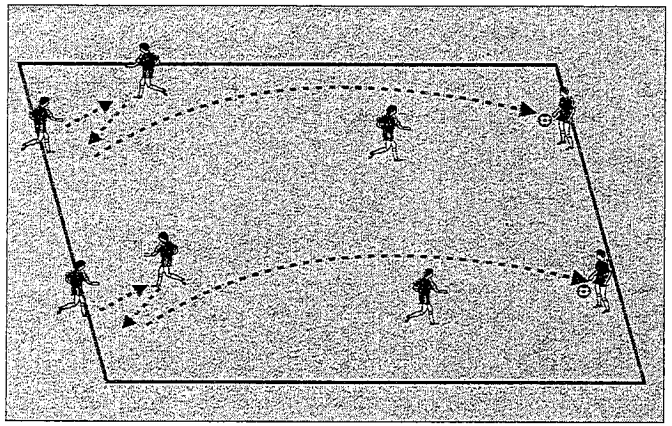
Organization:
The players divide into pairs with one ball between them and spread out throughout a half field. They move around the field and make long passes to each other.

Progression:

1. Have the players try to control the ball with one touch on the chest, thigh or foot and pass with the second touch.
2. Have them practice with their weaker foot over a shorter distance & to pass to who ever they wish within the group.

Coaching Points:
Warm your muscles up with some 10-15 yard passes first.
Approach from an angle and swing through smoothly on a long arc.
Try both with your toes pointed and your foot in the L position.
Make contact with the lower half of the ball.
Try pushing the ball a few yards to one side before striking.

Short-Short-Long



Organization:
The players divide into groups of four with one ball between them. Two players play as passers at either end of the 10 x 30 yard grid, and the other two as supporting players, 10 yards in from either end line. The passer makes a long aerial pass to the other end of the grid where the ball is controlled by the opposite end player. They then play a give & go with the support player and then return the lofted pass.

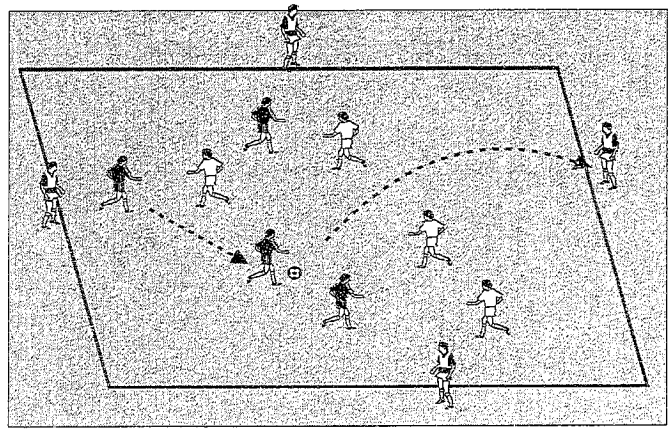
Progression:

1. The receiver must now try to lay the ball off to the supporting player with their first touch.

2. The passer and support player change position after every pass.

Coaching Points:
The supporting player should lay the ball off to the side of the passer. Try slicing your foot under the ball and make contact with your laces.

End to End



Organization:
Divide the group into two teams, and place four neutral players on the four sides of a 25-35 yard square grid. The team in possession of the ball, tries to make a lofted pass to a neutral player on the outside of the grid. If they succeed they score a point.

Progressions:

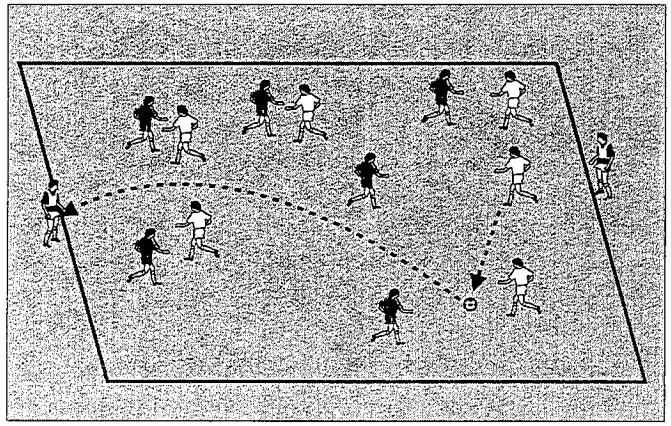
1. Limit inside players to three touches.

2. Limit the minimum distance of the scoring pass.

3. Allow side players to play cross field passes to other side players.

Coaching Points:
If your teammate inside has the ball stay close enough to help them but far away enough so that one defender cannot defend you both. Look to use a give & go, take over and overlap to create space.

Six V Six To Keepers Hands



Organization:
Set up a 30 x 40 yard grid. Each team has a goalkeeper beyond their opposing end line. The keepers are allowed to move laterally along the end line only. The teams earn points for making long passes to their keeper's hands. If the keeper receives a pass, they get to restart the practice with an uncontested long pass to a teammate.

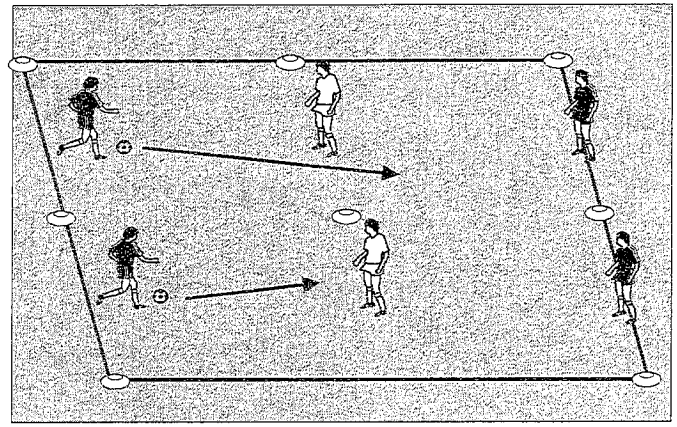
Progressions:

1. Change the keeper for a forward. He must control the ball in the air with his chest or thigh.

2. Add goals and award double score if a goal is scored off a long pass or a cross.

Coaching Points:
Keep the game simple by playing the way you are facing.
Play the ball long to the target player as soon as possible.
Play low risk, shorter passes in order to create an opening.

Two Way Shooting



Organization:
Split the players into four groups of three and have each group work in a 10 x 30 yard grid. Each group should have one player on each end line, and one keeper defending a goal in the middle of the grid. Players take it in turns to shoot at the goal in the middle of the grid. If the keeper saves the ball he turns and feeds the other shooter.

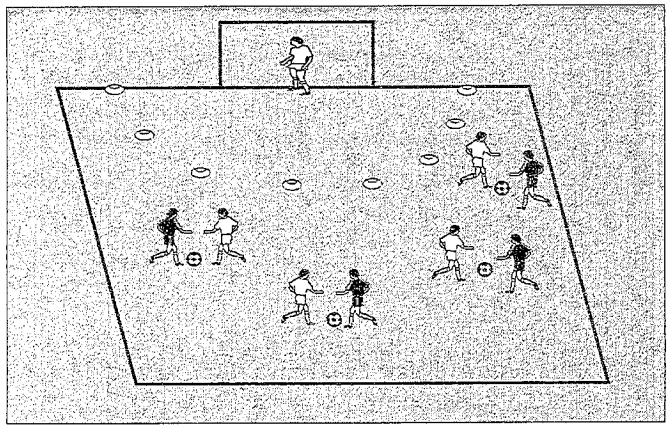
Progressions:

1. Push the ball diagonally forwards before shooting

2. Repeat the drill using the weak foot.

Coaching Points:
Approach the ball on a curved run from the side.
Make the last stride a big one before planting non kicking foot along side the ball - this will ensure a good backswing.
Strike the ball with the laces and keep the toes pointed and locked.
Follow through towards the goal.

Shoot out



Organization:
A goal is set up inside a 10 yard semi circle. Only the goalkeeper is allowed inside this area. The players are paired up and compete against each other to try and score past the goalkeeper.

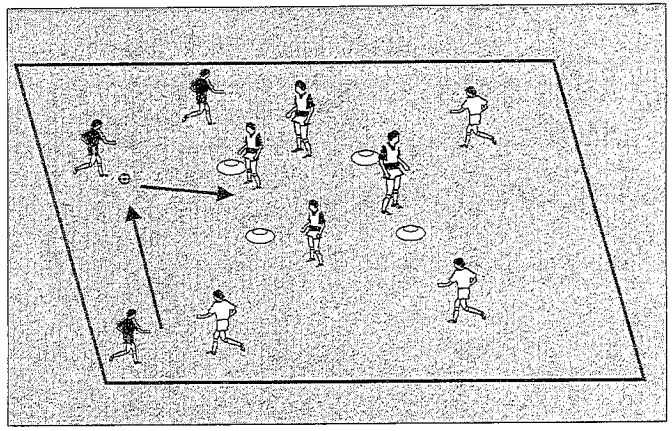
Progressions:

1. When players score they run to the coach who pairs them up with another partner.

2. The players now compete in teams of two and try to combine with their partner to create goal scoring chances.

Coaching Points:
Look to create early shooting opportunities by quick changes of direction and speed.
Shoot as soon as you see clear route to goal.
Follow your shot in case the goalkeeper does not hold on to it.

Four Goal Shooting



Organization:
Divide the group into three teams. Two of the teams compete against each other, trying to score a goal in any of the sides of the four sided goal which stands in the center of the grid. The third team plays as goalkeepers who defend each side of the four sided goal.

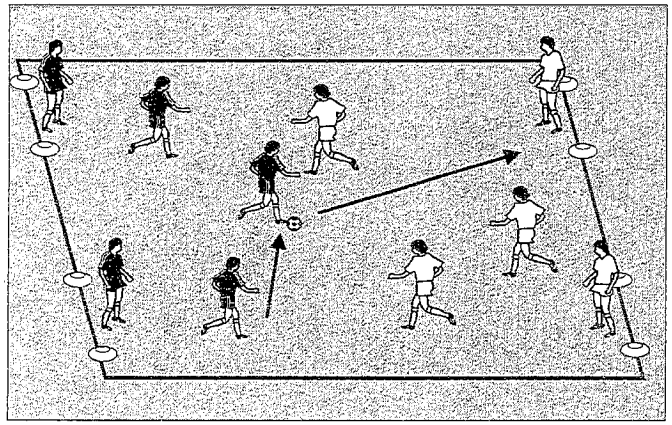
Progression:

1. Bonus points can be awarded for a team who scores with a first time shot off a pass or with their weaker foot.

2. A soon as a goal is scored the Goalkeepers change quickly with the team that allows the goal and the coach feeds a new ball in at once.

Coaching Points:
Follow up all of your teammates shots and finish the rebounds.
If you cannot get a shot off before the route to goal is closed down, turn and attack one of the other goals.

Two Goal Game



Organization:
Set up a playing field with two goals at each end, and each goal with a keeper. Two teams play against each other and are permitted to score in either of the two goals that they are attacking. Players are encouraged to shoot at either goal as soon as they have an opening.

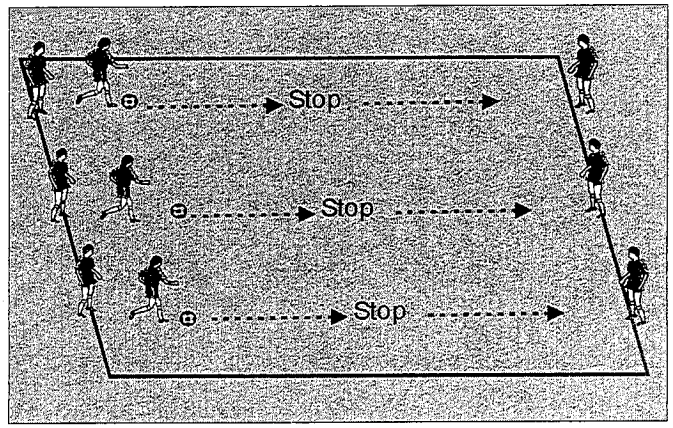
Progressions:

1. Teams score 1 point for a shot on target and 3 points for a goal.

2. Award double points for goals scored off a pass or with their weak foot.

Coaching Points:
Switch the point of attack to set up teammates in front of open goals.
Look to shoot off the dribble by attacking one goal and the cutting towards the other goal.
If you are forced to your weak side, shoot with that foot.

Dribble Stop Dribble



Organization:
Set up the players in groups of three at one end of a 30 x 40 yard grid. The first player in each group will dribble at speed down the entire length of the grid, slowing down and stopping dead at the end line. When they reach the end, the next player begins. Repeat several times.

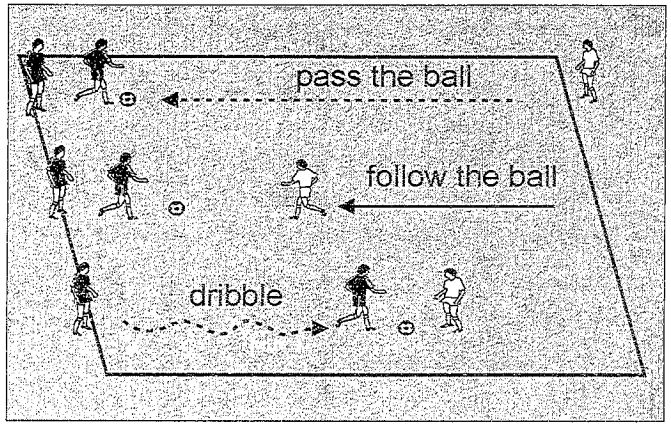
Progressions:

1. The players must now stop completely on the half way line and then continue on again at speed.

2. The players must now stop the ball twice on each run.

Coaching Points:
To maintain speed keep pushing the ball 5 yards ahead with the laces of the front foot.
To stop the ball suddenly, shorten the strides, bend your knees, slow down, and plant one foot directly on top of the ball.

One V One Dribble



Organization:
Players pair up and face each other across a 25 x 30 yard grid. The defender passes and follows the ball to take up a defensive position in front of the dribbler. The dribbler moves forward, cutting the ball from side to side all the way across the grid. The defender moves backwards maintain a 2 yd gap from the dribbler and may not tackle.

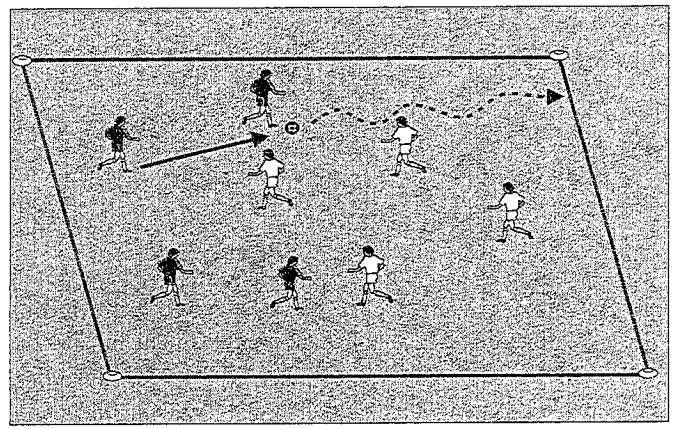
Progressions:

1. At the halfway mark the defender commits their front foot, the dribbler cuts the ball across this foot and accelerates away.

2. The defenders are allowed to tackle in their half only. The defender shadows the dribbler without tackling until they reach halfway, once the line is crossed they may tackle.

Coaching Points:
Use soft touches with the inside and outside of the leading foot.
Keep the ball close enough to touch at all times.
Keep looking up to check the defenders position.

Four v Four to End Line



Organization:
Divide the group into three teams in a 30yd x 40yd grid. Two teams compete against each other in a small sided game. A goal is scored when a player dribbles across the end line. The ball must be under control when the player crosses the line. Each time a team scores they change ends, the next team comes on in place of the defeated team.

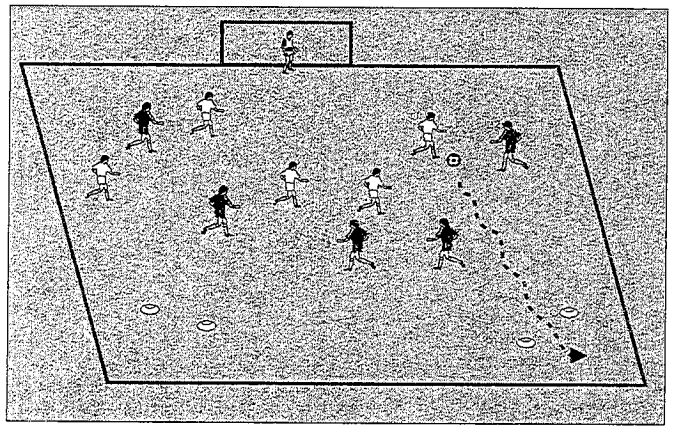
Progressions:

1. Players must attempt to use a fake or move to beat their defender in the attacking half of the field.

2. Divide the players into two equal teams and repeat the game. There will now be less space and less time on the ball.

Coaching Points:
Attack the space behind the defender, not to their side.
Watch the movement of the defender's feet - if they make a move towards the ball, dribble past them.

Counter Attack Game



Organization:
Divide the group into two teams and play in one half of a field, one team attacking the main goal and one attacking two small goals set up 10 yards inside the half way line. The team defending the main goal must dribble the ball through either of the two small goals to score a point. Change ends after 2 minutes.

Progressions:

1. The team scores an additional point if a player can beat an opponent with a scissors move.

2. If a player dribbles through the small goals, their team immediately changes directions and now attacks the main goal.

Coaching Points:
Always be looking to create a shooting opportunity while you are dribbling towards the main goal.
Take advantage of players out of position following a turnover.

The material in this booklet is taken from Challenger's extensive library of coaching drills, practices and games. Go to the Challenger Sports website www.challengersports.com and check out the full range of books and DVD's.

Check out Challenger's latest coaching books:

The Challenger guide to coaching 4 - 6 year olds.

An invaluable tool for all first time soccer coaches. Young players need to be introduced the skills of the game through fun and stimulating games and activities. This book contains a wide selection of warm ups, ball familiarity activities, fun games and tips on how to set up and coach the players within small sided games.

The Challenger guide to coaching 7 - 12 year olds.

This book will help coaches of all ages and abilities. Learn how to plan practices sessions based upon Challenger's progressive coaching method and select material for your whole season's practices from the comprehensive selection of warm ups, unopposed practices, opposed practices and small sided games.

For more information, contact:

Challenger Sports
8263 Flint
Lenexa, KS 66214
www.challengersports.com
800-878-2167