



FOUNDATIONAL PLAYBOOK

PRESENTED BY **DICK'S** 

**FOR COACHES OF
11-12-YEAR-OLD PLAYERS**



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Hi! I'm Coach Ed, your new assistant coach, providing tips and support to help you in your coaching journey. Get ready to embark on a fun-filled adventure where learning, growth and teamwork flourish.

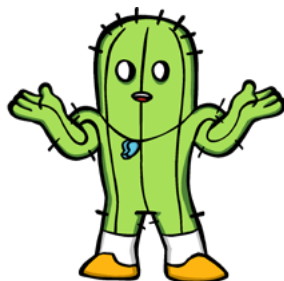


I'm excited by the impact we can have on these kids. First, we'll nurture a love for the game, and then we'll teach the fundamentals. Let's get started!

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with special thanks to Dr. Fritz Ettl
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Where do I start?

3



What is my “why”

What’s your philosophy?



What do I say?

Being positive is always the best way.



How do I know if they learned?

Check for understanding.



What do I do?

What do you teach them?



How do I modify activities?

Use the STEP approach.



What activities do I use?

Pick 3 types of activities and modify them over the season.

What is my “why”

What’s your philosophy?



Whether you have been asked to coach or stepped up to be a coach, you should have a coaching philosophy.

An activity for you to help you create a philosophy is to write a letter to yourself as if it’s being written by one of your players. If you were to receive a letter from one of your players, what would you want it to say? Hopefully there will be keywords like “fun,” “safe,” “inclusive,” “positive,” etc. Then, use these keywords to develop 2-3 sentences that will help you develop a coaching philosophy.

“Say ‘yes’ to the S’s” is another way to develop your philosophy.

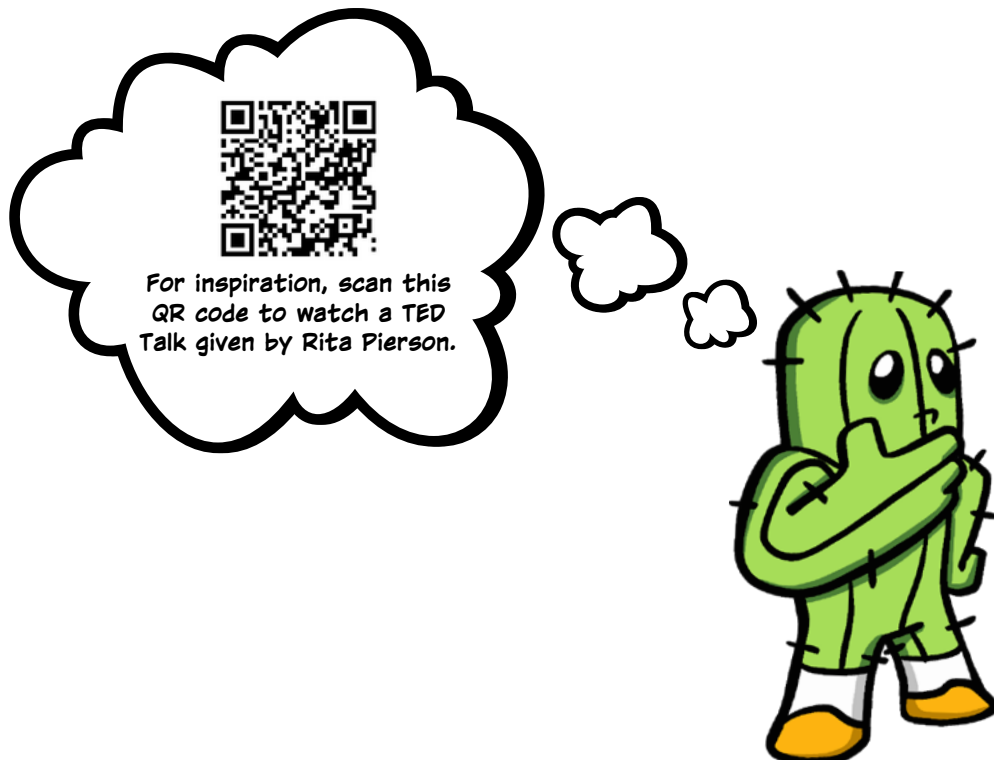
Example: Say “yes” to **safety, smiles, sportsmanship, skills, sweat, simple and, of course, soccer.**

The letter to yourself could read:

“Dear Coach,

I want to thank you for always making me feel welcomed. I appreciated how you placed my needs and wants over yours. You taught me to always smile have fun and show good sportsmanship. This helped me to really love the game and I want to keep playing it the rest of my life.”

To help you remember your philosophy or “why,” write it on an index/note card. Then, put that note card where it can be seen. For example, tape the note card on the sun visor of your car, draw a smiley face on your hand or write a keyword or two on your hand. These little tips can help you remember why you are there.



What do I say?

Good-Better-Best



An effective tool to use when providing instruction or feedback is to use the idea called **“Good-Better-Best.”** Often times, when we instruct or provide feedback is to tell them what they are doing wrong or incorrectly. Using the idea of good, better or best is a way to instruct and provide feedback. This way takes a more positive approach.

Below are some examples:

GOOD

What does a good pass look like?
What does good dribbling look like?
What is a good decision to make here?
What does good attacking/defending look like?

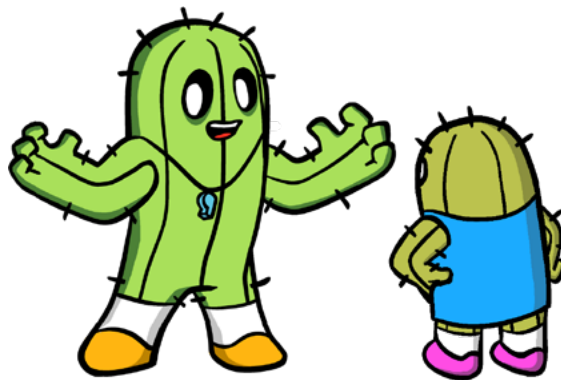
BETTER

What does a better pass look like?
What does a better shot look like?
What would be a better decision to make here?
How can we make our passes better?
How can we be better teammates?

BEST

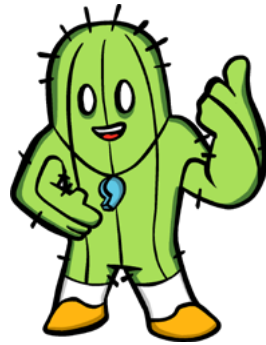
What does the best pass look like?
What does the best shot look like?
What does the best way to attack/defend look like?
How can we be the best at passing the ball?
How can we be the best teammate?

While those are very simple questions, they provoke thoughts and possible answers. The key is to ask the right one at the right time or moment. You don't have to use all of them in one breath. Maybe one day, you just use “good,” then the next practice you use “better”.



What do I say?

Being positive is always the best way.



“Brains in pain” cannot learn. As a coach, your words and actions matter. Remember, you are not just coaching a child, but a future adult. Negative comments or actions can really impact a child’s experience. “If you have nothing nice to say, then don’t say anything at all.” Sound familiar? One of your main goals as a youth coach is that they sign up again next season. It’s a bonus if they request you for their coach.

IDEAS

As they arrive to practice, tell them how glad you are to see them.

Try to say their names at least 2–3 times a practice.

Praise, but be specific with it.
Example: “That’s a great turn you did to get away from the defender.”

Provide more positive feedback than negative (5 positives to 1 corrective or 5 glows and 1 grow).

Use the sandwich technique (start with a glow/positive comment, add a grow/corrective comment, end with another glow/positive comment).

Use open-ended questions (avoid yes or no questions).

Three things players like to hear:

- I believe in you!
- You have a purpose!
- Ask them what they need or “how can I help you?”

Explain the “why.” Provide rationale.

Usually, when you yell at them, when they are playing in a game about a mistake they made, it’s too late. Praise (specific) when they do something that was great in the game.

Reward effort, not outcome.

Coach the bench, praise the play.

While the game is going on, coach the players on the bench.
Example: Ask what they’re seeing?

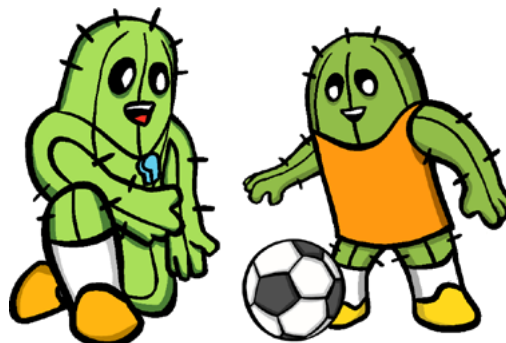
What do I say?

Transferring knowledge into understanding



Great coaches can simplify their teaching so the athletes can understand it. For younger players, try using metaphors, analogies, etc. to teach the mechanics of a technique. Try using external focus of attention to teach the “how.” Below are some examples of internal focus of attention (detailed mechanics of a technique) and external focus of attention (the effect of the technique). Using external focus of attention may be easier for a player to understand as opposed to the finer details of a technique or internal focus of attention.

Technique	Internal Focus of Attention	External Focus of Attention
Dribbling (running forward)	“Use the laces of your shoe and point your foot down and in to push the ball forward.”	“Keep the ball within a hula hoop of your body.”
Dribbling (turning the ball)	“Use the inside of your foot, make sure your heel is down and toe is up in the shoe.”	“Make the ball stick to the inside of your foot.”
Short passing	“Place your non-kicking foot next to the ball, bend your knees, Use the inside of your foot while keeping your heel down and toe up.”	“Your non-kicking foot is next to the ball, using the inside of the foot, make the ball roll as flat as a board.” (Non-kicking foot is like Google Maps. It guides the direction of the pass.)
Long passing	“Place your non-kicking foot next to the ball, use your laces to strike through the middle of the ball.”	“Make the ball go fast.”
Receiving (ground pass)	“Be balanced as the ball is rolling towards you. Take a slight hop on the non-receiving foot. With the receiving foot, cushion the ball.”	“Keep the ball within a hula hoop of your body when receiving a pass.”
Shooting	“Place your non-kicking foot next to the ball, keep your head, shoulders and knee over the ball. Strike the ball with the laces. Follow through by landing on your shooting foot.”	“Strike the ball so it either “dips” or has little to no spin.”



How do I know if they learned?

Check for understanding



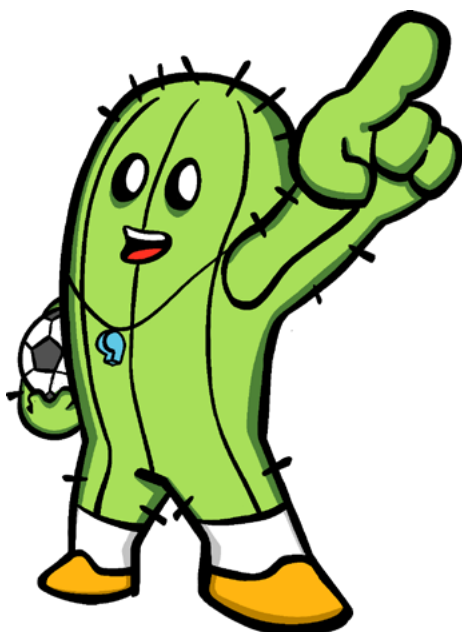
The famous basketball coach John Wooden has a quote that sums up the meaning of coaching:

"You haven't taught them until they have learned."

So, how do you know if they have learned? This is called checking for understanding. If you ask them after explaining to them, "does that make sense," they will probably tell you yes. They are also indirectly telling you that they just want to get back to playing and to be quiet.

- "Avoid saying "Does that make sense?"
 - » Instead, insert a why, when, where, how?
 - » Ex: "Why does this make sense?"
- Visual
 - » "Show me," Ask them to show you how to do something.
- Repeat back to me
- Small groups
 - » Have them get in small groups and give them an open-ended question to answer. After they have discussed in their small groups, get their answers.

- After you explain/show something, tell them that you will be looking for 3 good examples.
 - » Example: you have shown them how to do a push pass. As they are playing, you say out loud: "There's one great push pass; there's two; there's three. Way to go!"
- Theory of opposites
 - » What does a good shot look like?
 - » What does a bad shot look like?
- Slow-motion model
 - » Show them, or better yet, have a player model what good looks like.
 - » After the model, have the players perform the same action but in slow motion.



What do I do?

How do I start?



9



Set clear objectives

- What is your “why?”
- What are you always going to say “yes” to? (safety, smiles, etc.)
- What are your standards? (respect, integrity, fun, etc.)

Communicate

- Introduce yourself
- Practice and game times
- Your contact info
- For parent(s) to share important information about their child(ren) that you need to know



Equipment suggestions

- First aid kit
- Cones (flat or tall)
- Ball pump
- Training bibs/pinnies
- Pool noodles (primarily for the 5-8 year olds)
- Small goals (bonus if you have these)

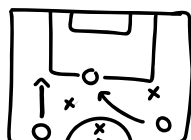
Planning practices

- Goals are anchored/weighted down & check the field for debris
- Number of players
- Space provided to you
- Length of practice (should be no longer than the length of the game)
- Make sure all of the children have been picked up by the designated adult(s)



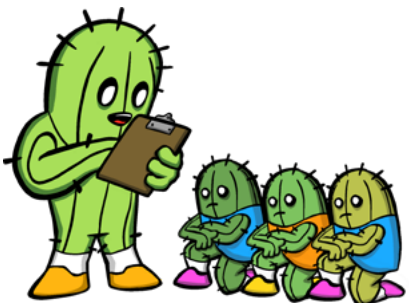
Game day management

- Goals are anchored/weighted down & check the field for debris
- Know the rules of the game and format being played
- Greet and thank the referee(s) before and after. Remember without them, there is no game!
- Be a positive role model
- Make sure all of the children have been picked up by the designated adult(s)

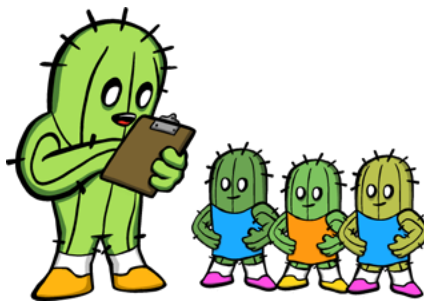


Taking a knee

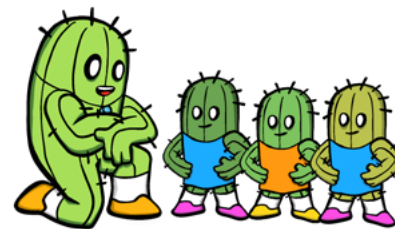
Instead of asking your players to take a knee while you stand above them, allow them to stand while *you* take a knee to get on their level.



BAD



BETTER



BEST

What do I do?

Sample parent communication

To the parents of Coach Ed's team:

Thank you for registering and allowing your child to play soccer this season. I look forward to meeting you and your child(ren). I am excited about helping your child learn and understand the game of soccer. As their coach, my first emphasis will be on them having fun while playing the most popular sport in the world.

My philosophy of coaching is insert your 2-3 sentence coaching philosophy.

My first priority is the physical and emotional safety of your child(ren). Teaching players the game and improving their skills throughout the season in a fun way is also a priority. I hope that you share in this philosophy, and while they do play games, the outcome when they are young is not the top priority.

Practice schedule

We will practice on insert day of the week from insert number of minutes/hour at insert address and/or specific directions and field location.

Game schedule

We will play games on insert day(s) of the week starting insert date and ending insert date.

If there is a chance of weather not permitting either practice or games to be played, every effort to make a decision will be determined by insert time. Please check the club/league website insert website prior to this time.

Please inform me of anything I need to be made aware. For example: your child is allergic to bee stings, a specific individual will be allowed to bring your child(ren) home, etc.

There will also be a parent meeting after our first practice to review this information again. If you are unable to attend, that's understandable.

If you would like to help this season in a capacity other than coaching, that is welcomed. For example, if there is a parent that is willing to be the post-game snack manager, please let me know.

Please don't hesitate to contact me via e-mail insert e-mail. I will be setting up a team group chat.

I look forward to working with your child(ren) and teaching them the love of the game.

Yours in soccer,

Coach Ed



What do I do?

Game management



They come to play the game!

For the youngest age groups, they should be playing at least 50% of each game. Most roster sizes are created so it is easier to make sure they get at least 50% playing time. Here are some other game day management suggestions:

Pre-Game

- Greet and welcome the referee (remember without them, there is usually no game).
- Make sure all of the players are properly equipped.
- Help to make sure that goals are weighted down and/or anchored.
- Prepare the players with an age-appropriate warm-up. (Note: Laps are not required!).

During Game

- For the youngest players, focus on keeping the game flowing.
- Be mindful of the players not on the field and make sure they get on the field.
Note: an assistant can help you with this.
- Coach the bench - Praise the play. This means that while they are playing only shout out loud positive moments. When you shout out negative ones, it's too late anyway. You are better off waiting until they come off to talk with them. This "talk" needs to be positive. Listen to them first or seek to understand as opposed to being understood.

Halftime

- Check in with them to make sure no one is hurt. Allow them some time to hydrate and relax.
- Keep your talk limited. An idea is to use "Good-Better-Best".
Example: "What was good about the first half?"
"What can be better?"
"What is the best way to get ready for the second half?"

Post-Game

- Show sportsmanship and shake hands with the opposing coaches, players and referee.
- Check in to make sure no one is hurt.
- Regardless of the score, praise their effort and celebrate the successes.
- Make sure they are going home with the designated adult(s)/parent(s).



What do I do?

What do you teach them?



Dribbling

- Holding off an opponent (shielding)
- Dribbling with both feet to change directions
- Use of bottom of foot to stop and start
- Feints and fakes to get away from an opponent
- Feints and fakes to dribble around an opponent
- Using the farthest foot when dribbling around an opponent
- Changing speed when dribbling
- Changing speed when dribbling around an opponent (fast, then slow down, then fast again)
- Change of direction to set up a pass and/or shot

Shooting/Finishing

- Striking/shooting the ball after receiving a pass from a teammate
- Shooting a ball that is rolling away (placement of plant foot is slightly ahead of the ball)
- Striking a ball off the bounce
- Striking the ball with the inside of the foot to score
- Striking the ball before it bounces or while in the air towards goal
- Shooting a ball after turning the ball (back to goal)

Heading

- Introducing heading with the forehead, neck stiff, arms out for balance (standing)
- Introducing heading while jumping

Passing

- Passing the ball 15–20 yards (medium-long passing)
- Further development with passing the ball with the outside of the foot while dribbling
- Introduce using the instep to make a longer pass
- Improving the weight and accuracy of short-range passes (5–10 yards) with the inside of the foot
- Introduce using the inside or outside of the foot to bend a pass
- Being able to pass with toe touch to a teammate or space
- Lofting a pass by using a chip or cross

Receiving

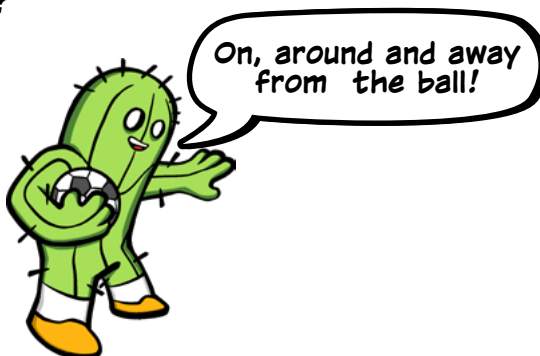
- Receiving the ball with the inside of the foot “open” to receive a ground pass and move it away from the opponent
- Using the outside of the foot when receiving a pass
- Introduce turning and receiving a ground pass with the inside of the foot
- Turning and receiving a pass with both the inside and outside of the foot
- Receiving a ball after it bounces with both feet
- Receiving an aerial ball with the feet, thigh, or chest

Individual Defending

- Approaching a player from behind to prevent turning
- Introducing the block tackle

What do I do?

What do you teach them?



Attacking

On The Ball

- Individually moving forward with the ball (dribbling)
- Decision to move forward individually with the ball or pass to a teammate
- Decision to shoot
- Decision to shoot or pass to a teammate who can

Around The Ball

- Can you go forward by using a teammate?
- Can you move to help your teammate?
- Combine with teammates around the ball
- Move to draw defenders out of position to help your teammate with the ball dribble into space

Away From The Ball

- Can we spread out?
- Can we stretch the opponent vertically?
- Can we draw teammates away to open up space?
- Can we switch the play?
- Can we overload one side?

Physical

- Agility
- Balance
- Coordination
- Simple and advanced motor movements
- Improving body strength
- Lateral movement
- Changing direction
- Jumping (standing)
 - » One leg
 - » Two legs
- Running & jumping
 - » Forward (sprinting)
 - » Backwards
- Twisting & jumping
- Speed development (proper form)

Defending

On The Ball

- Individual defending to deny an attacker getting forward
- Decision to stop a player from shooting
- Decision to win the ball vs. delaying

Around The Ball

- Can you and a teammate stop the ball from going between you?
- Can you and a teammate stop the ball from going around you?

Away From The Ball

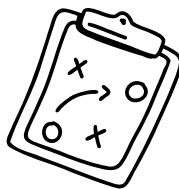
- Can we stay compact?
- Can we take away open spaces?
- Can we keep the ball to one side of the field?
- Can we stop the "switch the play"?

Psychological

- Fun!
- Brave
- Safe
- Growth mindset
- Becoming more serious about their performance
- Adults, like a coach and/or a teacher, can be more influential

What do I do?

Possible Weekly Themes

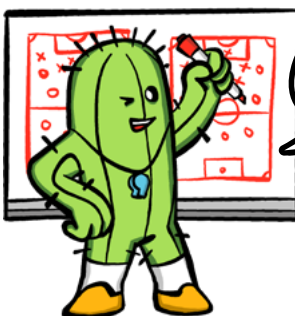


Based on 2 practices a week, between 75–90 minutes each

PRACTICE 1				
WEEK	THEME	GAME TYPE	CORE ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
1	Dribbling to maintain possession (holding off a defender and/or finding space)	Small-Sided Game	All Up & Back or	Time
			Dribblers' Game	Space
2	Improving medium and long-range passes	Small-Sided Game	The "El Pibe" Game or	Space
			6-Goal Game	Space
3	Individual defending	Small-Sided Game	Dribblers' Game	Process
4	Receiving & Turning	Small-Sided Game	The "El Pibe" Game or	Space
			6-Goal Game	Space
5	Movement off the ball	Small-Sided Game	The "El Pibe" Game or	Space
			Field Changer	Process
6	Space - The Final Frontier	Small-Sided Game	Angled Goals or	Time
			6-Goal Game	Space
7	Scoring from wide areas	Small-Sided Game	Half-Court Soccer or	Space
			3-Team Soccer	Space
8	**World Cup Tournament (Round 1)	Small-Sided Game	See Below	See Below

** World Cup Tournament (Round 1)

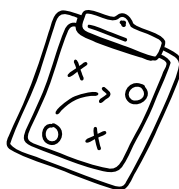
- Create 4 teams.
 - Each team is a country.
 - Each team represents a country.
 - Each team creates their own uniform (t-shirt).
 - Play small-sided games of 3v3–4v4.
 - Play 4 (if 3v3) to 5 (if 4v4) minute games.
 - Each team plays each other once (this is group play).
 - » Win = 3 points
 - » Draw = 1 point
 - » Shutout = 1 point
- Example: 0-0 shutout would receive 2 points. 1 for the draw and 1 for the shutout.
- A point is given for each goal up to 4.
 - A bonus point is given to a team for displaying good sportsmanship.
- NOTE: They are not aware of this opportunity until the end of Round 1.



CORE ACTIVITIES are located
[later in this document.](#)

What do I do?

Possible Weekly Themes



Based on 2 practices a week, between 75–90 minutes each

PRACTICE 2				
WEEK	THEME	GAME TYPE	CORE ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
1	Getting forward with the ball (individual's decision)	Small-Sided Game	Dribblers' Game	Time
2	Combining with a teammate to get forward	Small-Sided Game	Numbers Up & Down	Space
3	Working with a teammate to deny the opponent getting forward	Small-Sided Game	Dribblers' Game or	Process
			Numbers Up & Down	Process
4	Scoring	Small-Sided Game	3-Team Game or	Time
			Half-Court Soccer	Time
5	*Greatest Hits			
6	Getting Compact	Small-Sided Game	Angled Goals or	Equipment
			6-Goal Game	Space
7	Defending in and around the penalty area	Small-Sided Game	Half-Court Soccer or	Time
			3-Team Soccer	Process
8	**World Cup Tournament (Round 2)	Small-Sided Game	See Below	See Below

*Greatest Hits

- Players pick their favorite activities.

**World Cup Round 2

- Play 4 (if 3v3) to 5 (if 4v4) minute games.
 - » 1st Place plays 4th Place.
 - » 2nd Place plays 3rd Place .
- If the game(s) end in a draw, go straight to a backheel PK shootout:
 - » Walk 10 steps from the goal.
 - » No goalkeepers allowed.
 - » Players have to use a backheel to score.
- Winners of both games play.
- Losers of both games play OR they can watch and cheer!

What do I do?

Common Language



What do I do?

Practice procedure: "BAGS"

17



B

BELONG (Instant Activity)

- Have a game or an activity that is very simple, so they can jump right in.
- **Examples: Small-sided game, tag game, keep-away game, relay race, etc. that they have played before.**

NOTE: Do something other than have them run laps around the field!

Group meeting

- Bring them in as a group and have them:
 - » Turn and talk with someone. Example: "Turn & talk and discuss with each other one good thing that has happened to you today."
- Let's give everyone on our team a high five!

Preview time

- Provide a very short (30-45 seconds) preview of what they are going to learn today.
- Example: "Today, we are going to work on dribbling and keeping the ball within a hula hoop of our body. Let's get started!"

A

ACTIVITY (Not Drill) TIME

- After the "B" or "Belonging" part of practice, use the suggested CORE activity related to the them.
- Run the CORE activity without STEP variations for approximately 5–10 minutes.
- After running the CORE activity without STEP, run the same activity with the suggested STEP.
- Example: The "El Pibe" Game (Space).
- *NOTE: If there is no suggestion next to the activity, use 1–2 STEPs. Run this for approximately 5–10 minutes.*
- Plan water breaks between activities.
- After a water break, give them a challenge.
 - » Example: "Let's see how many toe taps you can get in 20 seconds."
 - » Example: "Who can sit down, grab their toes and then bring them to their nose without letting go!"

G

GAMES

- After the "A" or "Activity" part of practice, play a small-sided game or "scrimmage."
- Play the small-sided game at least 3–4 times.
- Example: Play for 3 minutes, take a break, then play another 3 minutes, take a break but ask them a question related to the theme. Play a 3rd time for 3 minutes.

S

SHOUTOUTS

- End practice with "shoutouts."
 - » Who do you want to say good job to today?
 - » Who showed a lot of hustle/effort today?
 - » How much fun did we have today/tonight?

WEEK	THEME	GAMES
1	Dribbling to maintain possession (holding off a defender and/or finding space)	Small-sided games
2	Improving medium and long-range passes	Small-sided games
3	Individual defending	Small-sided games

A green cartoon cactus character with a friendly face, wearing a blue shirt and orange shoes. It is pointing its right arm towards the right.

ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
Back or	Time
ers' Game	Space



What do I do?

Sample Session Using "BAGS"

BELONG

Instant Activity (10 Minutes)

- Play "Tag," "Keep Away," or a small-sided game ("Pick-Up Soccer").
- Play until all of the players have arrived onto the field.
- Water break then move on to the soccer "circle" (players all come in as a group).

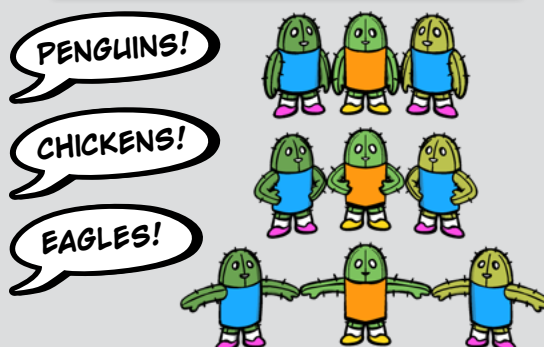
Soccer "Circle" (5 Minutes)

- Example: "Penguins," "Chickens," or "Eagles."
- "Penguins": Players stand side-by-side
- "Chickens": Players stand side-by-side with elbows on hips with tips of elbows touching
- "Eagles": Players stand an arm's-length apart

Practice Preview (60 Seconds)

- "Today we will be working on theme of today's practice... let's get started!"

Pick-Up Soccer



ACTIVITIES

CORE Activity (10-15 Minutes)

- Play the suggested CORE activity without any "STEPS"

"Pro Time" (5-10 Minutes)

- Water break
- Independent practice (toe taps, juggling, soccer tennis, or any "instant" activity).

STEP it up (10-15 Minutes)

- Play the CORE activity again but this time with the recommended STEP to bring out the desired theme or actions.

CORE Activity: The "El Pibe" Game



The "El Pibe" Game (Space Variation)



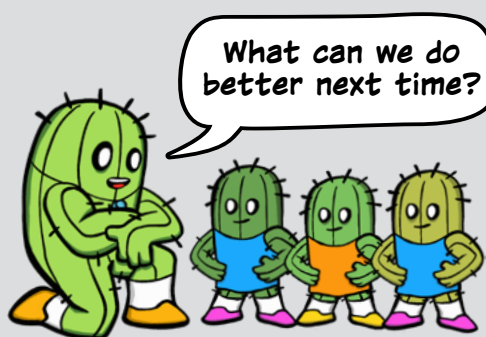
What do I do?

Sample Session Using “BAGS”

GAMES

Game Time (10–20 Minutes)

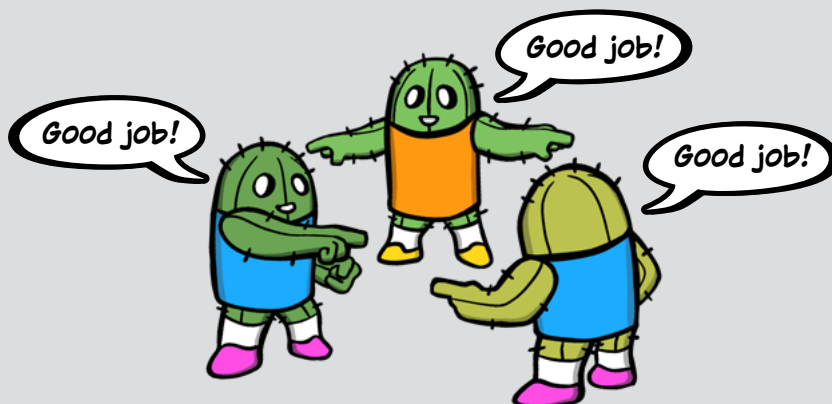
- Play the end game or “scrimmage” 3–4 times.
- An idea is to play 1 or 2 rounds then have a halftime break. During the break, ask some open-ended questions related to the theme or desired action of the practice.



SHOUTOUTS

End of Practice (5 Minutes)

- After the end game, have the players acknowledge each other.
- Example: “Who do you want to say ‘good job’ to today?”



What do I do?

Benefits of Familiarity

Remember when you played a game of tag, pick-up basketball or baseball, but modified the rules to make it slightly different? The game was already familiar and when a new friend showed up, all you had to do was tell them the slight modification.

Over the years, many new coaches have shared with me that they spend most of their planning time trying to design and create activities. Instead of trying to find and/or create 57 different activities, just use a few that you are already familiar with. Better yet, ask your players their favorites and then modify those over a season. Then, throughout the season, you use familiar activities but simply modify them to bring out a desired behavior and player actions



"Children learn new ideas by referencing to ideas they already know."

(Kirschner, 2022)

Using an activity that is already familiar to them and then modifying it, you allow yourself to focus more on the actual teaching and desired player actions than explaining the activity. How many times have you explained a drill (*bad word, by the way*) only to have your players ask more questions on how the activity or games (*better words*) works? Instead, use an activity that has been used before, but you simply modified it to build upon their existing knowledge.

"Children are both problem solvers and problem generators: children attempt to solve problems presented to them. They also seek novel challenges. They refine and improve their problem-solving strategies not only in the face of failure, but also building on prior successes. They persist because successes and understanding are motivating in their own right. Adults make connections between new situations and familiar ones for children."

(National Research Council, 2000)

In other words, try allowing young players to experience success and challenges again with an activity they have been involved in before. The first time it was played they may have been more worried about the rules. This can interfere with their learning and playing when playing in the activity. By playing again, they can now experience it differently than before.

On the next page are some core activities that you can use during the season. By changing space, time, equipment, or process (STEP) they can now have a different experience while playing a fun game they already know.

Kirschner, P. A., Hendrick, C., & Heal, J. (2022). How Teaching Happens: Seminal Works in Teaching and Teacher Effectiveness and What They Mean in Practice.

National Research Council. 2000. How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/9853>

How do I modify activities?

Use the **STEP** approach



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Timothy Gallwey, the author of *The Inner Game of Tennis*, says:

"Variety can also be accomplished by simply rearranging the order in which activities are practiced."

(Gallwey, W.T. 2008)

Here's an idea to help you take a familiar activity and change it: STEP it up! Using an acronym like STEP can be beneficial to both you and your players.

Space

Make the space:

- Longer
- Shorter
- Wider
- Narrow
- Circle, triangle, etc.

Time

Time can mean:

- Longer
- Shorter
- Faster
- Slower
- # of seconds

Equipment

Add, reduce, modify, and/or eliminate:

- Balls
- Cones
- Flags
- Pool noodles

Process

Add, change, and/or eliminate a:

- Rule
- Player(s)
- Challenge
- Condition
- Method of scoring
- Choice

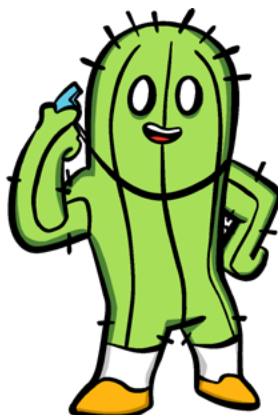
Below are a few activities that you should scan with a mobile device to see some examples of how to use STEP to modify an activity or game.



The Octopus
(dribbling game
for 5-7 year olds)



4-Goal Game
(small-sided game
for 8 and up)



Gallwey, W. Timothy. (2008). *The inner Game of Tennis: The classic guide to the mental side of Peak performance*. Random House.

How do I modify activities?

How to apply STEP to CORE ACTIVITIES



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Example CORE ACTIVITY: The “El Pibe” Game

Space

Make the space:

- Longer
- Shorter
- Wider
- Narrow
- Circle, triangle, etc.



How to apply **Space** modifier:

- Make the space smaller, wider, or larger.

Time

Time can mean:

- Longer
- Shorter
- Faster
- Slower
- # of seconds



How to apply **Time** modifier:

- The team that reaches a certain number of points first is rewarded with a penalty kick.

Equipment

Add, reduce, modify, and/or eliminate:

- Balls
- Cones
- Flags
- Pool noodles



How to apply **Equipment** modifier:

- Use large goals with goalkeepers instead of only using small goals.
- Play with 2 small goals on each end.

Process

Add, change, and/or eliminate a:

- Rule
- Player(s)
- Challenge
- Condition
- Method of scoring
- Choice



How to apply **Process** modifier:

- When a team gets to a certain amount of points (example: 6 goals), the other team has to play silently until they get to the same amount.

Core Activities



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All Up & Back



Angled Goals



Dribblers' Game



Half-Court Soccer



Numbers Up & Down



The "El Pibe" Game



Field Changer



3-Team Game



6-Goal Game



All Up & Back

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game

Equipment: Cones, Small or Regular-Sized Goals, Bibs/Pinnies

Field Space: Approx. 30'–50' L x 20'–35' W
(Depending on Group Size)

Group Size: 8+

Purpose(s): *Attacking: Dribbling, Passing, Scoring, Controlling, Supporting, Mobility, Counter-Attacking*
Defending: Pressure, Delay, Cover, Balance, Staying Compact to Prevent Counter-Attack, Intercepting Passes, Tackling



INSTRUCTIONS

1. This game can be played on small or large goals.
2. Make 2 teams of approximately 4–7 players. In the middle of the field, make a line with cones, flat discs, etc.
3. Play a normal game.
4. The only rule is that for a goal to count, everyone (except the goalkeeper) has to be at least to the midway line or in the opponent's half.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Change the space by making the field wider or shorter.

Time

- If a team can keep possession in their opponent's half for 10 or 15 seconds, they get an extra point if they score.

Equipment

- Play with 2 small goals instead of just 1.

Process

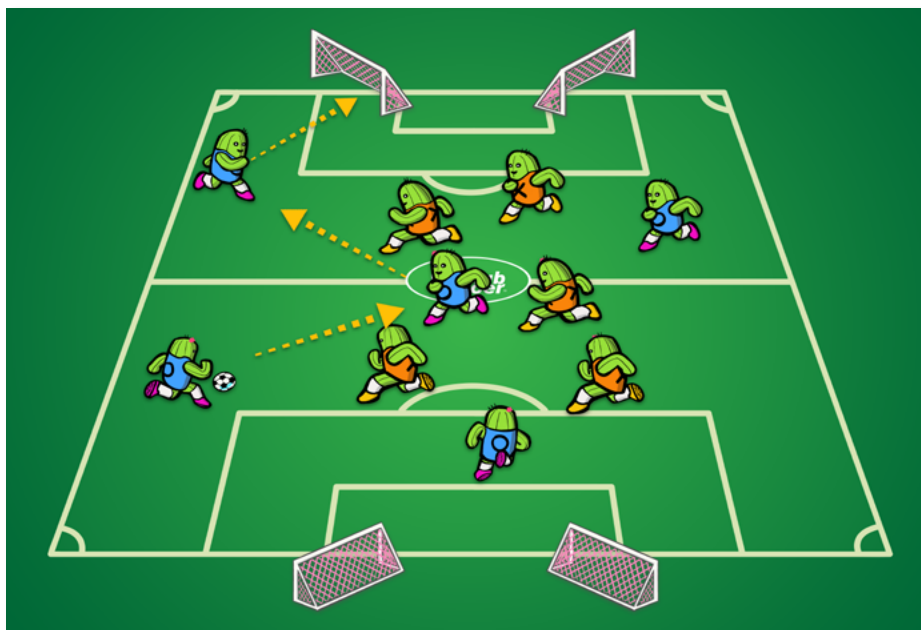
- Play with the initial rule in place.
- If a team scores and the opponent doesn't have everyone in their defensive half, they get a penalty kick or an extra goal.

Angled Goals

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game
Equipment: Small Goals, Balls
Field Space: 20'–40' L x 20'–35' W

Group Size: 8+
Purpose(s): Dribbling, Passing & Receiving,
 Scoring, Defending, Transition



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create 2 teams of 3–6 players each.
2. Each team attacks 2 goals and defends 2 goals.
3. The goals are angled out approximately 45 degrees.
4. Play a normal game for a set amount of time or until a team scores a certain number of goals.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Change either the width or length or a combination to bring out different player actions and behaviors.

Time

- The team that scores in both goals first, wins.

Equipment

- Turn the goals “in” instead of “out.” This will also change the emphasis of the activity. The attacking team needs to stay spread out. The defending team needs to protect the middle.

Process

- An option is play a game to all 4 goals, so a team can score in any of the 4 goals, but they can't score in the same goal 2x in a row.

Dribblers' Game

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game

Equipment: Cones, Small or Regular-Sized Goals, Bibs/Pinnies

Field Space: Approx. 30'–50' L x 20'–35' W
(Depending on Group Size)

Group Size: 6+

Purpose(s): Attacking: *Dribbling, Passing, Scoring, Controlling*

Defending: *Pressure, Delay, Cover, Balance, Intercepting Passes, Tackling*



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place either small or large goals at the end of each field.
2. Using cones, make a halfway line.
3. Play a normal game using 3–7 players.
4. Whenever a player has the ball in their attacking half, they must take at least 3 touches before passing or shooting.
5. When the ball is in the defending half, there is not restriction.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Make the field either shorter, longer, wider, or narrower.

Time

- The team that scores first is rewarded with a penalty kick.

Equipment

- Use a large goal with goalkeepers or place 2 small goals on each end.

Process

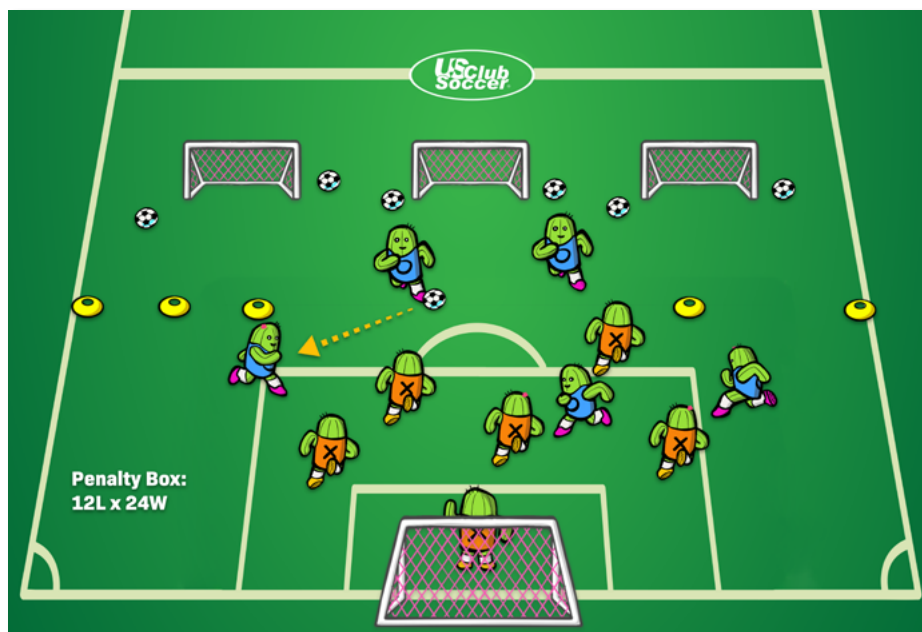
- Instead of 3-touch minimum, play a 4–5 touch minimum.

Half-Court Soccer

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game
Equipment: Small Goals, Cones, Balls
Field Space: 1/3 or 1/2 Field

Group Size: 8+
Purpose(s): Attacking, Scoring, Defending, Transition



INSTRUCTIONS

1. For this game, you need 1 large goal.
2. 2–3 small goals are placed approximately 5 yards past the top of the penalty box, which is 12 yards away from the goal.
3. The game is similar to half-court basketball. There are 2 teams plus a goalkeeper. 1 team attacks the large goal while the other team defends it. There is a “take-back” line. When the defending team wins the ball back, they try to score in one of the small goals.
4. A variation to having small goals is to have the team that is defending the large goal get the ball out of the penalty box.
5. When the team that was defending the goal scores, they not attack the large goal. The team that was attacking now defends the large goal. The offside rule is in effect. If the goalkeeper saves a shot, they try to throw the ball into one of the outside smaller goals.
6. Play for time or a set amount of points.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Make the “take-back” line farther away from the penalty box.

Time

- The team attacking the large goal has 12 TOTAL TOUCHES to get a shot on goal or they lose possession.

Equipment

- Instead of 2–3 small goals, just use 1 or none.

Process

- If a goal is scored inside the penalty box = 2 points.
- A goal scored outside the penalty box = 3 points.

Numbers Up & Down

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game

Equipment: Cones/Flags for Goals, Bibs/Pinnies

Field Space: Approx. 30'-50' L x 20'-35' W
(Depending on Group Size)

Group Size: 4+

Purpose(s): Attacking: *Dribbling, Passing, Controlling, Scoring, Combination Play*
Defending: *Pressure or Delay, Cover, Balance, Intercepting Passes, Tackling*



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make 2 teams of 3-5 players.
2. Make 2 goals with flags or large cones if possible. Make the goal width almost the same size of the normal goal.
3. When a team is attacking, all of the players are on the field.
4. When team loses the ball, they send one player back into the goal to become the "goalkeeper." That player must stay on the goal line until their team has possession.
5. Goals must be scored on the ground. This makes the game a constant numbers up/down situation.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Make the space smaller to encourage quicker transitions.

Time

- The team that scores "X" amount of goals is rewarded with a penalty kick.

Equipment

- Make an end zone instead of using goals. The attacking team now has to score by dribbling into an end zone.

Process

- After 2x, a new "goalkeeper" needs to be used.

The “El Pibe” Game

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game

Equipment: 2–4 Small Goals, Cones, Bibs/Pinnies

Field Space: Approx. 30'–50' L x 20'–35' W (Depending on Group Size)

Group Size: 6+

Purpose(s): Attacking: *Passing, Controlling, Scoring*

Defending: *Pressure, Cover, Balance, Intercepting Passes, Tackling*



INSTRUCTIONS

1. “El Pibe” was the nickname for the former Colombian player Carlos Valderamma. He was known for his playmaking and passing abilities.
2. Set up 2 teams of 4–7 players.
3. Play a normal game with either small or large goals.
4. Each team gets a number of points based on the amount of passes they make per possession. The points count **ONLY** if they score.
Example: If they make 6 passes and then score, the goal is worth 6 points.
If they make 6 passes and they don’t score, they score 0 points.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Make the space smaller, wider, or larger.

Time

- The team that reaches a certain number of points first is rewarded with a penalty kick.

Equipment

- Use large goals with goalkeepers instead of only using small goals.
- Play with 2 small goals on each end.

Process

- When a team gets to a certain amount of points (example: 6 goals), the other team has to play silently until they get to the same amount.

Field Changer

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game
Equipment: Small Goals, Balls, Cones
Field Space: 20'–30' L x 20'–35' W

Group Size: 10+
Purpose(s): Dribbling, Passing & Receiving,
 Scoring, Defending, Transition,
 Numbers Up/Down



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set up a minimum of 2 fields. Create small teams of 2–3 and then send them to a field.
2. Each field has 2–3 players per team. *Note: 3 players per field is ideal.*
3. Play 2–3 minute games. If a game becomes too lopsided then stop the whole group and play again. Example: If the game becomes 5v1, then stop and start over.
4. Play a normal small-sided game. When a player scores, they must leave that field and change or run to a new field. This should create numbers up/down situations to coach either attacking or defending themes.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Make the fields different sizes. Example: one is long, one is short, and one is a circle shape.

Time

- If a team scores, they get a penalty kick. This is a free kick 10 yards out from the goal with no goalkeeper.
- Challenge the group to not let the other team score or have a player change to a new field. See how long they can go before this happens.

Equipment

- 1 field has 4 goals on it; the other has 2 goals.
- Each field has a different sized ball.

Process

- The player who provides an assist instead of the scorer changes or runs to a new field.
- When a team scores, they pick 1 player from the other team to change or run to a new field.
- If there are more than 2 fields, the players should change or run to the field that needs the most help.

3-Team Game

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game
Equipment: 1 Large Goal, 3 Different-Color Bibs/Pinnies
Field Space: Penalty Box Area

Group Size: 12+
Purpose(s): *Attacking: Mentality to Shoot/Score, Shooting Under Pressure, Close-Range Finishing*
Defending: Blocking Shots When Inside The Penalty Area, Defending In and Around The Penalty Area



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make 3 teams of 5–6 players and a goalkeeper with 1 goal.
2. 2 teams play against each other in the penalty box. The third team spreads out across from the penalty box. One time inside starts as the attacking team; the other is defending. The third team supports the attacking team when they have possession.
3. If the defending team wins the ball, they have to either dribble out of the box or play it to one of the players on the outside of the box. When they do this, the attempt is over and a new ball is played in.
4. If a shot is attempted or scored, a new ball is played in. If the goalkeeper catches or saves the ball, they roll the ball to either side and it becomes a live ball.
5. Each game has a specific number of balls played.
 Example: Play a game with 10 balls. Once the tenth ball is out of play, the teams switch. The team that was defending now goes outside, and the team that was outside becomes the attacking now becomes the defending team.
6. The 2 teams that have scored the most goals do a penalty kick shootout against each other.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Make the space bigger but extend the penalty box 5 yards.

Time

- Instead of playing a number count of balls, play for time. Example: Play 4-minute games.

Equipment

- Have 2 small goals for the defending team to play into instead of dribbling out of the penalty

Process

- If a goal is scored without using any of the players on the outside, that goal is worth double.
- Another way to end the game is for the team who allows the fewest goals in the penalty kick shootout.

6-Goal Game

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game
Equipment: 6 Small Goals, Balls
Field Space: 25'–35' L x 20'–35' W

Group Size: 8+
Purpose(s): Dribbling, Scoring, Scanning, Defending



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make two teams of 4–7 players.
2. Each team has 3 goals to attack and 3 to defend.
3. Play for time or a number of points.

HOW TO REPLAY THIS GAME LATER OR CHANGE IT USING STEP:

Space

- Make the field longer or more narrow.

Time

- The first team to score in all 3 goals wins.

Equipment

- Turn the outside goals out 45 degrees.

Process

- Make the outside goals worth more than the central goals.
 Example: 3 points for outside goals, 1 point for the central goals.
- Put two players from each team in between the small goals. The team with possession can pass the ball to those players in between the small goals, who will then pass it back to their teammates to either score or maintain possession.

How do you manage their energy?

Children have a lot of energy, especially when they arrive to practice after a full day of school or sitting around at home.

Here are some tips to manage their energy at practice:

- Limit information to 1 or 2 important points at a time. Minimize downtime. Avoid lines.
- Have them “show you” after you have provided them with instruction.
- Get players to think by asking open-ended questions. Questions are also more engaging. Allow them to problem solve.
- Create challenges or competitions to keep them engaged. Foster a growth mindset.
- Maximize time spent with the ball. The more they are moving, the more they are learning.

How can you get their attention?

Try using the following attention grabbers:

Eyes on me

You can follow up by asking them to show you the right way to pay attention.

Catch them being good

When someone is paying attention, acknowledge them and say it out loud so the rest of the players can hear and see.

The volume ball

Toss a ball in the air. When the ball is in the air, they yell. When the ball lands, they stop.

Clap it out

Turn palms up. When palms are up, they clap. Turn palms down. When palms are down, they stop clapping.

Match me

Tell them to match what you are doing with your hands. Ex: Put hands on head, hips, etc.



If you have more questions related to the development of youth players, don't hesitate to reach out to Vince Ganzberg, Director of Coach Education, at vganzberg@usclubsoccer.org.

Please Remember...

1

Physical and emotional safety is #1

2

Make sure no child walks around with a hole in their heart!

3

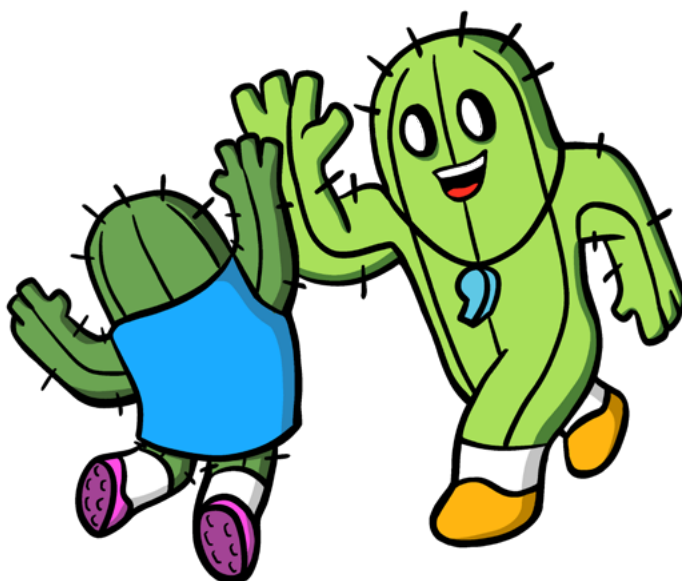
Keep in mind you may be the best thing happening in their life. Be their champion!

4

Say "yes" to the "S's"!

5

When all else fails, refer back to #1 and FUN!



Meet the authors

Vince Ganzberg

As Director of Coach Education for US Club Soccer, Vince Ganzberg is responsible for working with member leagues and clubs to educate and develop coaches.

His role supports US Club Soccer membership by leading those areas technically, expanding strategic partnerships and creating new content. Ganzberg earned an MS in Recreation and Sport Sciences from Ohio University.

A former high school teacher, his professional career has been dedicated to coaching education for 20 years, serving as Director of Coaching Education for Indiana Soccer Association (2002-12) and United Soccer Coaches (2015-23). He is also a coaching education instructor for U.S. Soccer since 2007. He was responsible for creating the former 'F' license online course (now grassroots) and delivers 'GR,' 'D,' 'C,' and 'B' license courses for U.S. Soccer. He is also a coach educator developer for U.S. Soccer.

Ganzberg was inducted into the Bethel University Hall of Fame as a player in 2008, Indiana Soccer Hall of Fame in 2015, and was the recipient of the Dr. Tom Fleck Award in 2018. This award is given to the top coach educator for US Youth Soccer.



Dr. Fritz Ettl

Fritz's first job was working at a soccer day camp back in 1994 in South Bend, IN. That kicked off a career as an educator in a variety of contexts (e.g., college professor, coach educator, non-profit executive, public school teacher, international summer camp program director, and as a youth soccer coach).

Prior to landing in South Minneapolis in 2022, Fritz spent 6 years as a professor at Butler University teaching a variety of coach education, youth development, and teacher education courses. He now works as a consultant and coaches the Washburn High School Boys Academy A team.

Dr. Ettl has an Ed.D from Boston University in curriculum and teaching with a specialization in athletic coaching education.

