

US Club  
Soccer®

# FOUNDATIONAL PLAYBOOK

PRESENTED BY DICK'S 

**FOR COACHES OF  
5-6-YEAR-OLD PLAYERS**





# Table of Contents

**Where do I start?** (3)

**What is my “why”?** (4)

**What do I say?**

Good-Better-Best (5)

Being positive is always the best way (6)

Transferring knowledge to understanding (7)

**How do I know if they learned?** (8)

**What do I do?**

Where to start (9)

Sample parent communication (10)

Game management (11)

What do you teach them? (12)

Practice procedure: “BAGS” (14)

How to use the CORE ACTIVITY to make a full practice (15)

Sample session using BAGS (16)

**How do I modify activities?**

Benefits of Familiarity (18)

Use the STEP approach (19)

How to apply STEP to CORE ACTIVITIES (20)

**What activities do I use?**

CORE ACTIVITIES (21)

**Ask Coach Ed** (28)

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.

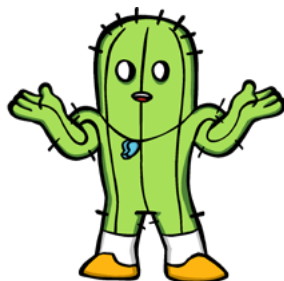


I'm excited by the impact we can have on these kids. First, we'll nurture a love for the game, and then we'll teach the fundamentals. Let's get started!

Written by Vince Ganzberg  
with special thanks to Dr. Fritz Ettl  
Layouts by Robin Pinger  
Illustrations by Albert Capitan

# 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.

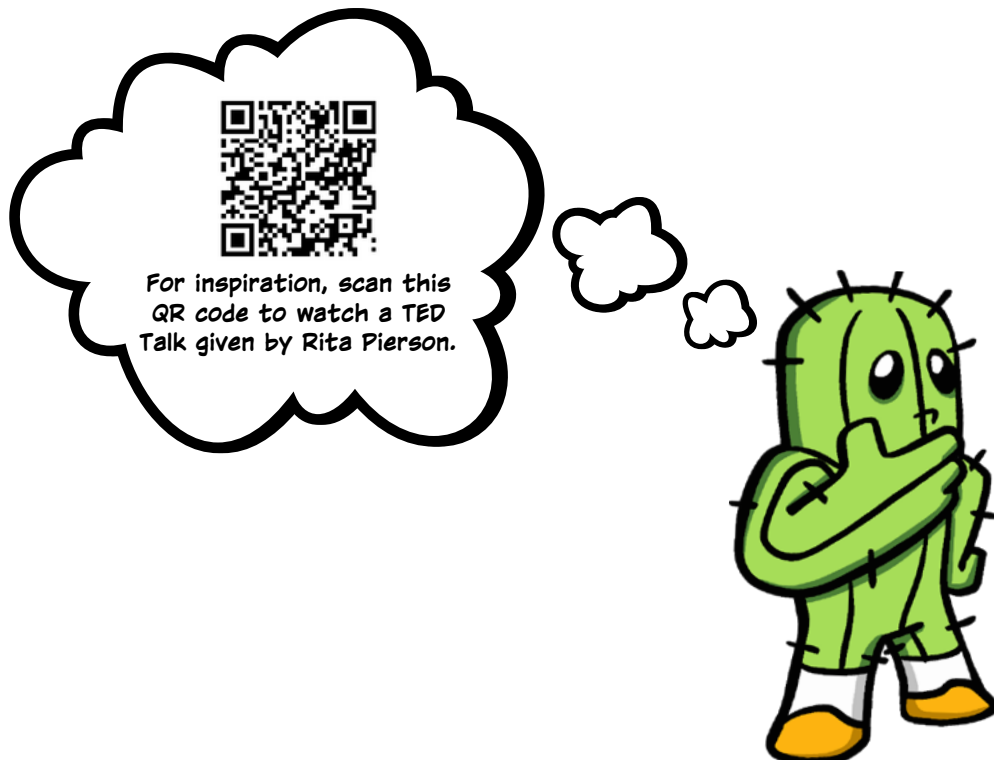
Example: Say “yes” to **safety, smiles, sportsmanship, skills, sweat, simple and, of course, soccer.**

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?*

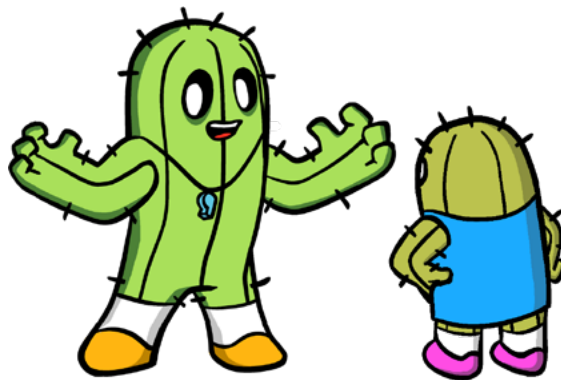
### BETTER

*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?

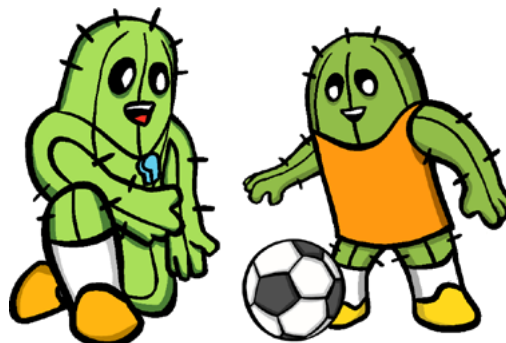
# What do I say?

## *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



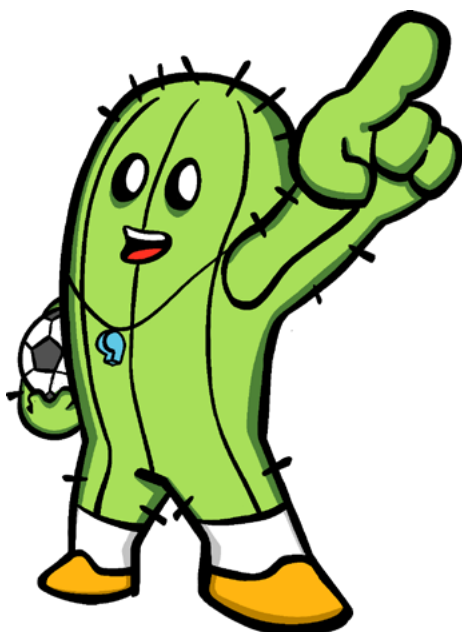
The famous basketball coach John Wooden has a quote that sums up the meaning of coaching:

**"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)

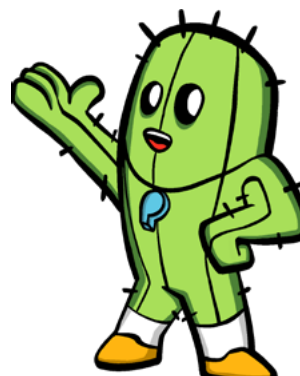
## Planning practices

- 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)



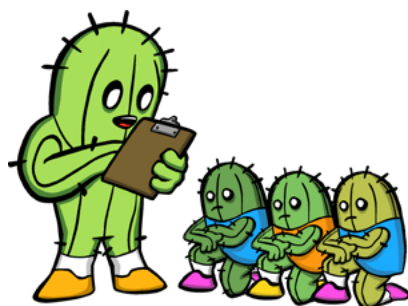
## Game day management

- 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)

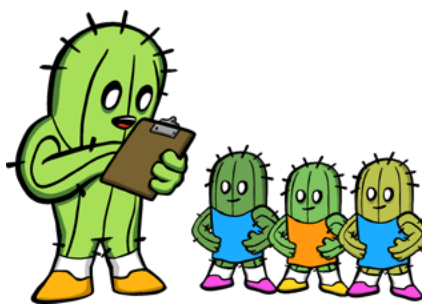


## Taking a knee

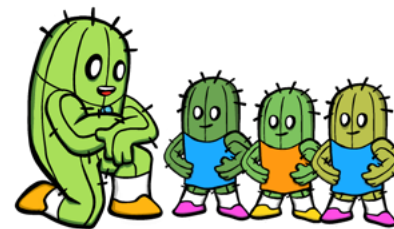
Instead of asking your players to take a knee while you stand above them, allow them to stand while *you* take a knee to get on their level.



**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 for the 5–8 year-old age groups are 5, 6 or 7 players, 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

- Running with the ball unopposed with head up
- Running with the ball keeping it within a hula hoop of their body
- Ball manipulation—two surfaces (laces, bottom of foot to start and stop)

## Striking the ball

- Introduce striking the ball with instep. They will either strike it naturally with their instep, because they are often pigeon toed or use their toes. (Make the ball go fast!)
- Striking the ball while moving
- Striking/shooting the ball to goal

## Passing (low priority)

- Pushing the ball with the laces
- Introduce the push pass (does the ball roll as flat as a board?)
- Can they look at their teammate first before passing?

## Receiving (low priority)

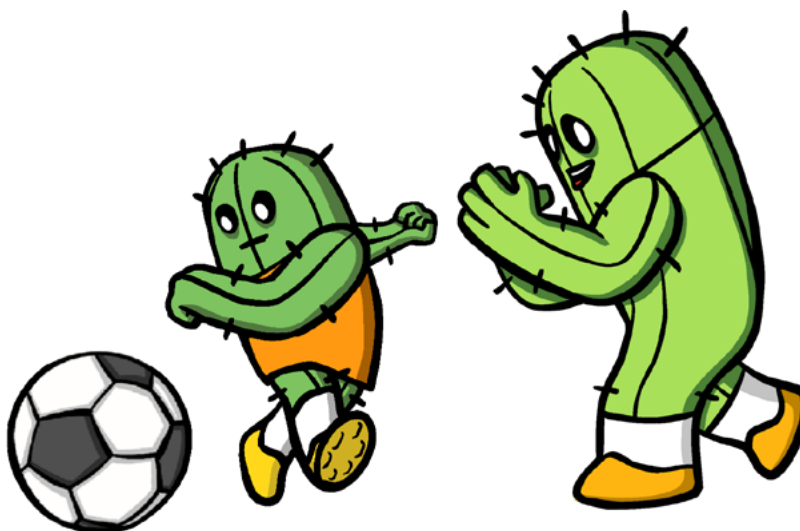
- Controlling the ball—not trapping
- Eyes open when receiving a ball
- Introduce receiving ground passes towards the end of the season

## Attacking

- Can you go forward?
- Can you go around someone with the ball?
- Can you keep an opponent from taking your ball away?

## Defending

- Can you get the ball back?
- Can you stop someone from going around you?



# What do I do?

*What do you teach them?*



## Physical

Note: this part should not be done in isolation but as much as possible with a ball. No laps required.

- Agility
- Balance
- Coordination
- Simple motor movements (examples: skipping, hopping, etc.)
- Running forward
- Running backward



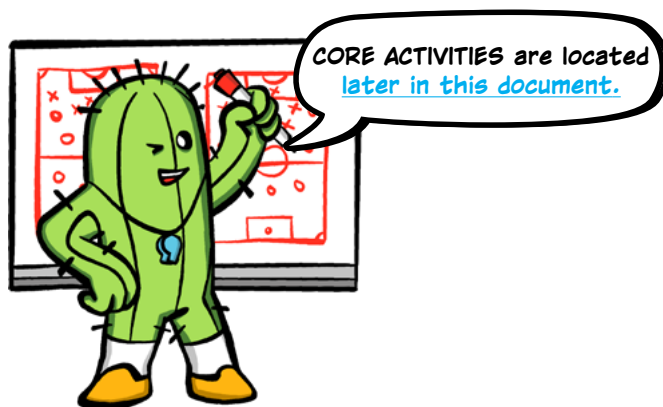
## Psychological (SEL)

- Must be a safe environment
- Fun!
- Brave
- Growth mindset
- Positive with self
- Positive with teammates

## Possible weekly themes

*Based on 1 practice a week, between 45–60 minutes*

1 practice a week, between 45–60 minutes				
WEEK	THEME	GAME TYPE	CORE ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
1	Dribbling with the head up	Tag	<a href="#">The Octopus</a>	Equipment
2	Dribbling to go forward	Tag	<a href="#">The Octopus</a>	Space
3	Dribbling to turn the ball (get away)	Individual Development	<a href="#">The Gate Escape</a>	Process
4	Striking the ball part 1	Small-Sided Game	<a href="#">2v2 Four-Goal Game</a>	Space
5	“Greatest Hits” (use the games/activities they like the most)			
6	Introduction to passing part 1	Individual Development	<a href="#">The Gate Escape</a>	Equipment Process
7	Striking the ball part 2	Small-Sided Game	<a href="#">Get Out of Here</a>	Process Space
8	Festival 2v2 tournament	Small-Sided Game	<a href="#">2v2 Four-Goal Game</a>	All STEPs





# What do I do?

Practice procedure: "BAGS"

14



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 Octopus (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.

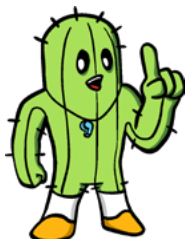
S

## **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?

# What do I do?

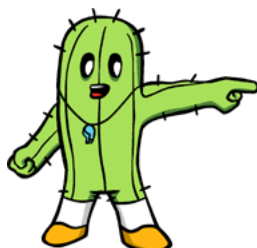
How to use the **CORE ACTIVITY** to make a full practice



Pick one theme from the [“What Do I Do Section?”](#)

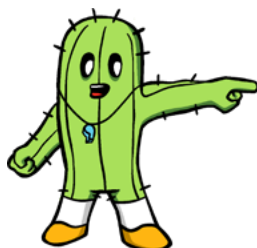
WEEK	THEME
1	Dribbling with the head up
2	Dribbling to go forward

Each week, there is a suggested **CORE ACTIVITY**.  
Locate the suggested **CORE ACTIVITY**.



CORE ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED APPLICATION
<a href="#">The Octopus</a>	Equipment
<a href="#">The Octopus</a>	Space

If the **CORE ACTIVITY** doesn't have a **STEP** variation listed, then use 1 or 2 of the variations from the **CORE ACTIVITY** page.



CORE ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
<a href="#">The Octopus</a>	Equipment
<a href="#">The Octopus</a>	Space



**The Octopus**  
CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Activity  
Equipment: Cones, balls, 1-2 pool noodles  
Field Space: 25'-35' L x 20'-30' W

Group Size: 8+

Purpose(s): Dribbling to get forward, scanning

- Make one grid 20' L x 10'-15' W.
- All players have a ball and get on a line facing one direction.
- The coach or an experienced adult is "it" and has a pool noodle in each hand. They are the Octopus.
- The "fish" players (all "it") try to dribble their ball from one side to the other without the Octopus trying to touch their ball with one of the pool noodles.
- If their ball gets stuck, they have to take the ball on the spot. When the players get to the other side, they have to take the ball on the spot.
- The Octopus turns around and the players go back to the start.
- Repeat this game later or change it during using STEP:

**Loops**

- Make the space smaller by making either shorter or more narrow.

**Cones**

- The players have no more than 10 seconds to get across without being touched.

**Equipment**

- Place small cones randomly on the field. They are now asked to avoid dribbling over the cones. The cones are "narrowed" if they touch them than they are caught or stuck.

**Probes**

- The Octopus only uses 1 pool noodle for games 1 & 2.
- After game 2, the Octopus makes it harder by now having 2 pool noodles.
- Another option is to add an extra Octopus (approved adult) who also has pool noodles.

Plug the **CORE ACTIVITY** in the middle of the practice session in between the **BELONG** and **GAMES** section.  
See the [BAGS sample session](#).

# 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).

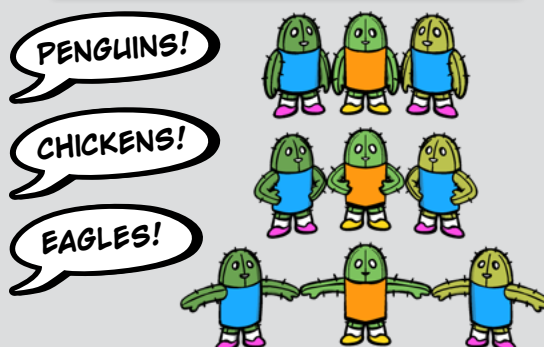
#### Soccer "Circle" (5 Minutes)

- 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"

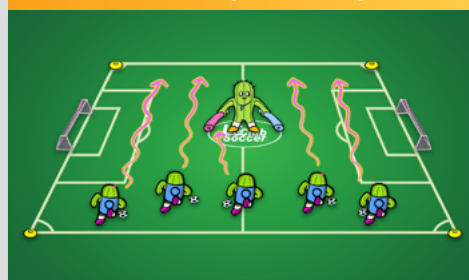
#### "Pro Time" (5-10 Minutes)

- 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 Octopus



#### The Octopus (Space Variation)





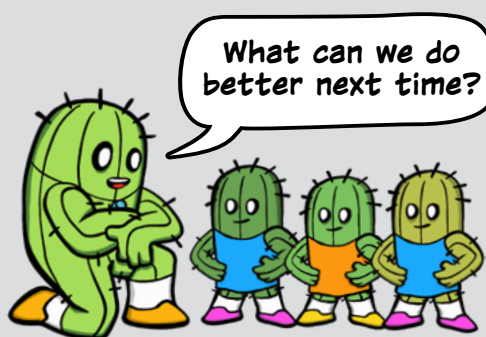
# What do I do?

## Sample Session Using “BAGS”

### GAMES

#### Game Time (10–20 Minutes)

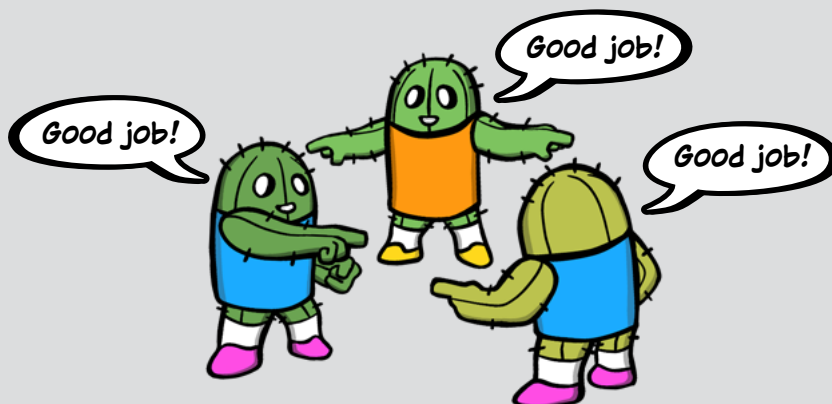
- Play the end game or “scrimmage” 3–4 times.
- An idea is to play 1 or 2 rounds then have a halftime break. During the break, ask some open-ended questions related to the theme or desired action of the practice.



### 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., & Heil, 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



19

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

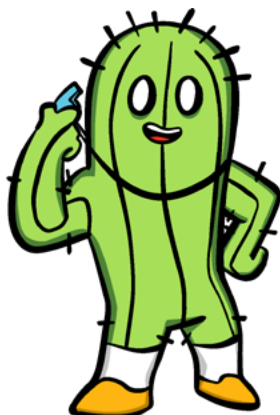
Below are a few activities that you should scan with a mobile device to see some examples of how to use STEP to modify an activity or game.



**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



20

## Example CORE ACTIVITY: The Octopus

### Space

#### Make the space:

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



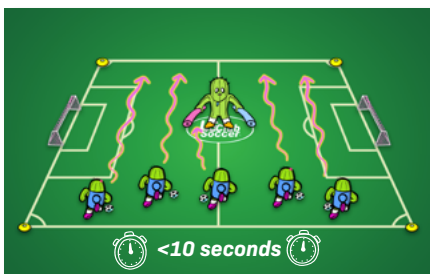
#### How to apply **Space** modifier:

- Make the space smaller by making either shorter or more narrow.

### Time

#### Time can mean:

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



#### How to apply **Time** modifier:

- The players have no more than 10 seconds to get across without being touched.

### Equipment

#### Add, reduce, modify, and/or eliminate:

- Balls
- Cones
- Flags
- Pool noodles



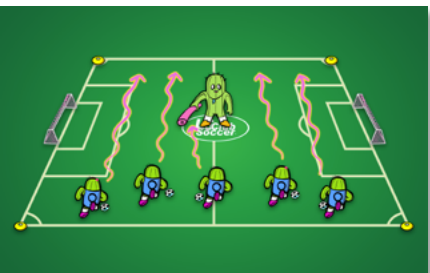
#### How to apply **Equipment** modifier:

- Place small cones randomly on the field. They are now asked to avoid dribbling over the cones. The cones are "seaweed." If they touch them, then they are caught or stuck.

### Process

#### Add, change, and/or eliminate a:

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



#### How to apply **Process** modifier:

- The Octopus only uses 1 pool noodle for games 1 & 2.
- After game 2, the Octopus makes it harder by now having 2 pool noodles.
- Another option is to add an extra Octopus (approved adult) who also has pool noodles.



# Core Activities



21

## Pick-Up Soccer



## Get Out of Here



## 2v2 4-Goal Game



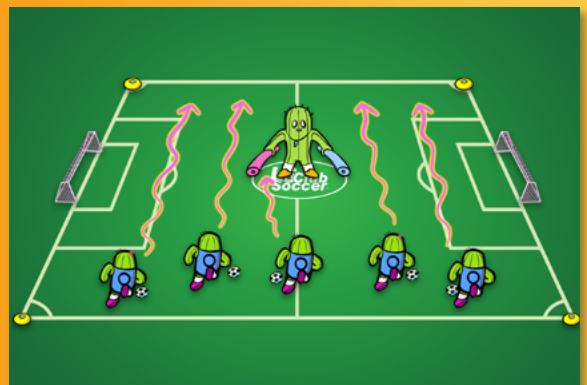
## New Ball



## The Gate Escape



## The Octopus

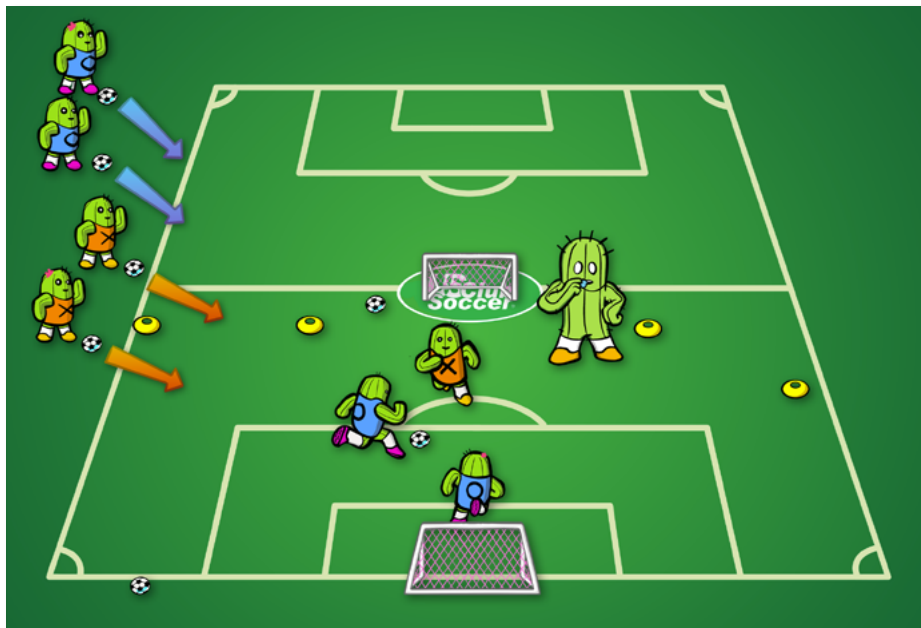


# Pick-Up Soccer

## 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):** Attacking, Defending



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set up goals and small field.
2. As players arrive to practice, add them into the game. If needed, the coach(es) can fill in and also participate.
3. As more players arrive, pause and make the field bigger, wider or both. Continue to play until all or most of the players have arrived with a group greeting.
4. In the group greeting, you can preview the session, ask them how their day went, etc.

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

#### Space

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

#### Time

- Play for a set amount of time and then switch teams.

#### Equipment

- Bring a different sized ball for them to play with (volleyball, smaller ball, etc.).

#### Process

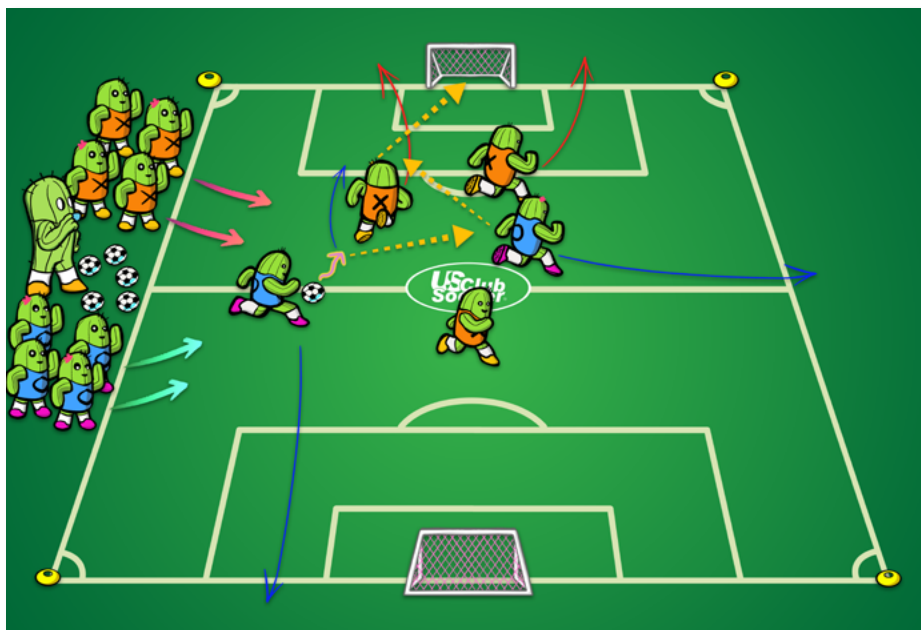
- After a game is played, switch teams around or group them appropriately by their ability level.

# Get Out of Here

## CORE ACTIVITY

**Activity Type:** Small-Sided Game  
**Equipment:** Small Goals, Balls  
**Field Space:** 15'–20' L x 10'–12' W

**Group Size:** 6+  
**Purpose(s):** Dribbling, Passing & Receiving,  
 Scoring, Defending, Cooperation,  
 Competition



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make 2 teams.
2. Make a field with a small goal on each end. The coach has all of the balls.
3. Players line up in pairs on both sides of where the coach is standing.
4. A pair from each team goes on the field.
5. They play 2v2 until a goal is scored or the ball goes off the field on either end.
6. When this happens, the coach says “get out of here!” and the players on the field run off.
7. When both pairs are off, a new pair from each team now runs onto the field.
8. The coach then passes in a new ball and the game continues.
9. Play for a set time or specific number of points.

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

### Space

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

### Time

- See which team can score in both goals the quickest. Whoever scores in both goals the quickest receives a bonus goal.

### Equipment

- If you don't have 4 small goals, use laundry baskets, sticks/poles or cones.

### 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.

# 2v2 4-Goal Game

## CORE ACTIVITY

**Activity Type:** Small-Sided Game  
**Equipment:** Small Goals or Cones, Balls  
**Field Space:** 15'-20' L x 10'-15' W

**Group Size:** 6+  
**Purpose(s):** Dribbling, Scanning,  
 Changing Direction, Scoring



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place 2 goals on each field.
2. Each team has 2 goals to attack and defend.
3. Play 2v2 for 45-60 seconds.
4. Have the extra players (subs) go on and replace someone on the field.

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

### Space

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

### Time

- Challenge them to see how long they can keep the ball from going out of bounds.

### Equipment

- Use a different size ball.
- Place a cone or a flag in the small goals to act as a barrier.

### Process

- Play "New Ball" (whenever a ball goes out, the coach(es) roll in a new one).
- Play 3v3 instead of 2v2.

# New Ball

## CORE ACTIVITY

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

**Group Size:** 6+  
**Purpose(s):** Attacking, Defending



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create 2 teams of 3–6 players each.
2. Each team attacks one goal and defends one goal.
3. Whenever the ball goes out of bounds, the coach *rolls* (keyword) a new ball in for the play to continue. *Note: the coach can either be on the field with a ball in their hands or off.*
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 of both to bring out different player actions and behaviors.

### Time

- Challenge them to see how long they can keep the ball from going out of bounds.

### Equipment

- Add another goal on each end so there is a total of 4. They attack 2 goals and defend 2 goals.

### Process

- Play with 2 balls at one time. This will help break up the “beehive.”
- If a team goes up by 3 goals, roll the new ball into their defending half OR put a player from the other team to play for the team that is down.



# The Gate Escape

## CORE ACTIVITY

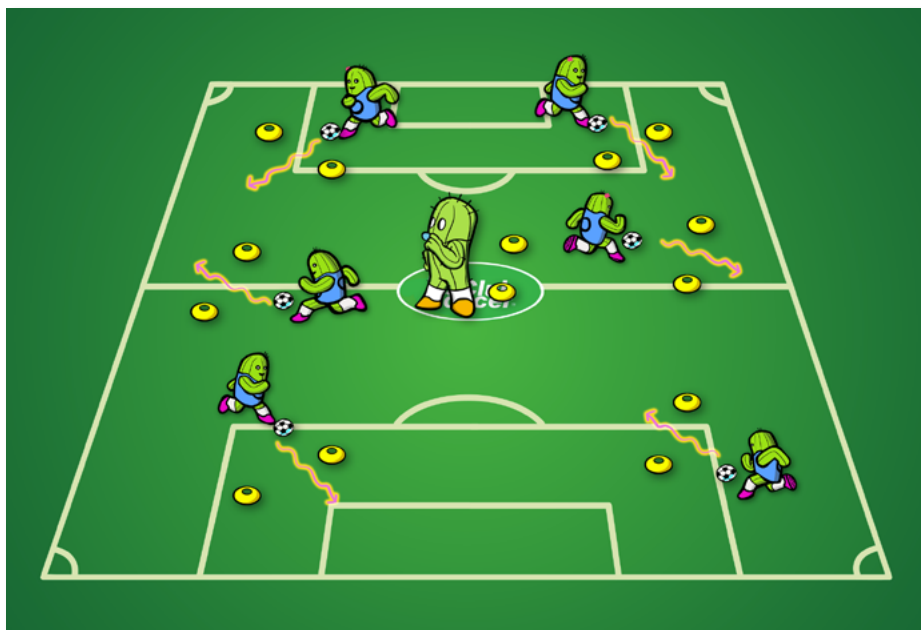
**Activity Type:** Activity

**Equipment:** Cones, Balls

**Field Space:** 25'–35' L x 20'–35' W

**Group Size:** 8+

**Purpose(s):** Dribbling, Scanning,  
Changing Direction



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make small gates (3–4 steps) apart and spread them around the field.  
*Note: Make at least one more than there are players.*
2. All of the players have a ball.
3. The coach or an approved adult is “it.” An option is to hold a pool noodle or have a pinny/bib in their hand to throw at a ball.
4. All players start in one gate. When the coach shouts “go,” “escape,” etc., they try and dribble through as many gates as time allows.
5. As they are dribbling, the coach tries to either tag them on the shoulder, touch the ball with their pool noodle or throw a penny/bib at their ball.

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

#### Space

- Make the space smaller to either make it more challenging for the escape artists.

#### Time

- Challenge the players to dribble through at least 3 different gates before time is called.

#### Equipment

- Make the gates smaller to make it more challenging to dribble between them.

#### Process

- To help understand the activity, have the players run through as many gates without the ball for 15–20 seconds. Then, have them all get their ball, and now they progress to dribbling.
- The coach walks from gate to gate. If they are in a gate, they can not dribble through.
- The coach has a pool noodle(s) in their hand and try to touch a player’s ball.
- If the players are able, pair them up and then have them pass the ball in between the gates.

# The Octopus

## CORE ACTIVITY

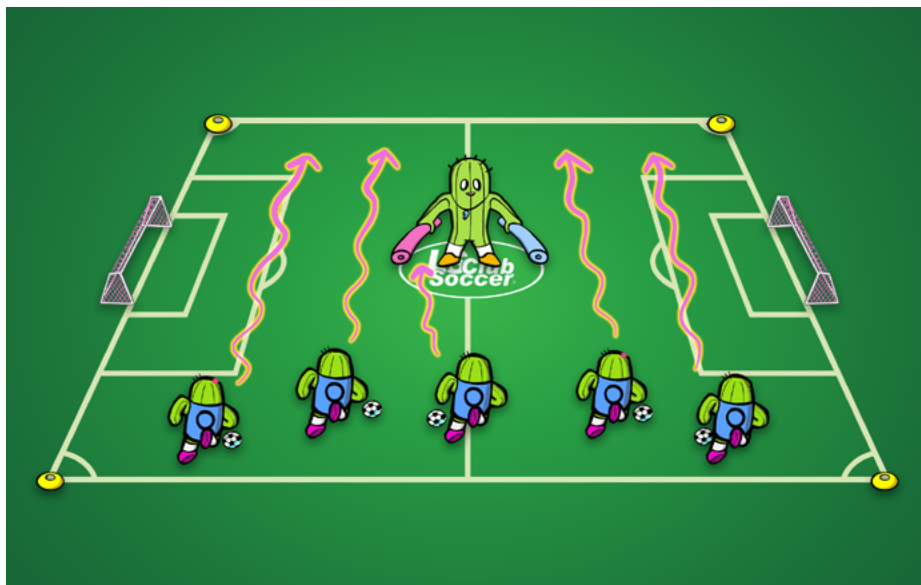
**Activity Type:** Activity

**Equipment:** Cones, Balls, 1–2 Pool Noodles

**Field Space:** 25'–35' L x 20'–35' W

**Group Size:** 8+

**Purpose(s):** Dribbling To Get Forward, Scanning



### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make one grid 20' L x 10–15' W.
2. All players have a ball and get on a line facing one direction.
3. The coach or an approved adult is “it” and has a pool noodle in each hand. They are the Octopus.
4. The “fish” (players not “it”) try to dribble their ball from one side to the other without the Octopus trying to touch their ball with one of the pool noodles.
5. If their ball gets touched, they do 3 touch ups/toe taps on the spot. When the players get to the other side, they stop.
6. The Octopus then turns around and the players go the other way.

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

#### Space

- Make the space smaller by making either shorter or more narrow.

#### Time

- The players have no more than 10 seconds to get across without being touched.

#### Equipment

- Place small cones randomly on the field. They are now asked to avoid dribbling over the cones. The cones are “seaweed.” If they touch them, then they are caught or stuck.

#### Process

- The Octopus only uses 1 pool noodle for games 1 & 2.
- After game 2, the Octopus makes it harder by now having 2 pool noodles.
- Another option is to add an extra Octopus (approved adult) who also has pool noodles.

## ***Why don't they (5-8 years) spread out?***

Children under the age of 8 haven't developed spatial awareness. The concept of time and space is still immature. The younger they are, the less capable they are of spreading out and staying in a position. The ball is their toy, and they don't like anyone playing with it. They all want to play with it. The dawn of spatial awareness occurs around 9-10 years of age.

## ***Why don't they (5-8 years) stay in their positions?***

In addition to lack of spatial awareness prior to the age of 8, categorizing information is a challenge. When they are 7 or 8, they start to categorize information. This is when they understand the idea of a position. They may not stay in those positions, but they understand what a position is or a role to play.

## ***As a best practice, why shouldn't we have them run laps before practice?***

Lose the laps! Children under the ages of 11 typically are not quite capable of aerobic capacity—the ability to run over a period of time with oxygen. When they enter the pubescent years is when they are capable of aerobic capacity. Until this time, if you have them run laps, they are simply running for running's sake. The notion that you are getting them in shape is not a reality. A coach should avoid activities without the use of a ball. There are plenty of ways to develop physical characteristics required to play soccer with the ball. They do love to run and they should be running while they are playing the game. Running shouldn't be a punishment either. Movement should be “medicine” to the mind.



## ***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](mailto: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.

