

US Club
Soccer®

FOUNDATIONAL PLAYBOOK

PRESENTED BY **DICK'S** 

**FOR COACHES OF
9-10-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.

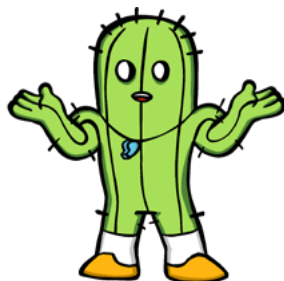


I'm excited by the impact we can have on these kids. First, we'll nurture a love for the game, and then we'll teach the fundamentals. Let's get started!

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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?

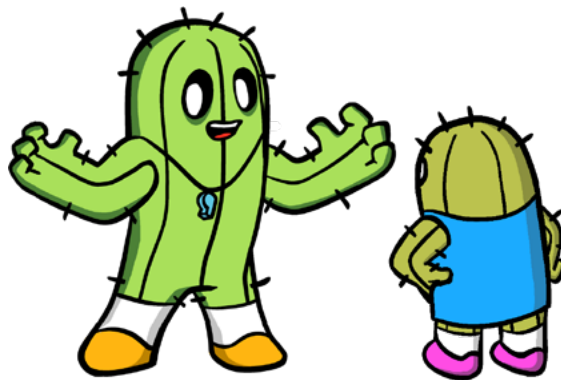
BETTER

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

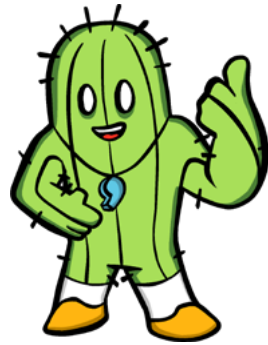
What does the best pass look like?
What does the best shot look like?
What does the best way to attack/defend look like?
How can we be the best at passing the ball?
How can we be the best teammate?

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?

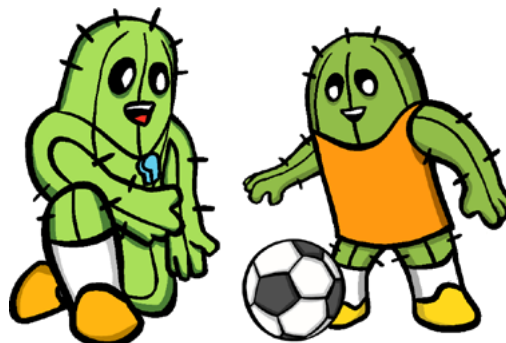
What do I say?

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



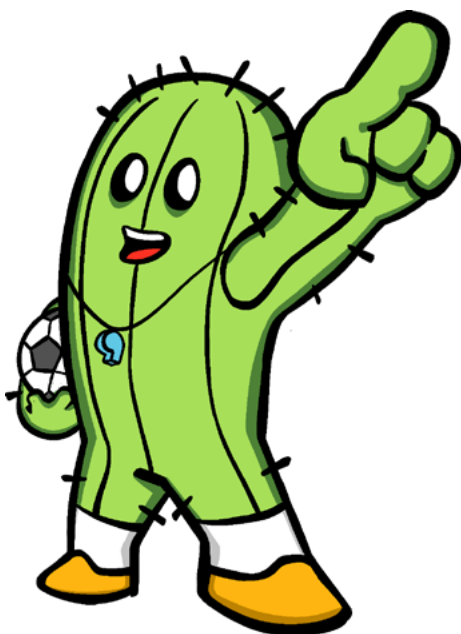
The famous basketball coach John Wooden has a quote that sums up the meaning of coaching:

"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)

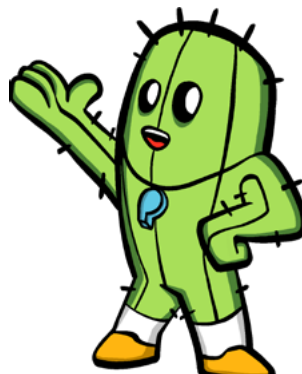
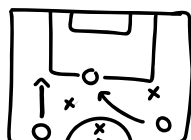
Planning practices

- 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)



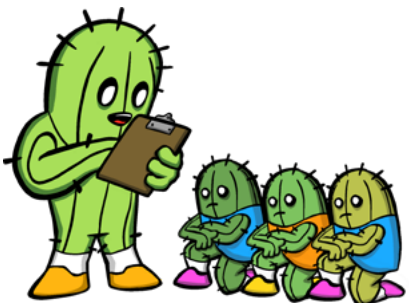
Game day management

- 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)

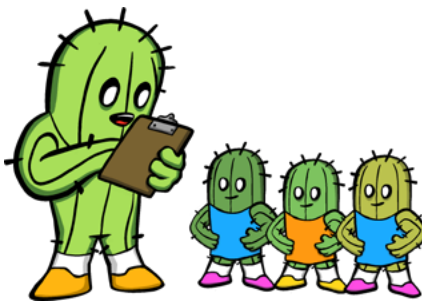


Taking a knee

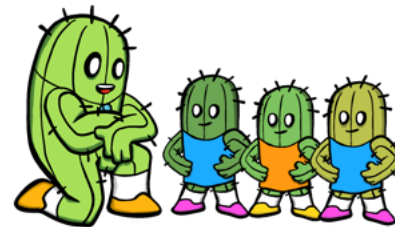
Instead of asking your players to take a knee while you stand above them, allow them to stand while *you* take a knee to get on their level.



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

Novice

- Use of bottom of foot to stop and start
- Feints and fakes to get away from an opponent
- Using the farthest foot when dribbling around an opponent
- Changing speed when dribbling

Challenge

- Feints and fakes to dribble around an opponent
- Changing speed when dribbling around an opponent
- Change of direction to set up a pass

Advanced

- Using feints and fakes at speed while dribbling around a defender
- Holding off an opponent while shielding

Passing

Novice

- Weight and accuracy of short-range passes (5–10 yards) with the inside of the foot
- Introduce passing with the outside of the foot while dribbling
- Placement of plant foot while passing
- Making eye contact with teammate when passing

Challenge

- Introduction of one-touch passing
- Introduce using the instep to make a longer pass
- Using the outside of the foot to make a 3–5 yard push pass when dribbling at an opponent

Advanced

- Passing to combine around a teammate
- Passing to set up a teammate
- Chipping a ball into space

Shooting/Striking The Ball

Novice

- Shooting while running with the ball; prep touch: ball outside the line of body
- Surface selection (instep vs. inside)
- Keeping the head and shoulders over ball for a long-range shot
- Placement of plant foot (shifting weight)

Challenge

- Shooting a rolling ball one-touch
- Shooting a ball that is rolling away (placement of plant foot is slightly ahead of ball)

Advanced

- Striking/shooting a ball after a pass from a teammate (one-touch finishing)
- Shooting across the body with instep to the far post

Receiving

Novice

- Receiving a ground pass with the inside of the foot to move forward, “keep the ball within a hula hoop of the body”
- Receiving a ground pass with the inside of the foot to move away from an opponent

Challenge

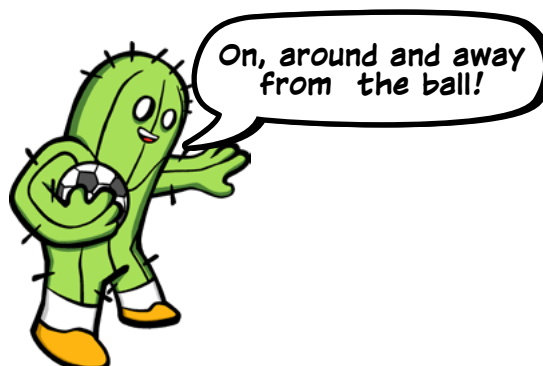
- Using the outside of the foot when receiving a ground pass
- Introduce turning and receiving a ground pass with the inside of the foot

Advanced

- Introduce turning and receiving a ground pass with the outside of the foot
- Making a feint/fake before receiving a ground pass
- Introduce receiving a bouncing ball with the feet and thighs

What do I do?

What do you teach them?



Attacking

Can you go forward? (Penetrate)

- Try to score
- Try to move the ball forward via dribbling or passing
- Can we create a 2v1 or 1v1 to penetrate?

Can we help our teammate(s)? (Support)

- Move to help the player with the ball
- Combine with teammates around the ball
- Move to draw defenders out of position

Can we go wide? (Width)

- Spread out (note: they are just learning this concept)
- Create space from side to side
- Draw defenders from out of the middle (stretch the defense)

Can we move forward or backward? (Depth)

- Create space from front to back (stretch)
- Provide options for forward passes
- Provide options for safe back passes



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

Can we win the ball back? (Pressure)

- Win the ball back as soon as you lose it
- Try to stop forward progress

Can we help out teammates win the ball back? (Cover/Support)

- Move to help defend around the ball
- Follow attackers running into dangerous spaces

Squeeze forward the ball from the sides (Balance)

- Eliminate/reduce space from side to side
- Defend space and opponents from the weak side

Squeeze toward the ball from front to back (Compactness)

- Manage the depth of the team
- Defending shape is "like a fist" as a team

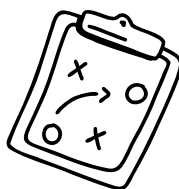


Psychological

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

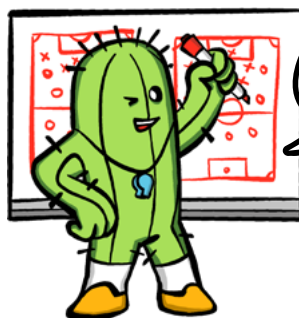
What do I do?

Possible Weekly Themes



Based on 2 practices a week, between 60–75 minutes each

PRACTICE 1				
WEEK	THEME	GAME TYPE	CORE ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
1	Dribbling to maintain possession	Small-Sided Game	The Shrinking Field	Space
2	Passing (short-range)	Keepaway	3v1	Process Equipment
3	Passing (medium-range)	Small-Sided Game	4-Goal Game	Equipment
4	1v1 Attacking	Keepaway	3v1 or	Process
		Small-Sided Game	The Shrinking Field	Space
5	Finishing/scoring	Small-Sided Game	Get Out of Here	Time
6	Outnumbering the opponent when attacking	Small-Sided Game	Field Changer	Space Time
7	Defending in the attacking half	Small-Sided Game	Angled Goals	
8	Greatest Hits Practice (let the players pick their favorite activities)			
PRACTICE 2				
WEEK	THEME	GAME TYPE	CORE ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
1	Dribbling to beat an opponent	Keepway	3v1 or	Process
		Small-Sided Game	The Shrinking Field	Space
2	Receiving	Keepaway	3v1	Process Space
3	Introduction of receiving a bouncing ball	Small-Sided Game	Street Soccer	Players do throw-ins instead of kick-ins or dribble-ins
4	1v1 Defending	Keepaway	3v1 or	Process
		Small-Sided Game	The Shrinking Field	Space
5	2v2 (attacking and/or defending)	Small-Sided Game	Get Out of Here	Space Time
6	Outnumbering the opponent when defending	Small-Sided Game	Field Changer or Angled Goals	All STEPs Equipment
7	Defending in the attacking half	Small-Sided Game	Angled Goals	
8	4v4 Festival	Small-Sided Game	4-Goal Game or Angled Goals	



CORE ACTIVITIES are located later in this document.

What do I do?

Common Language



What do I do?

Practice procedure: "BAGS"

16



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 Shrinking Field (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.

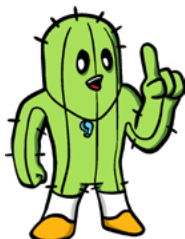
S

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?

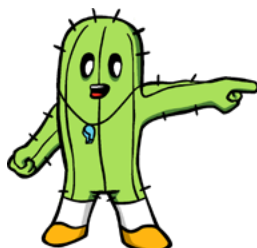
How to use the **CORE ACTIVITY** to make a full practice



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

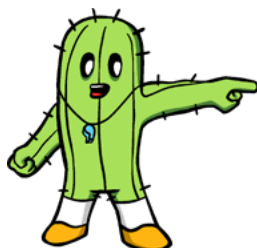
WEEK	THEME
1	Dribbling to maintain possession
2	Passing (short range)

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



CORE ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
The Shrinking Field	Space
3v1	Process or Equipment

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



ACTIVITY	SUGGESTED STEP APPLICATION
Shrinking Field	Space
	Process or Equipment



The Shrinking Field
CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-sided game
Equipment: Small goals, balls
Field Space: 25'-35' L x 20'-35' W

Group Size: B
Purpose(s): Dribbling, scoring, scanning, defending

- Two teams of 3-5 players.
- Two Goals.
- Cones laid out on the touchlines.
- Play a normal game with small goals. After 2-3 games of 2 minutes each, stop and move the cones in 3 steps.
- The players can help you. Now that the field is more narrow, play another 2-3 games of 2 minutes. After that, move the cones back out to the normal width and continue playing.

Repeat this game later or change it during using STEP:

- Learn**
 - You can move the cones in 2 steps instead of 3.
 - You can just move one side of the field in 3 steps.
 - Instead of shrinking the field width-wise, shrink it length-wise. Bring up the small goal 3-4 steps but keep the normal width.
- Flow**
 - Play longer when the field is at normal width than when it's more narrow (shrink).
- Equipment**
 - Place two goals on each end or play the 4-goal game.
- Process**
 - A goal that is scored when the field is normal width is worth 1 point. A goal that is scored when the field is narrower is worth 2 or 3 points.

US CLUB SOCCER PROPRIETARY

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).

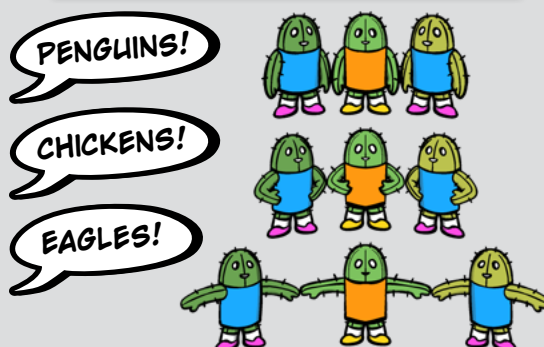
Soccer "Circle" (5 Minutes)

- 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 Shrinking Field



The Shrinking Field (Space Variation)



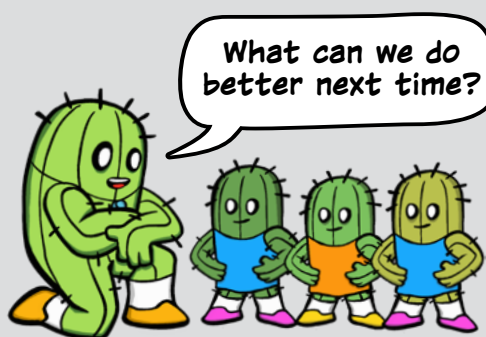
What do I do?

Sample Session Using “BAGS”

GAMES

Game Time (10–20 Minutes)

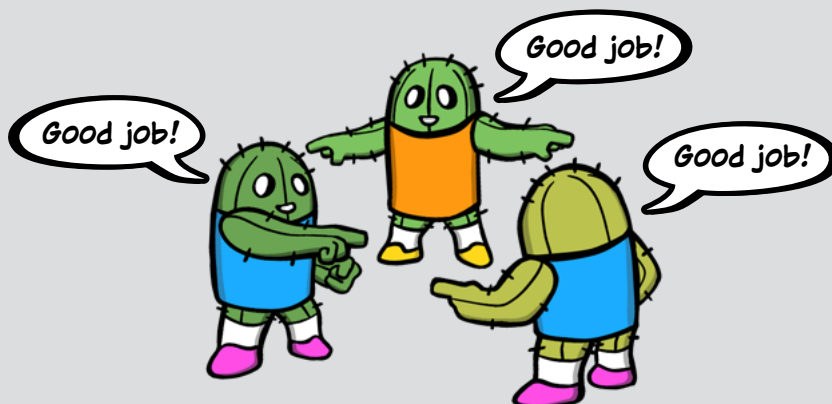
- Play the end game or “scrimmage” 3–4 times.
- An idea is to play 1 or 2 rounds then have a halftime break. During the break, ask some open-ended questions related to the theme or desired action of the practice.



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



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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

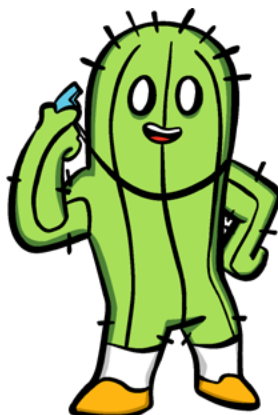
Below are a few activities that you should scan with a mobile device to see some examples of how to use STEP to modify an activity or game.



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 Shrinking Field

Space

Make the space:

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



How to apply **Space** modifier:

- You can just move one side of the field in 3 steps.
- Instead of shrinking the field width-wise, shrink it length-wise. Bring up the small goal of 3-4 steps but keep the normal width.

Time

Time can mean:

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



How to apply **Time** modifier:

- Play longer when the field is at normal width than when it's more narrow (shrunk).

Equipment

Add, reduce, modify, and/or eliminate:

- Balls
- Cones
- Flags
- Pool noodles



How to apply **Equipment** modifier:

- Place two goals on each end or play the 4-goal game.

Process

Add, change, and/or eliminate a:

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



How to apply **Process** modifier:

- A goal that is scored when the field is normal width is worth 1 point. A goal that is scored when the field is shrunk is worth 2 or 3 points.

Core Activities



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The Shrinking Field



Get Out of Here



4-Goal Game



Angled Goals



3v1



Field Changer



Street Soccer



The Shrinking Field

CORE ACTIVITY

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

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



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make 2 teams of 3–5 players.
2. Set up 2 goals.
3. Cones laid out on the touchlines.
4. Play a normal game with small goals. After 2–3 games of 2 minutes each, stop and move the cones in 3 steps.
5. The players can help you. Now that the field is more narrow, play another 2–3 games of 2 minutes. After that, you can move the cones back out to the normal width and continue playing.

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

Space

- You can move the cones in 2 steps instead of 3.
- You can just move one side of the field in 3 steps.
- Instead of shrinking the field width-wise, shrink it length-wise. Bring up the small goal of 3–4 steps but keep the normal width.

Time

- Play longer when the field is at normal width than when it's more narrow (shrunk).

Equipment

- Place 2 goals on each end or play the 4-goal game.

Process

- A goal that is scored when the field is normal width is worth 1 point. A goal that is scored when the field is shrunk is worth 2 or 3 points.

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. Create 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

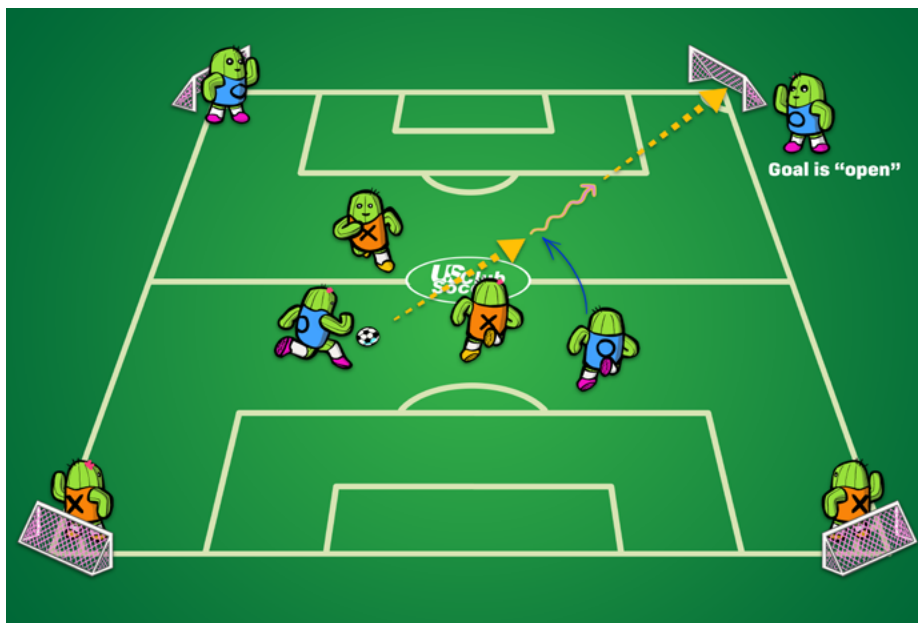
- An option is play a game to all 4 goals, so a team can score in any of the 4 goals, but they can't score in the same goal 2x in a row.

4-Goal Game

CORE ACTIVITY

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

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



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create 2 teams of 4 players each.
2. Place or make 4 small goals in each corner.
3. Each team attacks 2 goals and defends 2 goals.
4. 2 players from each team play against either 1v1 or 2v2.
5. The other 2 players from each team stand in front of the corner goals.
6. Whichever team has the ball, one player steps away from the goal. That goal is "open." The pair attempts to score in an open goal. If or when the opponent gets the ball, a player from their team does the same. Players step in and out from the goal depending on who has the ball.
7. Play for time or set amount 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

- 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

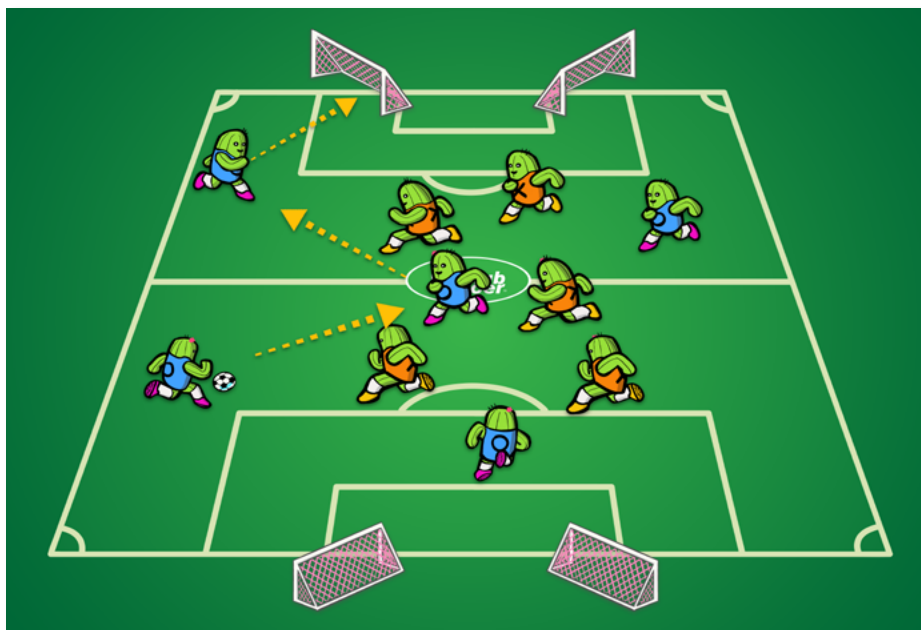
- An option is play a game to all 4 goals, so a team can score in any of the 4 goals, but they can't score in the same goal 2x in a row.

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.

3v1

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Activity

Equipment: Cones, Balls, and 1 Bib

Field Space: 25'–35' L x 20'–35' W

Group Size: 8+

Purpose(s): Dribbling, Passing & Receiving, Scanning, Defending, Transition



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make 2 grids: 10'x10', 12'x12' or 15'x15'.
2. Divide players into 2 teams.
3. Each team sends 3 players to one grid and 1 player to the other grid.
4. The team of 3 plays keep-away against the 1 defender. The only way to score is if one of the 3 players can dribble to an open line.
5. The player attempting to dribble across can opt to pass it to another attacker.
6. Each time they are successful in dribbling and stopping the ball to an open end, they get a point.
7. If the 1 defender wins the ball, they get a point for their team.

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

Space

- Make the space into a circle instead of a square. If a circle is made, then the challenge will be more on passing. Award points if they get a certain amount of passes before the defender pokes the ball out of the circle.

Time

- Play 20 second games x 2. Then, play 40-second games x 2.

Equipment

- Place a cone in the middle and the 3 players try to hit the cones that are in the middle to score instead of dribbling to an open end.

Process

- The first 1-2 games they attempt to dribble to score on the open end. Then, they score by making a certain number of passes.

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.

Street Soccer

CORE ACTIVITY

Activity Type: Small-Sided Game
Equipment: Small Goals, Cones, Balls
Field Space: Space Varies

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



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set up 1, 2, or 3 fields. Place 4–6 cones depending on the number of players you have off to the side of the fields.
2. Play anywhere from 2v2 to 4v4.
3. Play 2–3 minute games. After each game, a player goes and stands behind a new cone.
4. Before each game, the players select a cone to stand behind. Organize the players into 2 by grouping them randomly.
5. After they play the first game, tell them that they have to stand behind a different cone and have different players in front, behind, or beside them. Create new teams based on how they line up.

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

Space

- Make the fields different sizes (length and/or width).

Time

- Announce that there are 60 seconds left. Any goal from this moment is worth 2 points.

Equipment

- Use different sized balls on each field.

Process

- Make a rule that a player can't score 2 times in a row.

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.

