US YOUTH SOCCER COACHING EDUCATION
ASSISTANT COACH SERIES

U12 PRACTICE ACTIVITIES for the Parent Coach

INTRODUCTION

The Under-12 player, though still in need of technical training and playing experience, can be exposed to tactics. The U-12 coach should be careful not to go overboard with tactical training. A coach cannot invade the cranial recesses of U-12s and pour in reams of tactical information. Before describing beneficial activities for the emerging player, a discussion of tactics is in order.

What are tactics? Tactics are decisions made by players. This point warrants repetition. **Tactics are decisions made by players.** Soccer is as much a mental as a physical exercise. Tactics are the thinking part of the game.

Take for instance a grid situation of 4 v 2. Obviously all the players should be thinking, but the conceptual approach of each group must be different. The group of four players should think and play quickly while the group of two must attempt to slow the pace of the game.

Of course, breakdowns in concentration will occur during these sessions. This is to be expected. A coach must recognize whether the breakdown stemmed from a technical error or a bad tactical decision.

This book presents 20 training sessions for U-12 players in which technical training with tactical implications is emphasized. A U-12 coach must create an environment in which players can play and think. Be especially careful not to give all the answers during training sessions. Although players may take a longer time to find solutions to various tactical situations, lessons learned independently are far more effective. A coach benefits his team more by raising good questions and not providing all the answers.

Each of the following sessions includes stretching because of its fundamental relationship to physical performance on the field. The stretching is dynamic, which means players move while extending various parts of their bodies to a comfortable limit and hold the position. The players should hold the position for about 15 to 20 seconds, then shake out loosely and repeat the same stretch. Players should move about before stretching in order to stimulate their blood flow. Remember, the older the player and the colder the weather, the more stretching should be done. Regardless of age or weather, a 6-year-old in Florida should stretch in July for no other reason than that it's a good athletic habit.

Learn more about Small-Sided Games at
www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/SmallSidedGames/

SESSION 1 | Receiving and passing

ACTIVITIES

Warm-up (5-8 Minutes)

A. Each player must kick his ball into the air, receive it and change direction with a dribble. This is done on the coach's count. Depending upon the ability of your players, the count will be short or long.

B. Same as above, except the players must dribble 10 yards or get to the nearest line on the field after receiving the ball.

C. This one takes partner cooperation. Two players with one ball. The player with the ball knocks it into the air. The other player receives it and passes it immediately back to the first player who dribbles 10 yards or to the nearest line. Make this one a competition if you wish.

D. Take the above activity to a situation for groups of three or four using various conditions to challenge the players.

E. Be sure to stretch at varying intervals during the warm-up. Players should become more responsible for their own stretching.

Technical Emphasis (Receiving and Passing)

A. A coach plays a ball into an area of two or three players. The players control the ball and pass it to each other so that every player touches it at least twice.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-up (5-8 minutes)

A. Encourage players to move and visually track the ball at the same time.

B. Observe the execution of receiving and dribbling.

C. Players should select a player to receive their pass when the ball is in the air.

D. Activities as sophisticated or as realistic as the situation dictates.

E. Players should be able to stretch all body parts.

Technical Emphasis

A. Observe the player's touch in both passing and receiving.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Same as above, only now after a player plays in the ball they become a defender trying to disrupt the passes.

B. Take this same activity to goal, using different numbers of attackers and defenders.

Group Activity (Tactics - Decisions)

A. Divide the number of players into two teams. Play on half field in a space that would challenge the skill level. A team must complete four, five or six passes before they shoot on goal. Each time a team loses possession the pass count begins again.

COACHING POINTS

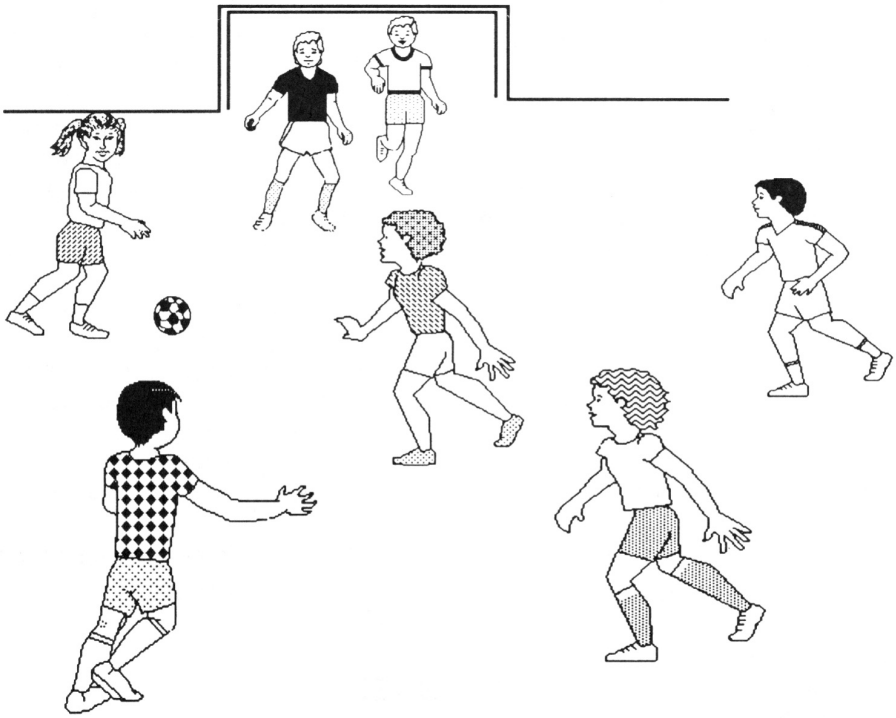
Small-Sided Games

A. See which players use the proper pass to get out of trouble.

B. Encourage players to shoot when the opportunity arises.

Group Activity

A. Look for good choices on the part of the players. See which players move without the ball (indicates thinking when and where movement).



SESSION 2 | Dribbling

ACTIVITIES

Warm-up (5-8 minutes)

A. Have each player dribble at his own pace in a large area. On a given signal he must dribble with the instep (laces), bottom of foot, inside or outside of foot. Make sure the players practice with both feet. Slow the pace at first, and then accelerate the speed.

B. Players are told to dribble about in the center circle with feet. At the coach's signal, the players must run as quickly as possible to get out of the circle. They must maintain ball control.

C. Stretch at varying intervals. Ask different players to give an example of various body part stretches. "Bobby, give us a lower leg stretch. Jimmy, how about an upper body stretch."

D. Without a ball, have players dribble in an area in slow motion. In this instance, the slowest is the best. Accelerate the activity to full speed. Introduce the ball.

Technical Emphasis (Dribbling)

A. Half the players have balls and take on other players who defend passively. After a short time, switch roles. Accelerate defensive pressure and confine the playing space.

B. Break out into half field playing 1 v 1 and working toward the coach who is moving around on the half field.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-up (5-8 minutes)

A. Check for players that are dribbling with their heads up. Encourage the touch of the ball rather than watching the ball.

B. Challenge players to be as creative as possible with their dribbling. "Straight line dribbling is boring."

C. Make sure the examples given are proper. If they are not, correct them.

D. Observe the body control and creativity of players.

Technical Emphasis

A. Players must play with vision so they don't bump into each other.

B. Now it is clear who wants to work and who is hanging out.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Move into a grid and play 3 v 3 with the condition that the players may not pass until they have made a successful dribble. Taking someone on and beating them earns big time points.

B. Take the above activity to goals located at the end of the grid with the condition that a player must take on and beat an opponent before shooting on goal.

Group Activity (Tactics - Decisions)

A. Divide the team in half and set up as many as six or eight small sized goals randomly about the field. Condition: that no attempts may be made on goal until one of your team has successfully beaten an opponent. A player may only score by dribbling through the goal.

COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. The coach acts as the referee and gives points for exceptional dribbling.

B. Balls can be rolled in by hand if accurate passing is difficult for the outside players. Change roles regularly.

Group Activity

A. Be particularly aware of the manner in which your player makes decisions (i.e. a crowded goal means go to another one). Look for good decisions and individual tactics.

SESSION 3 | Heading

ACTIVITIES

Warm-up (5-8 minutes)

A. Players move about in an unrestricted area tossing their ball in the air and heading it to themselves.

B. Continue by accelerating the speed of movement and the number of times the ball must be headed.

C. Stretch once the players are moving with an increased heart rate.

D. Have each player roll his ball on the ground, then run to it, stop and turn with it in the least number of touches.

Technical Emphasis (Heading)

A. As in the above activities, each player tosses the ball in the air, heads it twice and then heads it to another player.

B. In groups of three or four, players try to keep the headed ball alive. Condition - that no player can head the ball more than once before each of the other players head it.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-up (5-8 minutes)

A. Look for eyes open and mouths closed.

B. See which players display confidence while moving.

C. Let one or two players direct the stretching.

D. Efficient players do this with one touch. Let them experiment. Encourage vision while not in possession of the ball.

Technical Emphasis (Heading)

A. At first the balls will be all over the place, but they'll solve it. As soon as two players do it correctly, stop the session and praise them.

B. Create a competition between groups of players. Encourage groups to move as they head the ball.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Using Small-Sided Games teams (3 v 3 or 4 v 4), play to a goal by hand passing to the head. Points are awarded for heading balls properly while progressing toward the goal. A grand slam is a goal scored from a headed ball.

Group Activity (Tactics - Decisions)

A. Divide the players into two teams and play on half field with emphasis on completing a headed pass or scoring a goal with a head ball.

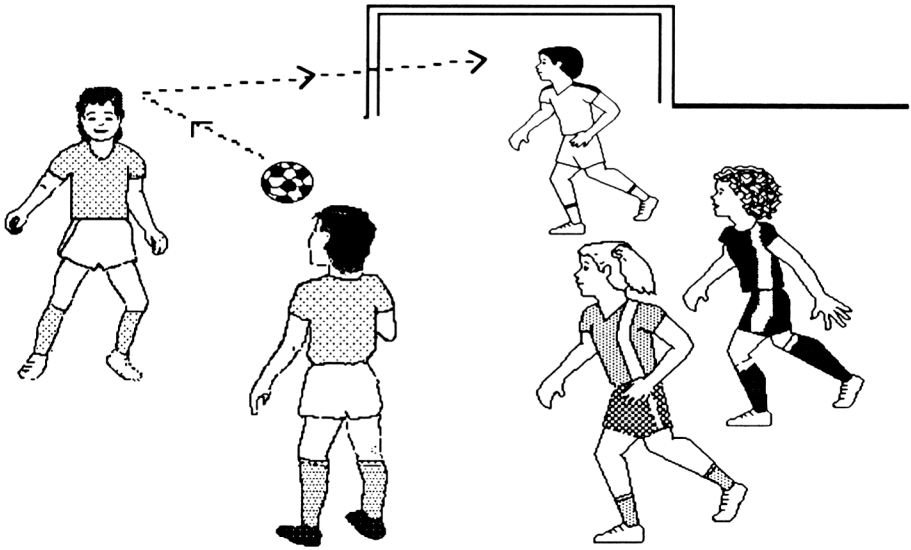
COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. Since this is a game situation, tactics will be employed. Though emphasis is on heading, watch the choices made by the players.

Group Activity

A. Watch for players who move to receive a headed pass. Successful passing indicates good decisions. Stop the play to praise players for sound tactical choices.



SESSION 4 | Shooting

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (5-8 minutes)

A. Have players jog inside the penalty box while juggling their ball in the air and catching it with their hands. When a player's name is called, the player immediately plays the ball with his feet and takes a shot on goal.

B. With half of the players behind the goal, the other half tries to chip balls from varying distances in an attempt to hit the cross bar. This should be done in a given time period (two minute segments) to create a competition between the two groups. One condition for the team retrieving the balls is that they must get the ball back in ten seconds or the shooting team gets a point.

C. At any time during the above warm-up activities, the coach calls out stretch and all the players respond with an individual stretch.

Technical Emphasis (Shooting)

A. Each player has a ball in his hand and lines up approximately 12 yards from the goal line facing the coach who stands near the 18 yard line. When the coach points to a player, that player responds by hand passing the ball to the coach. In turn, the coach throws the ball over the player's head. The player must shoot on goal before the ball takes a third bounce.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-Up (5-8 minutes)

A. Observe the time that it takes players to shoot. The goal scorers are those who get shots off quickly.

   Shots on goal need not be pretty to get results.

B. Chipping a ball properly requires the player to extend and strike below the middle of the ball.

C. Make players responsible for their own stretching.

Technical Emphasis

A. Observe the placement of the non-striking foot. Poor placement of this foot can often be the reason for missed shots. Encourage full and half volleys. Low full volleys must be praised.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Four attacking players in the box play against two defenders and a goalkeeper. The coach has a number of balls at his feet and serves them to various places in the box. The object is for the players to hit the best shot possible in the shortest period of time.

B. Same as above, but with two attackers against four defenders. It is far more difficult to score, but it can be done.

Group Activity (Tactics Decisions)

A. Bring the large goals to the distance of 20 yards apart. Have four field players on each team with a goalkeeper in each net. Since the emphasis is on shooting, the players are limited to only one or two touches. Good goalkeeper service is imperative for success in this activity.

COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. Passes to open space allow for the best shots on goal.

Quickness in shot release is vital. The decision to shoot on goal must be considered before the player receives the ball.

Group Activity

A. If the player's hips are facing the goal, there is a good chance that the shot will be on goal.

SESSION 5 | Game Night

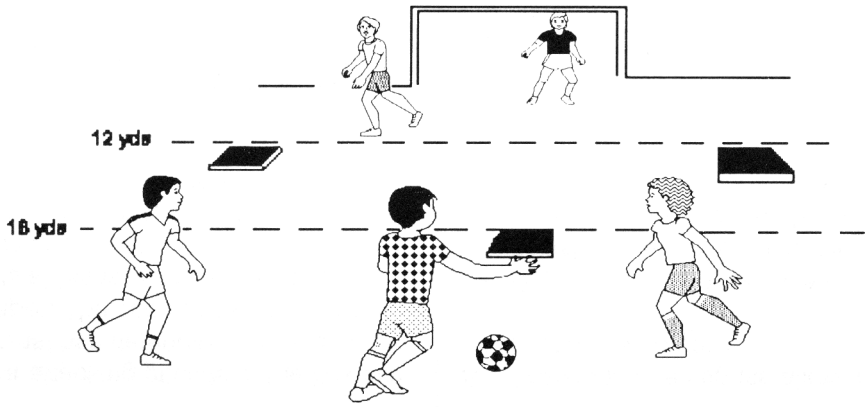
Sometimes a formal approach to training the players just doesn't work. In fact, there are times when some of the best thought out and prepared sessions just don't seem to fit. Let's say it is the middle of the season and the team has done particularly well, or for that matter, not well at all. Why should the coach worry about making the team wildly enthused about training? Why must the coach be the mid-season drill sergeant? Coach, it is time for Game Night. Some of these training games are directly related to soccer while others only have implications for soccer. These are four of hundreds of soccer related games that a coach can present to players for their development and their enjoyment. Emphasize player participation and fun.

Game 1: Soccer Golf

This game is played in pairs. Each player has a ball. The first player strikes his ball as far in any direction as he wishes. The ball must stay on the ground. When the first player's ball stops, the second player has two shots to hit the first player's ball. If he hits the first player's ball, then he receives one point and he serves the next ball. If the player who is shooting at the ball misses, he receives no points and must play his ball away. The first player to get five points wins! Players with low golf handicaps should be paired accordingly.

Soccer Implication - Observe the players' ability to strike a long ground ball and the players' ability to strike a ball with accuracy.

Game 2: Soccer Baseball



The player striking or batting the ball must keep the ball between first and third base for a fair ball. Once a batting player strikes the ball, he must round all the bases and get home before one of the field players shoots the ball from outside the 18-yard line and scores a goal.

One strike and a miss is an out. Two fouls is an out. Three outs constitute half an inning. The coach is the pitcher. The catcher plays the ball back across the 18-yard line if it misses the goal.

If the level of the team warrants, the players on the field must receive and control the ball with no hands. If the team is not able to compete with that condition let them use their hands.

Game 3: Soccer Volleyball

This game is played over any straight line on the training field. The game is played with all body parts except the hands. One or two bounces per side are permitted depending on the technical level of the players. Score is kept similar to volleyball in that a team must have the serve to score a point.

Coaching Points - Observe the players who receive the ball with proper cushion and those who strike the ball with accurate pace and direction. (Composure, vision, communication)

Game 4: Soccer World Cup

Divide the players into groups of three, four or five on a team. Each team is gathered around the goal in the penalty area. The coach has all the balls at his feet and controls the start and direction of play. One team plays with a goalkeeper and may not leave the line. The other team attempts to score goals. A goal is scored when the last touch before the ball crosses the line is made by a team member.

Example - Teams on the field are U.S.A., Brazil, Italy, Germany and Scotland. A shot is taken by Brazil and bounces off an Italian player and is finally netted by a player from the U.S.A. U.S.A. scores and their team leaves the field. The last team to leave the field now defends the goal and points are tallied.

Coaching Points - The implications are far from subtle. The game is won by the team which scores the most goals. The World Cup game focuses on game-winning situations and scoring under pressure.

SESSION 6 | Striking

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (5-8 minutes)

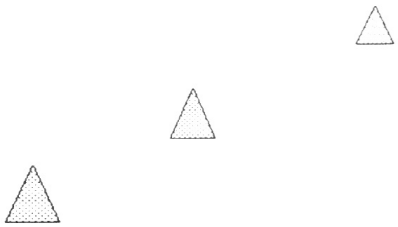
A. Players try to hit the other players with shots. Like a game of tag, when a player is hit, he is "it" and tries to hit someone else. Confine the space to the center circle or the goal area. Players may only hit below the waist.

B. After the players have moved about for a bit, have them stretch.

C. Move half of the group outside the circle and play soccer dodge ball. Players in the center must hop rather than run in this warm-up activity.

Technical Emphasis (Striking)

A. Set up targets in various places using half the field. The players begin one at a time to hit the targets while on the move.



Small-Sided Games

A. Play 3 v 1 in a confined space. The player in the middle is sitting and not trying to win the ball from the other three, but rather is the target for the other three to hit. The player in the middle may not leave the ground in his attempts to avoid being hit.

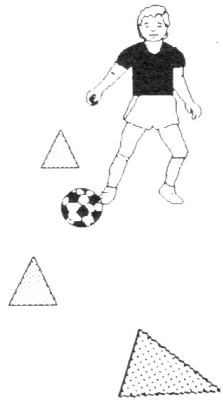
COACHING POINTS

Warm-Up (5-8 minutes)

A. Look for players with fast feet trying to escape being hit. Encourage players with the ball to make fakes before striking the ball at someone. Players who properly strike the ball get the best results in this game (caution, don't blast).

Technical Emphasis

A. Observe how fluidly the players accommodate going from the dribble to striking the ball.



Small-Sided Games

A. See if the players figure out that trying to strike the target directly doesn't always get the best result. Perhaps a pass or two may get the job done.

ACTIVITIES

A. Add to the above activity by using as many as three players in the middle and five on the outside. Make the space smaller and allow only two touch if you wish to have players execute more efficiently.

Group Activity
(Tactics - Decisions)

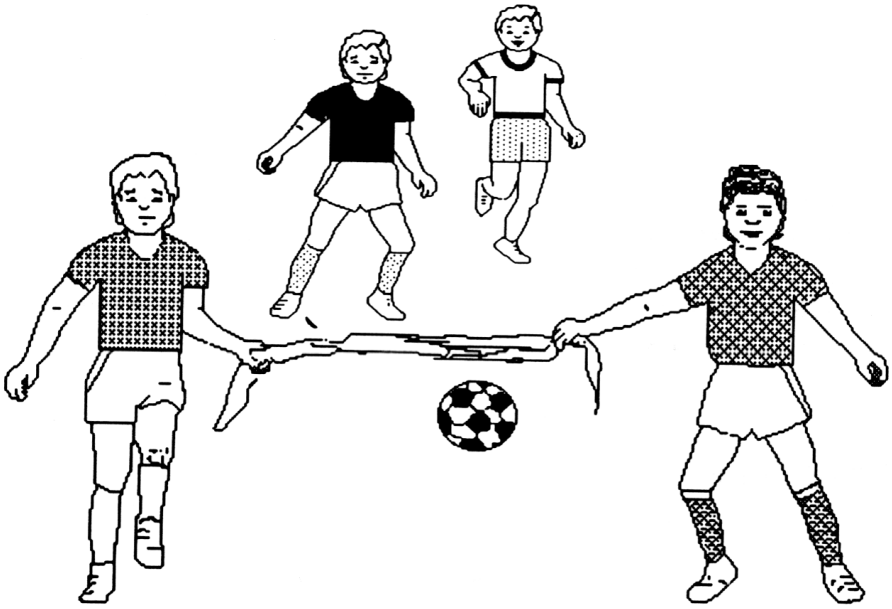
A. All players except two play on the same half of the field. The two players become the moving goal. These players take the opposite ends of a large bath towel or a pool noodle stretched out fully as they run. With one or two balls, the rest of the players try to score by striking a ball between the players and under the towel. For more changes, add another goal.

COACHING POINTS

A. A properly struck ball is essential for success.

Group Activity

A. Players must strike a moving ball accurately to score in this game. The coach can readily observe correct pass selection. With two goals moving about, the players must play with their heads up and look for more complex decision-making.



SESSION 7

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (8-10 minutes)

A. Assign four or five players to a group. Each group forms a circle about five yards in diameter. The groups have a ball and players jog in place. As soon as a player passes a ball to another in his group, he makes some kind of move (i.e. touches his knee, puts one hand over his head, touches his ear, jumps in the air, touches the ground, etc.). The receiving player must duplicate the action before he gets the ball and he must make another action as soon as he passes to another player.

B. Stretch.

C. Change the conditions of the activity by making the circle larger, but permitting only one or two touch. Players use correct throw-ins rather than foot passes.

Small-Sided Games

A. Have players participate in a 2 v 1 activity within a 10 by 10 yard grid using their hands to pass. Passes may not be made over the head of the defending player.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-up

A. Here coordination, agility, flexibility and mental quickness all play a part. Make this as competitive as you wish. Three mistakes and a player must run around his circle three times.

B. Designate a group in charge of four or five different kind of stretches.

C. Be certain to challenge illegal throw-ins.

Small-Sided Games

A. Place the emphasis of your observations and concern upon the decisions made during the activities. By not allowing passes over the defender's head, the player without the ball must move. Once the players seem to be making good decisions while using their hands, go to the feet.

ACTIVITIES

B. Take the above activity to feet with no conditions while still playing keep away.

C. Using the same three players in a slightly larger grid. Put the ball in the hands of one of the players and tell him to keep it away from the other two. He will only lose it if he is tagged while in possession of the ball.

D. Make the grid larger and use 3 v 2 groups of players.

Group Activity

A. Divide the team in half and play to half-field goals. Though a point is scored for a goal, also award points for good tactical decisions. This activity can be done with hand passes first, then feet. This game can be played with or without goalkeepers depending on the conditions for scoring goals and the size and placement of goals.

COACHING POINTS

C. Place value in keeping the ball away from the defender as long as possible.

Group Activity

A. Stop the play and congratulate good decisions. Commending players in training can lead to excellent game results.

SESSION 8 | Receiving Air Balls

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (8-10 minutes)

A. This session is an individual ball gymnastic warm-up. At different intervals, the coach should stop the gymnastics and have a stretch.

Examples of ball gymnastics activities are:

1. Players roll a figure eight on the ground using their hands to push the ball around spread ankles. First right to left, then left to right.

2. Switch to moving the ball around one ankle, then the other ankle.

3. With two hands holding the ball behind the back, have players toss the ball over their heads and catch it in their hands without moving their feet.

4. In pairs, one player lies on the ground and the other player stands at his head. The player on the ground raises the ball pressed between his ankles and the standing player grabs the ball then runs around to place it between the other player's feet before they get to the ground.

5. At a one-yard distance, players facing away from each other must hand pass the ball to each other by turning right and left or over and under. Accelerate the speed of the activity after the players get the idea.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-Up (8-10 minutes)

A. Ball gymnastics are designed to promote flexibility, coordination, ball touch and ball confidence.

- Be sure that the players become fluid in their body movement.

- Though some of these activities are handed, the emphasis is on body flow and movement.

- Right and left-sided activities help soccer players in their development.

- Body speed can also be accomplished in ball gymnastics.

ACTIVITIES

Technical Emphasis (Receiving Air Balls)

A. Have a player hand pass balls (or foot if capable) to a second player who must receive the ball and touch it to the third player. After a series of successful executions, have the third player move so the receiving player must first find him and then pass. At no time may the ball touch the ground.

B. Same as above. The first player must make a leg touch (thigh or foot), then play the ball to the upper body of the second player who in turn must one touch the ball to the original server.

Small-Sided Games

A. Divide the players into groups of five. Four players must keep the ball alive while one-player runs around the outside of the group. Each time he returns to his starting point without the ball touching the ground, a point is awarded. The first teams to have five players run successfully wins.

B. Same as the above, but specific body parts are designated to keep the ball in the air.

Group Activity

A. Divide the players into two groups and play on half the field with a goal at each end. Using hand passes, give points for players who successfully receive the ball. If a player with the ball is tagged, the ball goes over. Points are also scored if a player receives a ball and heads it into the goal.

COACHING POINTS

Technical Emphasis

A. If the first touch has proper cushion, then success is likely.

Look for the player without the ball anticipating the play.

Observe the touch and especially the timing of the off player.

The object should be to keep the ball off the ground.

Small-Sided Games

A. A team game with cooperation gets results.

B. Observe technique and the decisions made by the players.

Group Activity

A. In this game the coach must reward players who anticipate the play and get in proper position.

Who really cares who wins in this situation? How they play is what counts. Vision counts as well as assessing your environment.

SESSION 9 | Dribbling

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (8-10 minutes)

A. Without a ball, all the players line up and follow the coach's directions. The directions are:
   1. Lie down on your back.
   2. Sit up.
   3. Lay on your belly.
   4. On your knees.
   5. Stand up.

B. After several repetitions of these movements, have the players stretch.

C. Same as the above, only now have the players perform the same movements with the ball in their hands.

D. Again, same as the above, now have the players perform with the ball between their feet.

Technical Emphasis (Dribbling)

A. At the coach's direction, the players dribble with various parts of their body. Coach calls right knee and players must dribble with their right knee. Coach calls bottom of left foot and players must dribble accordingly.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-up

A. These are reaction type activities with body coordination and flexibility as the important objectives.

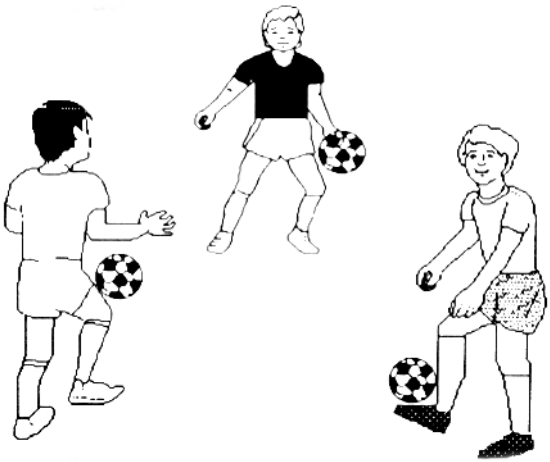
B. Observe the fluid motion of the body parts.

C. See what adjustments in coordination change with the ball in the player's hands.

D. See what adjustments in coordination change with the ball between the player's feet.

Technical Emphasis

A. Observe not only those that respond first, but those players that often respond last.



ACTIVITIES

A. Same as the above, with players doing the activity in the center circle, goalkeeper box or any confined area. When the coach calls the body part, the last player out of the area must juggle five times to get back in the game and the first player out is given success points.

Small-Sided Games

A. Create a dribbling game in which points are awarded for the various number of body parts used (hands not allowed) by a particular player while in control of the ball.

Group Activity
(Tactics - Decisions)

A. Create a full field activity with only five players per team including a goalkeeper. This may seem particularly punitive because the space is so large, but those players who are really thinking about the game will know enough not to give up the ball. Dribbling in this game is an imperative. Goals count as five points since the players are limited in number.

COACHING POINTS

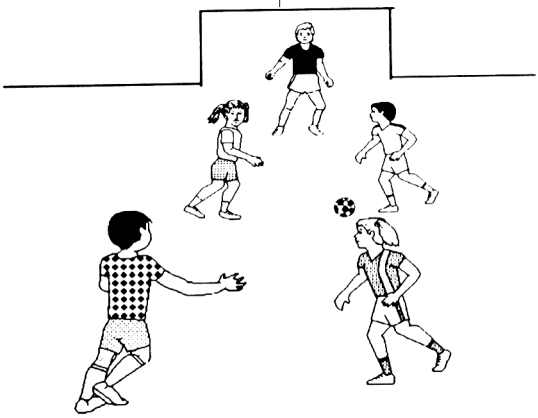
A. By upgrading the activity, players having trouble will get worse. This is no problem. Expect it. Keep an eye on those battling to get out of the confinement.

Small-Sided Games

A. This is an individual competitive game in which creative moves get results for the players. Observe and reward.

Group Activity

A. In this instance there will be times to run quickly with the ball and other times to settle down and hold that ball. Observe the above and praise players when appropriate.



SESSION 10 | Small-Sided Games

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (8-10 minutes)

A. Form groups of four in which each group must keep a ball moving on the ground with their feet.

B. Each group must maintain one touch passing.

C. Same as the above, but keep the ball in the air with heads.

D. Raise the level of difficulty by having three players put the ball on the ground while the fourth player must play it in the air to begin again.

E. Stretch when the heart rate of the players is accelerated.

Small-Sided Games

A. Create a 20 by 20 yard grid in which the players must play 4 v 0. The game is a matter of efficient ball movement without technical breakdown.

B. Progress from 4 v 0 to 3 v 1 and allow the players to play in a grid with no restrictions. This is a keep away or monkey in the middle situation.

C. Switch and give the ball to the single player, allowing him to play 1 v 3. See how long he can keep the ball.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-up

A. Look for players that keep the ball on the ground and assist them.

B. Try this at walking speed at the outset. As players become more successful, quicken the pace.

C. Observe proper heading technique; eyes open and striking the ball with the forehead.

Small-Sided Games

A. Playing against an imaginary opposition can make for creative play. Have each player imagine getting away from a defender.

B. By adding real defenders, play with break down.

C. Observe if the breakdowns are technical or tactical.

ACTIVITIES

Group Activity

A. Play 4 v 4 in a group championship in which the team that wins games (across field) advances to the next game. Do not, however, let those teams who have lost, lose faith or think the tournament is over.

COACHING POINTS

Group Activity

A. Sometimes in game situations a coach can pick out the most competitive players on the team. These players may not be the best players, but all teams need competitive players. Often through the enthusiasm of these players, the level of play from other players is raised.

SESSION 11 | Individual Skill

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (8-10 minutes)

A. Mix juggling, stretching and strengthening exercises (i.e. push-ups on the ball, sit-ups holding the ball, etc.).

Technical Emphasis (Individual Skill)

A. Run players through an obstacle course that emphasizes individual skill. The following is just one example to use your imagination.

In half field:

1. Dribble through six cones that are spread wide apart to force change of direction.
2. Using three small hurdles pass the ball under and jump over each one. Dribble around a corner flag to the middle of the field.
3. Set up three jumping cords not more than eight inches off the ground. Players jump two footed side to side and forward and back over the cord (10 times each).
4. Sprint-dribble back and forth between two lines 10 yards apart. Emphasize turning the ball with the inside, outside and bottom of the foot.
5. Dribble on through six tight markers in a straight line.
6. Dribble around the corner flag, back to the middle of the field, and shoot on goal.

   Rest and then repeat an appropriate number of times. Alternate directions around the course to stress development of both sides.

COACHING POINTS

Technical Emphasis

A. This type of training will enhance skill development and fitness in a game oriented activity.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Set up as many small playing areas as needed for all to play 2 v 2. Play for two minutes, change opponents and play again. Repeat five to eight times.

Group Activity

A. Divide into two teams and play in a restricted area. Instruct players to use only their weak foot. Play the game for 10-15 minutes and then allow them to play normal, unrestricted soccer for the balance of the training session.

COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. Play and learn.

Group Activity

A. Non-dominant side development.

SESSION 12 | Receiving

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (5-8 minutes)

A. Arrange players in pairs with one ball. Alternate between stretching, juggling with a partner, and playing soccer tag.

B. When the chaser tags the dribbler, the roles reverse (chaser becomes the dribbler).

C. Alternate the activities every minute. Repeat the series two or three times. This variety will get the players mentally and physically ready to train.

Technical Emphasis (Receiving)

A. Use a server and receiver with one ball in a defined area. The receiver executes a technique and then to another server. The techniques could involve:

1. Playing the ball back with the inside of the foot.
2. Playing the ball back with the instep (shoelaces).
3. Heading the ball back.
4. Receiving with chest and playing the ball back with the inside of the foot.
5. Receiving with the head and playing the ball back with the instep.
6. Receiving with the foot and chipping the ball back.

Alternate roles about every minute. Keep the activity intense.

COACHING POINTS

Technical Emphasis

A. Repetition of these skills in motion is critical for players to feel comfortable with the ball under game pressures.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Set up one or two 20-25 yard grids, depending on player numbers. Play 2 v 2 in the grid with four perimeter players as support. Outside players alternate with inside players every 60-90 seconds.

Group Activity

A. Using two teams and half the field, play around a three-sided goal. Teams may score from any side. The goalkeeper should distribute the ball in order to cause a confrontation.

COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. Playing 2 v 2 begins to teach the art of combination play. Wall passing, overlapping runs, take-over should all be practiced.

Group Activity

A. Players learn to attack from all angles.

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up (8-10 minutes)

In a confined area, each player has a ball.

A. Players dribble in and out of each other while changing direction and speed.

B. Players jog in and out of each other with a ball in hand until they make eye contact with another player. At that instant they should exchange balls and move off to exchange with someone else.

C. Continue as above with half as many balls as players. Players with a ball must find a player without a ball and allow him to take it over. A takeover occurs when one player with the ball dribbles at another and leaves for him to take in the opposite direction.

Technical Emphasis (Shooting)

In groups of three, with one on either side of a goal and a goalkeeper in the (5 yd.) goal, players take a variety of shots through the goal (i.e. shoot back and forth).

A. Work on stationary drives for power and accuracy.

B. Ask players to strike moving balls at goal.

C. Ask players to receive the ball and beat an imaginary defender before shooting on goal.

D. Invent different shooting situations.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Play 3 v 2 with a goalkeeper to a full size goal using half field. The goalkeeper initiates play. Change roles regularly. Use color differentiation of attackers and defenders. Keep each group together.

Group Activity

A. In pairs, players remain in contact with each other as they move up and down the field playing soccer. Players can each hold a shirt or a piece of twine or something that does not bind them but keeps them together. If the bond is broken the players are penalized.

COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. Possession skills combined with finishing.

Group Activity

A. Fun and Cooperation

SESSION 14 | Heading

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up

Bring a tennis ball for each player.

A. Start with basic stretching.

B. Introduce the tennis ball and explain how its use can enhance ball skills.

1. Have players dribble in and out of each other with the tennis balls in a confined area. Use the inside, outside and bottom of the foot.
2. Remove two or three balls. The players who don't have a ball should attempt to gain possession. When a player loses his ball, he should try to steal another one.
3. Ask players to drop the ball from their hands and play it back with the instep. If this can be done ask them to strike the ball twice. Increase the number of touches as ability increases.
4. In pairs, ask players to pass back and forth with the inside of the foot. Add movement

Technical Emphasis (Heading)

A. In threes, ask player A to serve a ball by hand to player B who heads the ball to player C. C plays the ball back to A who repeats by serving to C who heads to B. Repeat, changing the middle player regularly.

COACHING POINTS

A. This is a different warm-up that aids the development of fine touch and better ball control.

Technical Emphasis

A. High repetition of heading techniques is critical. If possible, use a slightly deflated ball.

ACTIVITIES

A. In threes, set up in an area with one player in a small goal and a player on other side, approximately 5 yards away from the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper serves by hand to either player. The player must then attempt to score by heading the ball past the goalkeeper. Rotate from header to goalkeeper each time. Keep heading.

B. Set up two lines approximately 18 yards from the goal. Use a goalkeeper server next to each goal post. Server A throws to line player A who heads on goal. Server B then serves to line player B. Make it competitive by keeping score.

Small-Sided Games

A. Set up four 15 yd grids, which is part of a larger grid. Grid borders touch one another.

1. Play 2 v 2 for possession in each. Change opponents every minute.
2. Use only one ball with all four grids. The object is for each team to possess the ball in their own grid and pass it to a teammate in any of the other grids. Team color differentiation is critical.

Group Activity

A. Divide into two teams and play unrestricted soccer in an appropriately sized area. Let them play!!

COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. Possession and decisions are the main point of this organization. Vision and environment awareness a must.

Group Activity

A. Play and learn.

SESSION 15 | Chipping

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up

A. For ball gymnastics, start with basic stretching. Each player has a ball.

1. Each player passes the ball back and forth between the inside of his right and left foot as fast as possible.
2. Player jumps side to side over his ball (10-20 times).
3. Player jumps front and backwards over the ball.
4. Player throws the ball up and as it bounces goes under it.
5. Player throws the ball up and controls it with the right foot, left foot, right thigh, left thigh, chest, head, etc.

   Repeat these and other such exercises over and over.

Technical Emphasis (Chipping)

A. In threes, player A chips over player C to player B. Instruct players to drive the instep under the ball in order to lift it. Change middle player regularly.

B. Chip over the coach/player. Form two lines, one chips over the coach/player to the other line, which receives the ball and goes to goal for a shot. Change lines and repeat.

Small-Sided Games

A. Using pairs in a small-defined area, place cones at random. Players move in and out of the spaces created by the cones and pass with each other.

   Work on all kinds of passing (i.e. inside of the foot, outside, etc.)

COACHING POINTS

Warm-Up

A. This type of training helps develop body and ball control essential to high level play. Strive to perform smoothly.

Technique/Chipping

A. This technique is difficult to master and must be repeated.

Small-Sided Games

A. Passing technique, selection of passes, timing and pace of passes must all be addressed.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Same as above, except two players should be added to intercept bad passes. Defenders should play passes outside the area. Both players must sprint to regain the ball and get back in the game.

Group Activity

A. Divide into two teams and set up four goals in a half-field. Each team tries to score points by passing through any goal. A pass through any goal to a teammate is considered a goal. Points can be scored from either side of the goal. Goals should be set up ten yards inside the field lines to allow play on either side of the goal.

EMPHASIS/COACHING POINTS

Group Activity

A. Increased concept of the field and an intense playing environment are created in this activity. Demand that players look up and ahead.

SESSION 16

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up

A. Start with basic stretching. Break into two groups and play 5 v 2 keep away. As a player in the middle gains possession of the ball he leaves, while the player who lost the ball enters the middle as a defender. Play for 10-15 minutes.

Technique

A. In pairs, line up on the sideline about five yards apart. The player's work on technique while moving both forwards and backwards to the opposite sideline and back.

1. Line A plays a ball to B, which controls the ball with the foot while moving backwards. B stops the ball, leaves it and sprints backward. Line A then sprints to the ball and repeats the pass. Reverse roles and return.
2. Players A and B pass while moving across the field. Use right and left feet.
3. Player A serves by hand to B who is running backwards. B plays the ball back with the inside of the foot.
4. Same as above using the instep.
5. Same as above but the player moving backward serves while the player moving forward plays the ball.
6. Moving back and forth, A serves to B who heads the ball back.
7. Same as above but the player moving forward jumps and heads.

COACHING POINTS

Technique

A. Players gain body control, and technique development in an active environment.

Player concentration is a key to the success of this activity.

Players should concentrate on communication, vision and their environment.

ACTIVITIES

8. Player B serves to the chest. Player A controls on the first touch and plays back to B with the second touch.

   Invent your own series. Ask players to execute while moving both forward and backwards with both the right and left side.

Small-Sided Games

A. Play with two teams on each end of a grid. Prior to each ball being served, the coach will call two numbers. The first dictates the number of the attackers, the second, the defenders. The coach controls the confrontations by calling these numbers. One team then serves to the other, which attacks and crosses the first team's line with control of the ball.

Group Activity

A. In half-court soccer (similar to half court basketball), two teams play to a full goal with a goalkeeper. Both teams try to score on the same goal. If the ball is stolen by one of the teams, it must take the ball outside the 18 yard line before beginning its attack. Teams score 3 points for a goal from outside the penalty area, 2 points for a header goal and 1 point for a goal from inside the penalty area.

COACHING POINTS

Group Activity

A. This game creates a high number of scoring situations. Scoring from the flank, defensive principles, 1 v 1, etc. can all be covered.

SESSION 17 | Dribbling

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up

A. Start with a basic dynamic stretching educating program. Teach players the parts of the body (ankles, calves, thigh, hamstring, lower back, shoulders and neck), which need to be properly warmed prior to physical activity.

B. Players juggle in a seated position. Challenge them to establish and break their personal record.

C. Players throw their ball into the air, sit down, stand up, control the ball and speed dribble 5 yards.

D. Same as above except the players do a forward roll before controlling the ball and sprinting 5 yards.

E. Players throw their ball into the air, control it and then quickly turn and sprint 5 yards in the opposite direction.

Technical Emphasis (Dribbling)

A. In pairs, stand face-to-face between two balls about 10 feet away. One player is the mover, the other the shadow. The mover attempts to touch either ball by hand after losing his shadow. Fakes, change of speed, etc. are used to lose the shadow. Allow the activity to continue 30 seconds and then change roles.

COACHING POINTS

Technical Emphasis

A. Lateral movement and balance are the main goals. Body fakes and bursts of speed are developed. Remember to change the speed of play.

ACTIVITIES

A. Seat half your group in a defined area. The other half should be at one end of the grid with balls. On your signal, players dribble through the grid trying to avoid the seated defenders. Initially keep defenders stationary and later allow them to move like crabs.

B. Have all players dribble in and out of each other in a confined area 25 yards from the goal. Each player has a number between 1 and 5. Randomly call a number. Players called burst out of the area to take a shot on goal, retrieve their ball and get back to the dribbling area. Use a goalkeeper or an open net.

Small-Sided Games

A. Set up grids suitable for 3 v 3. Place four cones randomly at both ends of the grid. Play 3 v 3 with the goal of knocking the opponent's cones over. The first team to knock over all four cones is the winner.

Group Activity

A. Using half the field set up a defensive group including a few midfielders in front of a full-sized goal. The offensive group tries to score on the full sized goal while the defenders attack two small goals placed near the sidelines at midfield.

COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. Attacking in threes concentrates on the idea of near and far support to the ball.

Group Activity

A. Discuss movement to open space and defensive cover and support.

SESSION 18 | Receiving and passing

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up

A. Set up two, five or six foot, ropes to serve as soccer volleyball net. The playing area should be large enough to hold four players on each side of the net. Each side gets three touches and two bounces before the ball must be played back. Players can use everything but hands to play the ball. Only the serving team scores points.

Technical Emphasis (Receiving and Passing)

A. Form a line of servers and receivers facing each other. The servers play a ball to a receiver who performs a skill, plays the ball back and then repeats the exercise with the server to his right. The receiver returns to the beginning of the line after he has gone to the last server. The following skills can be performed:

1. Play the ball back with the inside of the right foot, then the left.
2. Same as above using the instep.
3. Jump and head the ball back.
4. Collect the ball with the thigh and play back using the inside of the foot.
5. Collect the ball with the chest and play back using the instep.

COACHING POINTS

Technical Emphasis

A. High repetition of specific techniques in an active environment.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

A. Organize a small playing area with a goalkeeper in each goal and three groups of players. A attacks B. A tries to score until B gains possession. When B gains possession, A must exit the field. B then attacks C until C gains possession. Continue to rotate groups.

Group Activity

A. Using half the field, two teams play to four goals. Players score at any goal, from either side. The coach may or may not place restrictions on the play.

COACHING POINTS

Small-Sided Games

A. Non-stop attacking movement.

Group Activity

A. This activity develops vision and the decision making process.

SESSION 19 | Receiving and turning

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up

A. In two parallel lines, move around the field warming up South American style. Start by jogging, skipping, jumping to head, etc. Stop the group from time to time to stretch. Continue moving as a group at a higher speed. Mix short sprints with jogging.

Technical Emphasis (Receiving and Turning)

A. In a line of 3 players, the center player receives the ball from an outside player, turns with it and plays it to the other outside player. Repeat in the opposite direction. The middle player should receive and turn with the following types of ball.

1. Receive with the inside of the right and the left foot. Turn with it and pass smoothly to the other player. Repeat.
2. Receive with the outside of both feet, turn and pass.
3. Receive an air ball with the thigh, turn and pass.
4. Receive with the chest, turn and pass.
5. Receive with the head, turn and pass.

Small-Sided Games

A. The coach serves a ball into the grid of 3 v 3 plays approximately 30 yards from the goal. When the coach gives a signal, the team with the ball attacks the goal while the other defends. If the defenders gain possession, they attack.

COACHING POINTS

A. This is follow the leader with the two in front leading a rhythmic activity.

Technical Emphasis

A. Work on receiving in a smooth manner. Reduce touches needed to turn.

Small-Sided Games

A. Possession and attacking concepts are stressed.

ACTIVITIES

Small-Sided Games

Finish with a shot on goal. Instantly start another game of 3 v 3.

Group Activity

A. Same as above but make the grid larger. Play 6 v 6 with the same rules. Rest after every attack. The coach starts each attack by playing the ball into the grid.

COACHING POINTS

Group Activity

A. Possession and attacking concepts are stressed.

SESSION 20 | Finishing

ACTIVITIES

Warm-Up

A. Jog as a group, with the ball. Stretch for a few minutes. Break into two groups and play 5 v 2 possession. The outside player who makes a mistake enters center while one defender comes out.

Technical Emphasis (Finishing)

A. Start with attack from the flank. Plays a ball to B who passes wide to A. Player A sprints around a cone and serves a ball to B for a shot on goal with the foot or head. B makes an arched run away from the server in preparation for a good shot. Use both sides of the field.

1. A plays to B for a wall pass. A immediately shoots on goal. Make sure shots are taken with both the left and right feet.
2. A dribbles straight at B. A leaves the ball for B who immediately shoots after the takeover. Change lines, directions and require shooters to use both feet.
3. A passes to B and then overlaps. B plays the ball to A who shoots on goal. Approach the goal from both sides of the field.

Small-Sided Games

A. Set up four small grids, which form a larger square. Play 2 v 2 in each grid. Start with only one ball for all four grids. Players pass with their partners or teammates in the other grids. Color differentiation should be used.

COACHING POINTS

Warm-Up

A. Warm-up plus practice of proper support techniques in 5 v 2.

Technical Emphasis

A. Proper serving or crossing and shooting, shooting from wall pass and shooting from takeover.

Small-Sided Games

A. Possession and passing skills.

ACTIVITIES

Group Activity

A. Divide into two groups using half the field with two goals and goalkeepers. Divide the playing area into equal thirds by placing two or three cones across the field. Each team has:

Area 1 - Defensive third
Area 2 - Midfield third
Area 3 - Attacking third

Play with the following restrictions:

1. In the defensive area, one touch.
2. In the midfield area, two touch.
3. In the attacking area, unlimited touches.

   Adjust the one and two touch restrictions to two and three touch if necessary.

COACHING POINTS

Group Activity

A. This activity teaches the necessity of playing the ball out of your defense quickly as well as being creative in attack.

SUMMARY

In an effort to understand and improve the U-12 player we have to begin opening the player's eyes to the thinking aspects of the game. These areas that count on players seeing and responding depend on the concept of decision making. In the end, all players must constantly be evaluating the entire field and making decisions related to offensive and defensive situations that are occurring. Each player must add to the team effort. To accomplish this, each player must be astute enough to assist.

The philosophy behind this book is to provide activities that will place the U-12 player in an environment in which he will have to make proper decisions. If a player is placed in this type of environment over many years, he can develop the vision play at top levels. This decision making process does not develop in a training environment that is drill-like in structure. Fitness and technique are very important concerns as well, but tactical awareness can only develop with repeated practice in a thought provoking environment.

In closing, let's just remember that tactics involve a great number of factors, but that for the U-12 player, tactics are related to the area of decision making. Without thinking and proper decisions, we have something that resembles soccer, but not soccer!

US Youth Soccer Official Under 12 Playing Recommendations

US Youth Soccer recommended modifications to the FIFA Laws of the Game.
FIFA Laws of the Game can be found at www.ussoccer.com/referees.
Please note the U12 addendum and appendix.

Law 1) The Field of Play
Dimensions: The field of play must be rectangular. The length of the touchline must be greater than the length of the goal line.

Length: minimum 70 yards maximum 80 yards
Width: minimum 45 yards maximum 55 yards

Field Markings: Distinctive lines not more than (5) inches wide. The field of play is divided into two halves by a halfway line. The center mark is indicated at the midpoint of the halfway line. A circle with a radius of eight (8) yards is marked around it.

The Goal Area: Conform to FIFA.

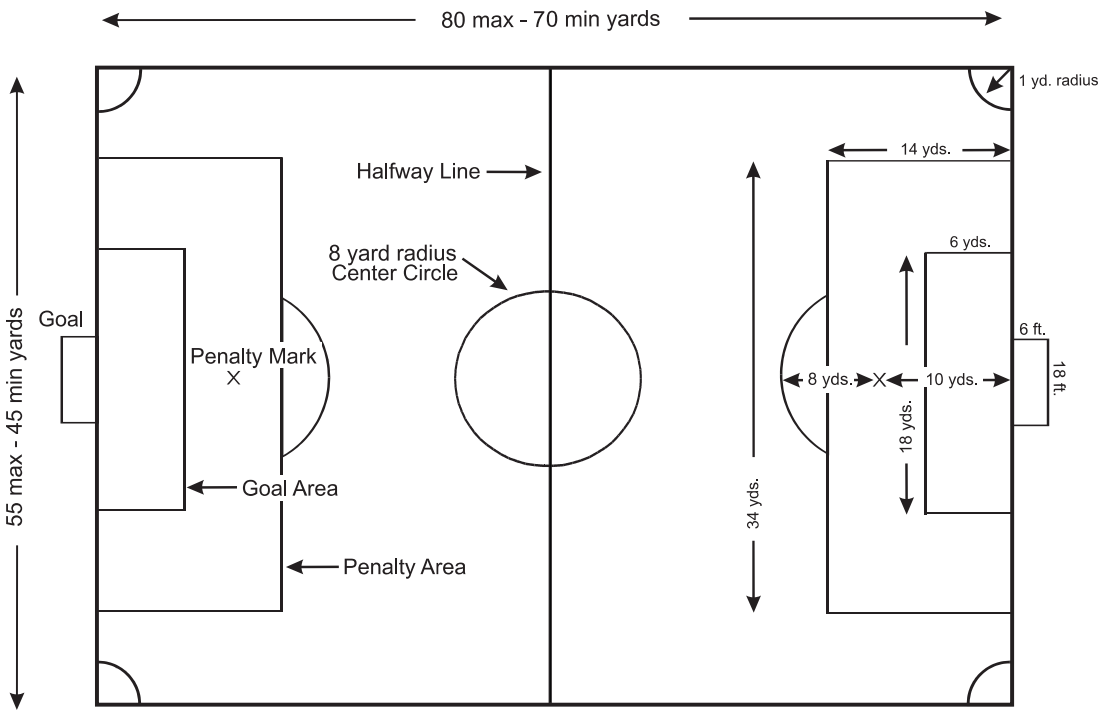
The Penalty Area: A penalty area is defined at each end of the field as follows: Two lines are drawn at right angles to the goal line, fourteen (14) yards from the inside of each goalpost. These lines extend into the field of play for a distance of fourteen (14) yards and are joined by a line drawn parallel with the goal line. The area bounded by these lines and the goal line is the penalty area. Within each penalty area a penalty mark is made ten (10) yards from the midpoint between the goalposts and equidistant to them. An arc of a circle with a radius of eight (8) yards from each penalty mark is drawn outside the penalty area.

Flagposts: Conform to FIFA.

The Corner Arc: Conform to FIFA.

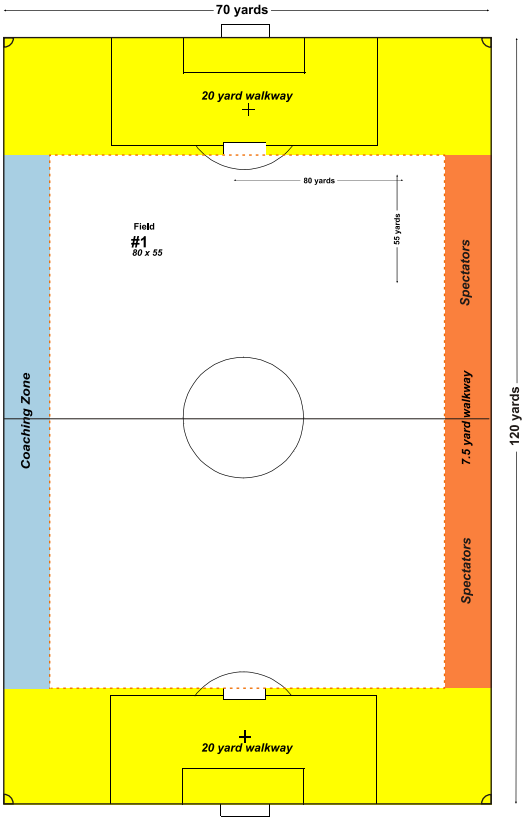
Goals: Conform to FIFA with exception that the maximum distance between the posts is eighteen (18) feet and the maximum distance from the lower edge of the crossbar to the ground is six (6) feet.

Safety: Goals must be anchored securely to the ground. Portable goals may only be used if they satisfy this requirement.



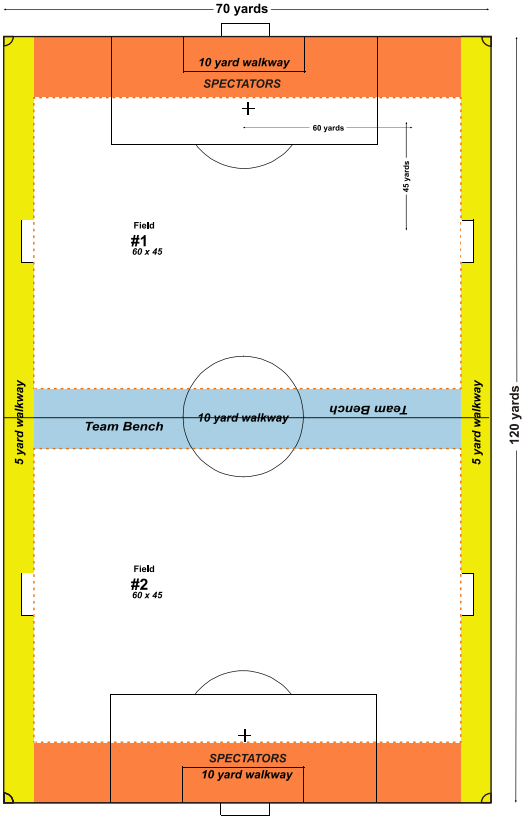
Suggested Set-up for 8v8 Fields

Dividing a 120 x 70 field into 1 - 80 x 55 field (maximum field size)



Suggested Set-up for 8v8 Fields

Dividing a 120 x 70 field into 2 - 60 x 45 fields (minimum field size)



Law 2) The Ball - Size four (4).

Law 3) The Number of Players - A match is played by two teams, each consisting of not more than eight players, one of whom is the goalkeeper. A match may not start if either team consists of fewer than seven players.

Substitutions: At any stoppage and unlimited. Revised May 1, 2009

Law 4) The Players Equipment - Conform to FIFA. Non-uniform clothing is allowed
based on weather conditions, but uniforms must still distinguish teams.

Law 5) The Referee - Registered referee.

Law 6) The Assistant Referees - Use U.S.S.F. registered referees or club linesmen/women.

Law 7) The Duration of the Match - Conform to FIFA with the exception of the match being divided into two (2) halves of thirty (30) minutes each. There shall be a half-time interval of five (5) minutes.

Law 8) The Start and Restart of Play - Conform to FIFA with the exception that opponents of the team taking the kick-off are at least eight (8) yards from the ball until it is in play.

Law 9) The Ball In and Out of Play - Conform to FIFA.

Law 10) The Method of Scoring - Conform to FIFA.

Law 11) Offside - Conform to FIFA.

Law 12) Fouls and Misconduct - Conform to FIFA with the exception that an indirect free kick is awarded to the opposing team at the center spot on the halfway line if agoalkeeper punts or drop-kicks the ball in the air from his/her penalty area into the opponents penalty area.

Law 13) Free Kicks - Conform to FIFA with the exception that opponents are at least eight (8) yards from the ball.

Law 14) The Penalty Kick - Conform to FIFA with the exceptions that the penalty mark is at ten (10) yards and that players other than the kicker and defending goalkeeper are at least eight (8) yards from the penalty mark.

Law 15) The Throw-In - Conform to FIFA.

Law 16) The Goal Kick - Conform to FIFA.

Law 17) The Corner Kick - Conform to FIFA with the exception that opponents remain at least eight (8) yards away from the ball until it is in play.

Coaching Education Programs

US Youth Soccer offers coaching courses and training for all coaches. For a course schedule contact your local State Association or US Youth Soccer.

Youth Coaching Modules
There are a number of Youth Coaching Modules offered to improve your age-appropriate coaching from US Youth Soccer. Each module offers classroom and field sessions designed for the parent/coach or novice coach with an emphasis on the age group of your players. Techniques, psychology and FUN are introduced with an emphasis on player development. Check out your State Association website or USYouthSoccer.org for more courses on coaching education. Some states offer the course online as well!
Available Modules include: U6/U8, U8/U10 and the U12 Youth Module

Also available from US Youth Soccer:
The Novice Coach DVD
Official US Youth Soccer Coaching Manual
The Youth Soccer Parent/Coach Primer
Assistant Coach Series: U10 Practice Activities for the Parent/Coach
Assistant Coach Series: U12 Practice Activities for the Parent/Coach
For additional information contact US Youth Soccer or your State Association.

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