

U8 SOCCER COACHES' MANUAL

Age Group Philosophy

Create a positive learning environment with fun activities with a soccer ball which keep players moving, developing a comfort with the ball and an awareness of space and other players.

Age Group Objective:

If you ask your players at the end of the season would they like to play soccer again next season and they answer YES, then your season has been a success

Key Words:

FUN , MOVEMENT, and BALL COMFORT

Age Group Skill Focus:

Players at this age group at the end of the season should demonstrate the following

- Comfort dribbling and turning with the ball with different surfaces of the foot and at different speeds
- Body and ball control to quickly change direction with the ball
- Players are aware of where the space is on the field and show a willingness to dribble or pass the ball towards space particularly after the ball is won in a crowded area
- Players begin to move up and down the field as a unit (limit players “hanging back” in front of their own goal or “cherry-picking” in front of the other team’s goal)
- Players begin moving into space when a teammate has the ball rather than running towards the teammate with the ball and crowding
- Player defend together in groups of 2 and 3 to win the ball back

Typical Practice Format One Hour in Length:

6pm to 6:15pm | **INTRO GAME**

6:15 to 6:35pm | **FUN ACTIVITY WITH A BALL**

Phase 1: No Defenders

Phase 2: Add Defenders

6:40 to 7pm | **END GAME**

Phase 1: Conditioned (Pick one condition and play 6 minutes)

Phase 2: Free Play (Game Rules Apply)

LET THE KIDS PLAY! Minimize the amount of instruction and get the kids on the field playing

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GAME RULES AND FORMAT

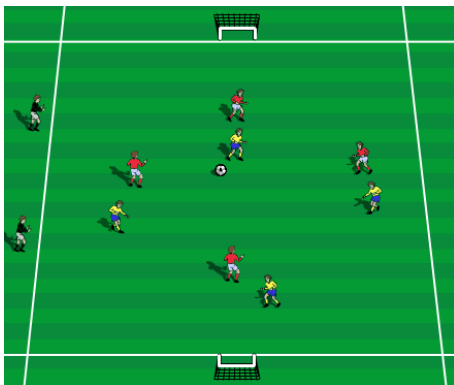
BASIC RULES

- 4 v 4 to PUGG goals with no keepers
- Four periods 10 minutes each period *running* clock with 2 minutes in between each period
- Substitute players on stoppages and one stoppage to sub per period is recommended to keep play moving
- Regardless of when your game starts, you must finish at least 2 minutes before the next game
- One Coach referee from sidelines. Choose which Coach before each Period. Work Together.
- starts and games are generally spaced ONE HOUR apart
- Fouls at this age group include: handling the ball, heading the ball, slide tackling, body tackling, pushing or interfering with another player without the ball
- Restarts upon a foul: coach/official give the ball to a player on the other team at the spot of the infraction. All restarts are INDIRECT (meaning the ball not be kicked directly into the goal)
- Out of bounds. The entire ball must cross the line to be out and **keep the play going if it is close to minimize stoppages**. Restart play with a kick-in with the ball placed on the line where it went out of bounds. All players must be 5 GIANT STEPS away from the player kicking the ball in. (No Throw-ins)
- No offsides is called
- No coaching on the field. Please limit in-game coaching to substitutions and encouraging players to get move involved in the play when necessary
- Discourage goaltending (one player standing in front of the goal while the ball is in play)
- Encourage freedom of movement and do not restrain players to one half of the field

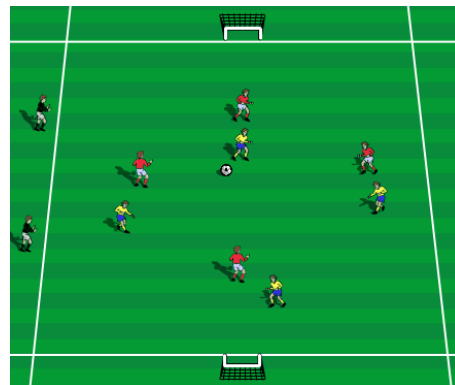
GAME FORMAT:

On game day, there will be two fields set up for the two teams. Each team will split their squads into two with half of their players playing on Field 1 and half of the players playing on Field 2. One coach from each team on each Field. See below diagram:

FIELD 1



FIELD 2



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When splitting the squads, please take the following approach to maximize the players' enjoyment:

- Each team place their TWO MOST COMFORTABLE players on Field 1.
- Each team place their TWO LEAST COMFORTABLE players on Field 2.
- The balance of your players could play on either field and should get opportunities to play on both throughout the season

COMFORT can be measured by factors including a player's speed, agility, size, technical skill, aggressiveness, and awareness.

This may be difficult to discern in WEEK 1 and it will be a fluid process. Just because a player stands out on Day 1, does not keep her on Field 1 for the season. You will see some players make remarkable strides in a short amount of time. Coaches work together to make the teams as even as possible.

What Happens When One Team Has Less than 8 Players?

- If the One Team has less than 8 players and the Other team has more than 8 players, you may share a player or players to even out teams
- **At U6** if both teams have 8 or fewer players on game day, you may play 3 v 3

Coaches please work together to keep players MOVING and ENGAGED

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PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

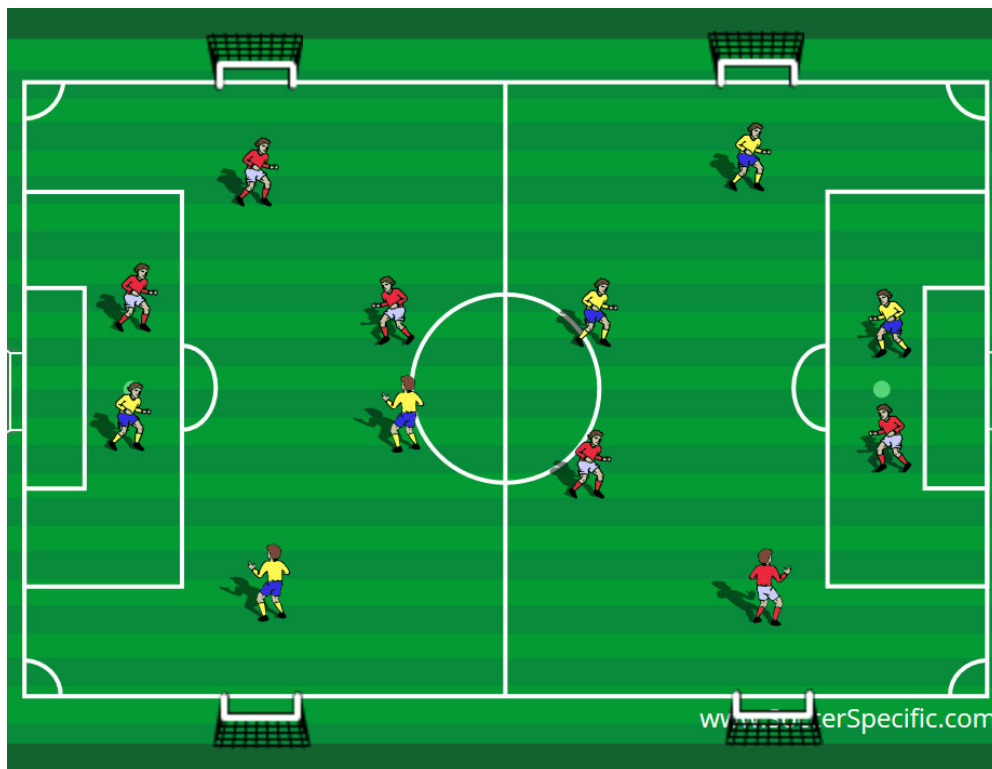
INTRO GAME FREE PLAY: 3 v 3 x 2

Setup:

- 2 playing areas each half a 3 v 3 field
- Goals on the sideline / end of each playing area
- May use cones or End Line in place of PUGG goals
- 3 v 3 each playing area

Instructions:

- One coach per field (or 1 coach in center circle between fields)
- Supply of soccer balls
- Normal game rules apply
- Play 4 or 5 minute games and rotate teams
- Each team play the other 3 teams



Note:

If teams are uneven, switch players so the teams are balanced or you may create one team with more players than the other team. For example: play 4 vs 3 with the team of 3 consisting of stronger players

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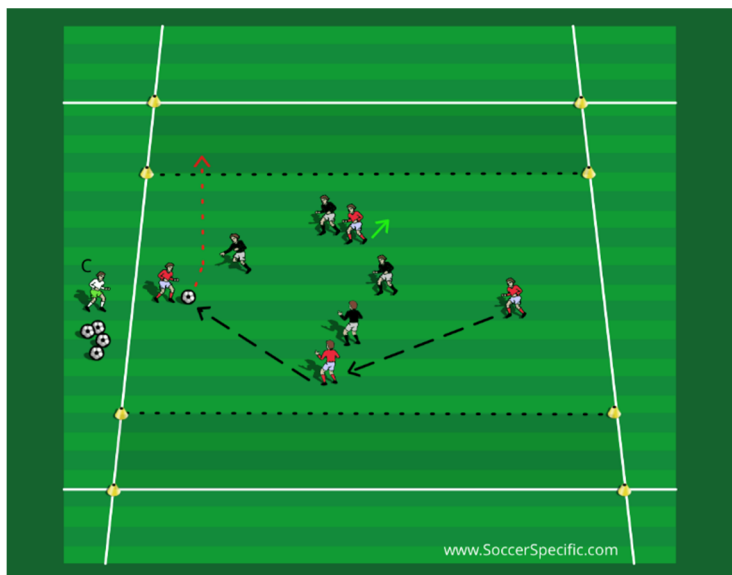
INTRO GAME: END ZONES

Setup:

As players arrive give them a ball and allow them to dribble around the field or pass with a partner
Once you have 6 players, split them into teams and begin playing a game

End Zones:

- Create end zone areas at each end of the field or use half the center circle at one end and the goal box at the opposite end
- Teams score a point by dribbling the ball into the end zone or designated area and then stopping the ball in that area for a point
- Once you have 8 or more players you can split the group and play two games of 2 v 2 or 3 v 3



End Zone Targets

- 2 teams of 4 or 5 players play in half of the 4 v 4 playing field
- 1 player from each team is a TARGET at one end of the playing area: one TARGET in the midfield circle and one TARGET in the goal box
- Teams score by passing to the TARGET player that is on their team
- Rotate TARGET players every 2 minutes

Coaching Points:

- Players look for opportunities to dribble forward to end zone or pass forward to targets
- Awareness of space on the field

Note:

If teams are uneven, switch players so the teams are balanced or you may create one team with more players than the other team. For example: play 4 vs 3 with the team of 3 consisting of stronger players

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INTRO GAME: MULTIPLE GOALS GAME

Setup:

- As players arrive place them in teams of 2 to 4 players
- Teams play across half of a 3 v 3 or 4 v 4 field
- Use cones to create two goals each 4 yards wide towards the corners of the playing area



Objective:

Teams score a point by dribbling through one of the two cone goals at the end they are attacking. Players must have control when dribbling through the cone goal for the point to count

Progression: Teams score by passing the ball on the ground through one of the cone goals

Coaching Points:

- Players attack the goal if there is space in front of them
- If the other team is blocking a goal, move the ball into space on the other side of the field and attack the other goal
- Defenders work together to block off paths to goal

Note:

If teams are uneven, switch players so the teams are balanced or you may create one team with more players than the other team. For example: play 4 vs 3 with the team of 3 consisting of stronger players

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FUN ACTIVITY GAME NO DEFENDERS: DRIBBLE IN A CONFINED PLAYING AREA

Setup:

- Each player has a soccer ball in a defined space.
- Defined space is approximately 15 x 15 up to 20 x 20



Objective:

Introduce players to the concept of dribbling in a confined area with other players around

Instructions:

- Each player is dribbling a soccer ball inside the playing area constantly moving, changing directions and avoiding other player
- If players collide, two players that collided to dribble their soccer ball out to the edge of the playing area, perform 5 jumping jacks (or ball taps) and return to the playing area

Coaching Points:

- Keep your head up and find space to dribble into
- Bigger dribbles into open space, smaller dribbles (closer to the body) in crowded areas
- Turn the ball and dribble to a different area of the square
- Speed and slow down

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FUN ACTIVITY GAME NO DEFENDERS: NAME GAME

Setup:

Each player has a soccer ball in a defined space.

Defined space is approximately 15 x 15 up to 20 x 20



Instructions:

Each player is dribbling a soccer ball inside the playing area

When the coach calls out SWITCH:

- Players dribble towards another player
- Stop the ball with the sole of the foot
- Announce her or his name to the other player
- Then switch soccer balls and resume dribbling

Repeat several times and players switch with different players each time.

Progression: Players announce their favorite color or food instead of their name

Coaching Points:

- Keep your head up and find space to dribble into
- Scan the field for players with whom you have not switched
- When Coach calls SWITCH, quickly find and dribble towards a player
- Be under control to be able to stop the ball next to a player
- Look your teammate in the eyes and listen to her or his name

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FUN ACTIVITY GAME NO DEFENDERS: BODY PARTS

Set-up:

Each player dribbles their ball throughout a 15 x 20 yards grided area.

Structure grid size smaller or larger based on the numbers of players present.

Ideally you want enough space available to run into as the exercise progresses.



Objective:

To have fun! Players need to be able to change direction and speed. Tight touches are encouraged while maintaining ball control. Players must be able to listen to the coach's instruction as the exercise progresses. Vision is all important as players need to see the open spaces within the grid and move into it or out of it as it fills up.

Progression:

1. The coach will call out a specific part of the body. As he does, the player will stop their ball with that part of the body.
2. Utilize the heel, sole, laces, toe, outside of the foot, thighs, rear, stomach, elbows, shoulders, forehead and anything else that may be appropriate.

Coaching Points:

- Keep close control of the ball
- Eyes up seeing ball and space
- Keep arms out for balance
- Avoid running into each other
- Develop a comfort level between the ball and the player

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FUN ACTIVITY GAME NO DEFENDERS: FOOT SURFACES

Setup:

Each player has a soccer ball in a defined space.

Defined space is approximately 15 x 15 to 20 x 20



Instructions:

- Coach instruct players which surface of the foot or which foot to use
- Players dribble in space using that foot or that surface
- RIGHT Foot only / LEFT foot only
- OUTSIDE of the foot only
- INSIDE of the foot only
- SOLE of the foot only

Switch surface every minute or so

Coaching Points:

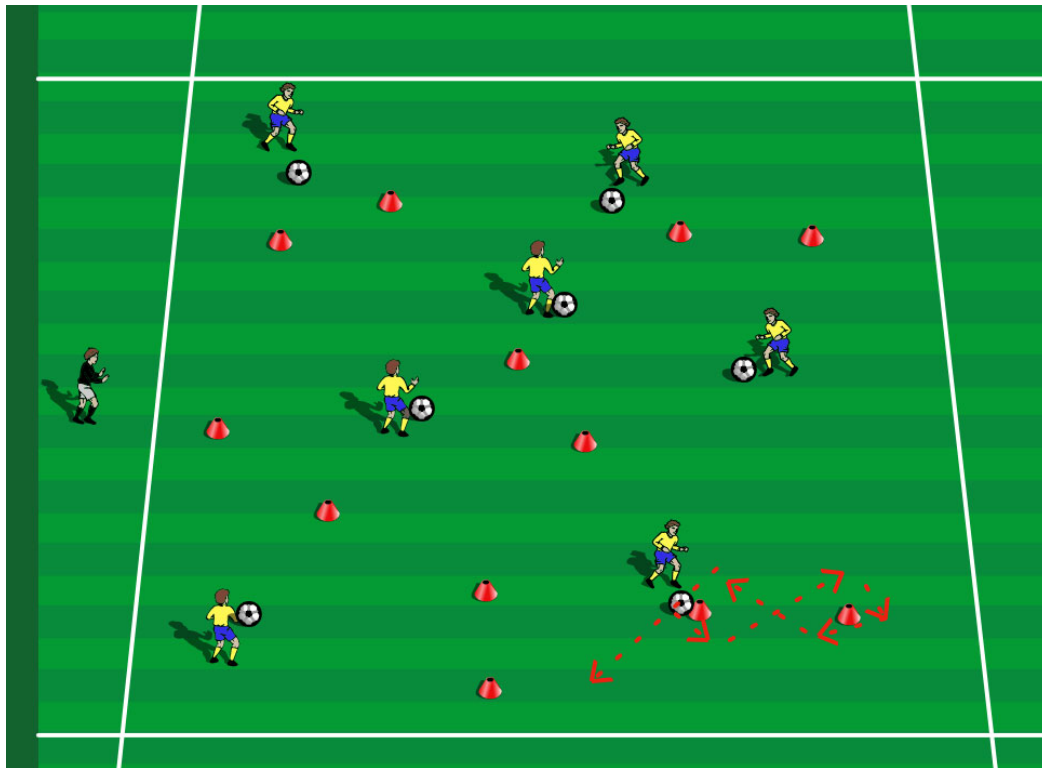
- Make sure players are clear on the location of each surface before each round. Have a player point to the surface identified
- Encourage the players to stick to using the surface identified
- Players turn with the appropriate surface

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FUN ACTIVITY GAME NO DEFENDERS: DRIBBLING GATES

Setup:

- Each player with a soccer ball
- Playing area half a 4 v 4 field
- Setup 6 to 8 cone "gates" throughout the playing area. Each gate 2 meters wide



Instructions:

- Players dribble around the playing area
- Dribble to a cone gate and dribble a figure 8
- Then explode away into a new cone gate
- Play for 90 seconds and count the number of gates completed

Progression: Add 1 or 2 defenders who upon winning a ball, pass to a coach outside playing area. Player retrieve ball and re-enter playing area. Rotate defenders every 90 seconds

Coaching Points:

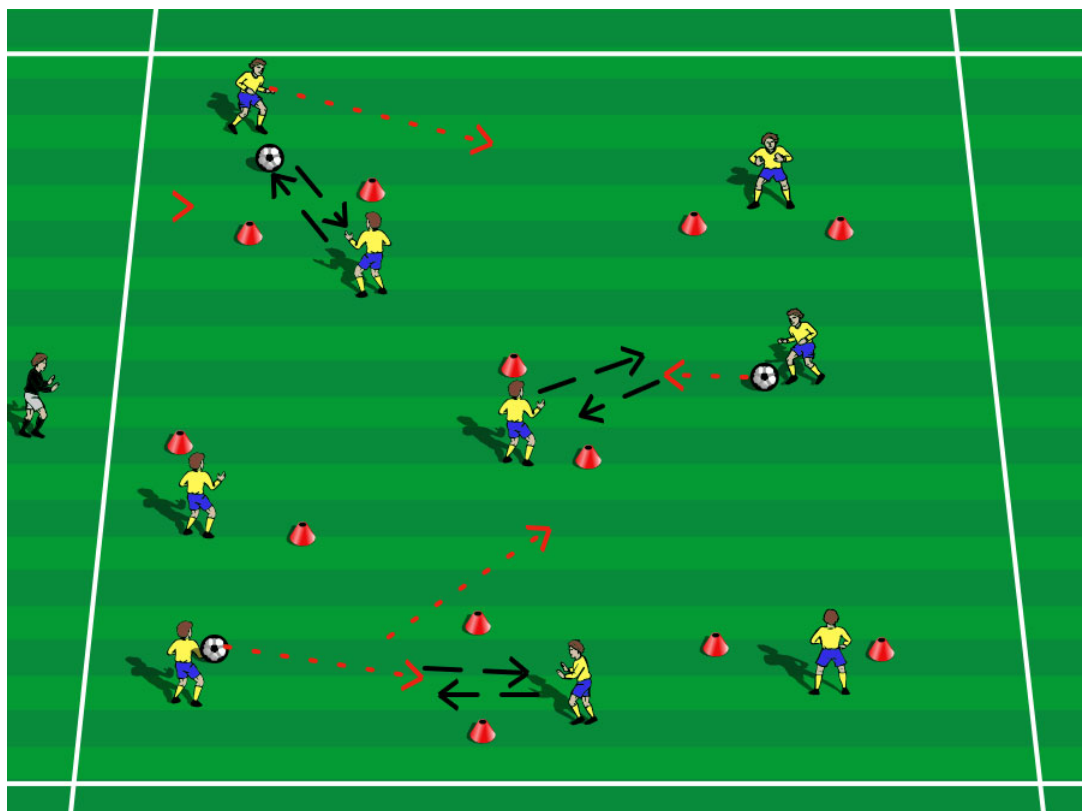
- Head up scanning area for an open cone gate
- Smaller dribbles (closer to body) as you approach cone gates
- Tight turns around the cone gate / body control
- After dribbling around the cone gate, take 2 bigger dribbles into space

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FUN ACTIVITY GAME NO DEFENDERS: PASSING GATES

Setup:

- Playing area full 4 v 4 field
- Setup 6 to 8 cone "gates" throughout the playing area. Each gate 2 meters wide
- Half the players without a soccer ball stand inside cone gate (in between cones)
- Half the players have a soccer ball



Instructions:

- Players with a soccer ball dribble around and find a player in cone gate to connect a pass with that player
- Player in cone gate passes back to the player who then dribbles away to find another player to pass
- Play 90 seconds, count the number of passes and switch passers and dribblers
- **Progression:** when player passes to teammate in the cone gate, the players switch roles and the player in the gate dribbles the ball out instead of passing the ball back

What to Look For:

- Dribble with head up scanning for open players
- Make eye contact – call out teammates name in gate before passing
- Accurate pass with inside of foot through the cone gate
- Receive with inside of foot to setup the pass or dribble back

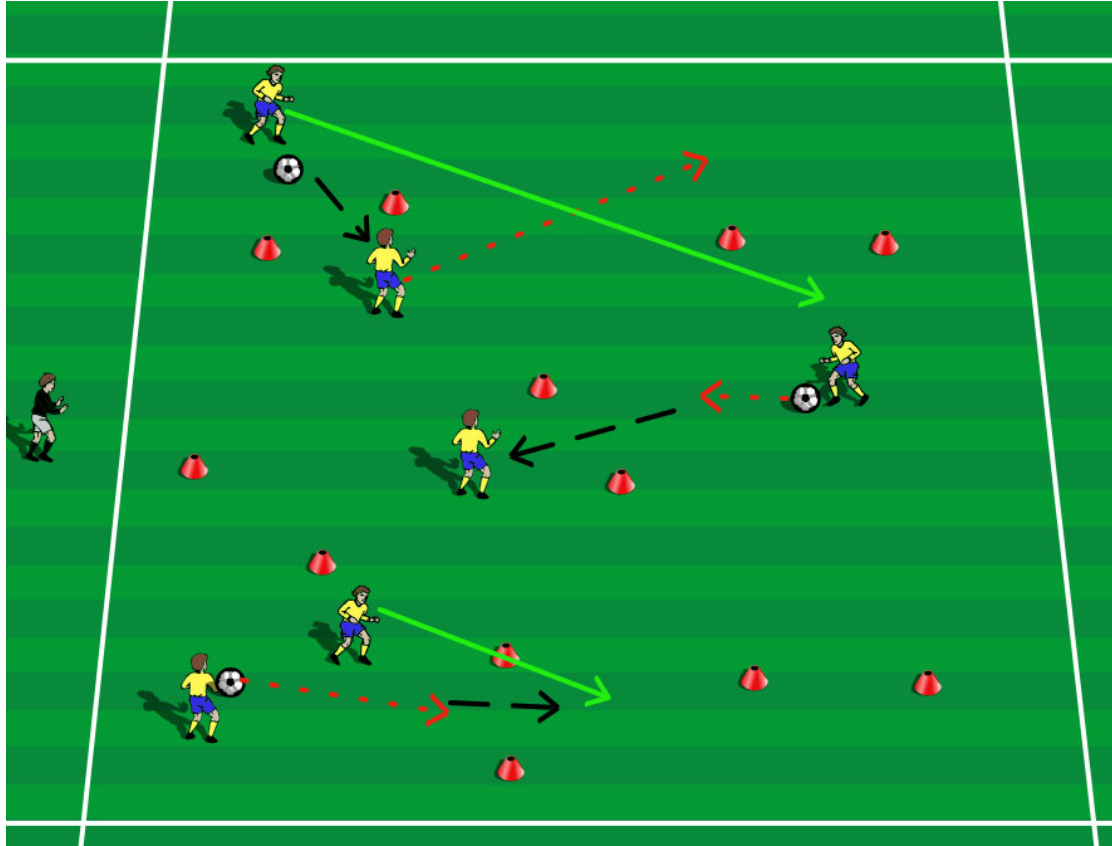


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FUN ACTIVITY GAME NO DEFENDERS: PASSING GATES WITH MOVEMENT

Setup:

- Each player with a partner and 1 soccer ball between 2 players
- Playing area full 4 v 4 field
- Setup 6 to 8 cone "gates" throughout the playing area. Each gate 2 meters wide



Instructions:

- Players dribble around the playing area
- Pass through a cone gate (between the cones) to your partner on the other side
- Then dribble away and find another pair of cones to pass through
- Play for 90 seconds and count the number of passes
- Players switch partners every round

What to Look For:

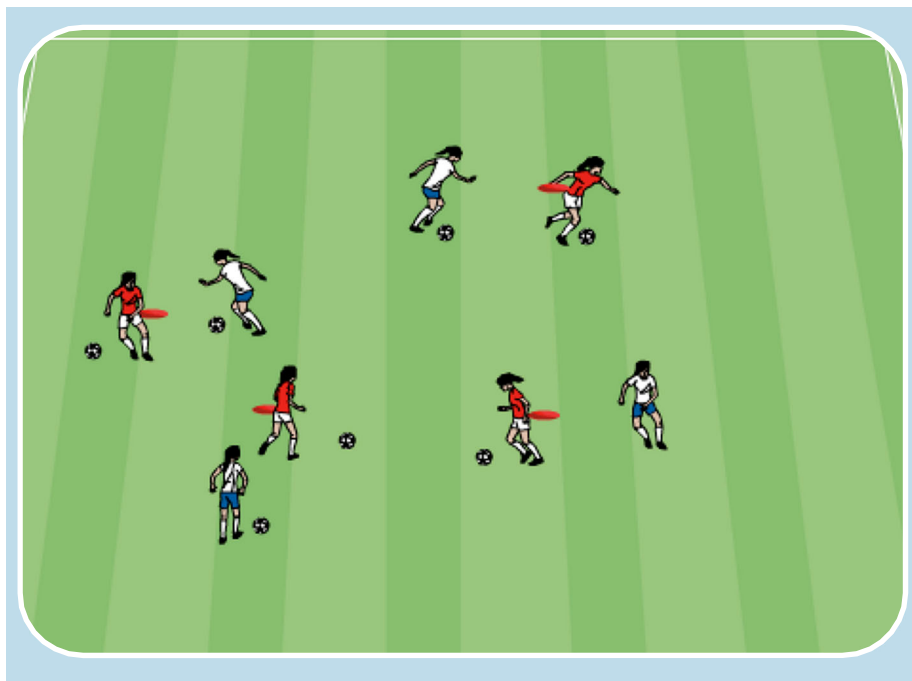
- Players head up scan for open cone gates
- Player without the ball move away from teammate into position to receive
- Accurate passes with inside of the foot through the cones
- Receive the ball inside of foot and then dribble away to another open gate

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FUN ACTIVITY GAME WITH DEFENDERS: FOXES AND FARMERS

Setup:

- Players split into 2 teams of 4 to 7 players per team each player with a ball
- One team tucks a pinnie into the back of their shorts giving FOX TAILS
- The team without the pinnies are FARMERS
- Defined space is approximately 15 x 15 to 20 x 20



Objective:

FARMERS try to pull the FOX TAILS (pinnies) from the FOXES until there is only one FOX left. The last FOX remaining wins the game.

Instructions:

- Players dribbling in space with FARMERS trying to steal FOX TAILS
- If a FOX loses her tail, she becomes a FARMER chasing the other FOX TAILS
- Last player with a FOX TAIL wins the game
- If a player runs away from her ball to avoid losing her FOX TAIL, she loses her
- If a player runs away from her ball to take a FOX TAIL, the TAIL is returned to the FOX
- Switch FOX and FARMERS at the end of each round

Coaching Points:

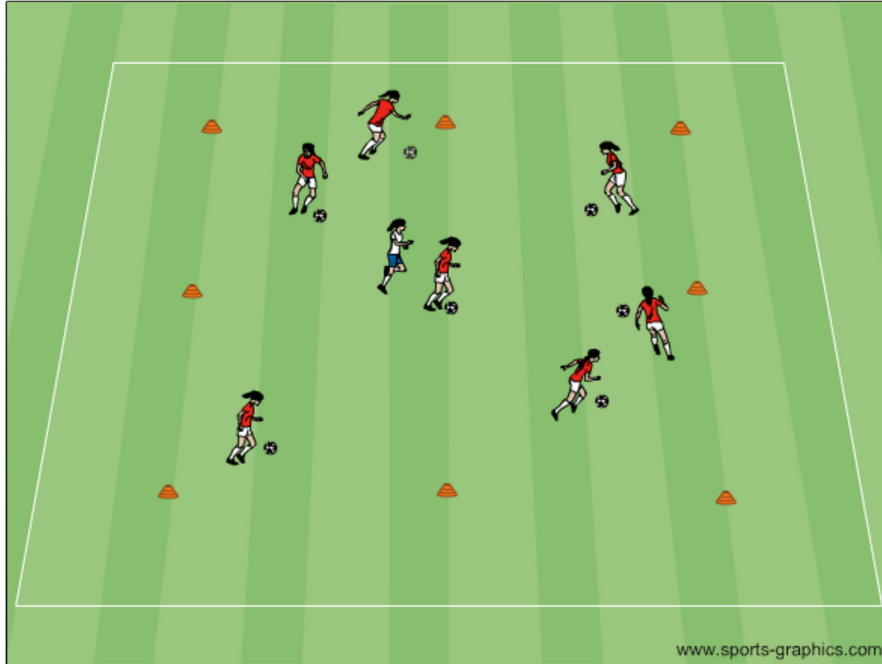
- Head up scanning the field while dribbling
- Be ready to quickly change directions and dribble away
- FARMER can work together to “corner” a FOX

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FUN ACTIVITY GAME WITH DEFENDERS: STUCK IN THE MUD

Setup:

- One or Two players without a ball designated as CHASERS. All other players with a ball
- Playing area 15 x 15 up to 20 x 20
- Ratios: 1 CHASER to 5 dribblers | add a 2nd CHASER at 7 dribblers or more



Objective:

Players with a ball dribble inside the square and try to avoid their soccer ball getting touched by one of the two CHASERS

Instructions:

- Players with a ball are dribbling in space while CHASERS try to touch a players' soccer ball
- If a CHASER touches a soccer ball, the player dribbling that ball is STUCK IN THE MUD. Move inside the playing area and hold the soccer ball above your head and open your legs wide
- Other players with a ball can get you UNSTUCK by dribbling or passing their ball through your legs. Then you return to the game dribbling away from the CHASERS
- Make the grid smaller or larger depending on outcomes

Play for one minute and count how many players are STUCK IN THE MUD at the end of the game
Switch CHASERS. Give every player a chance to be a CHASER

Coaching Points:

- Find space away from CHASERS and get there
- Be ready to quickly change directions and dribble away
- Find teammates who are STUCK and push the ball between their legs

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FUN ACTIVITY DEFENDERS: PAC MAN

Setup:

- Two players start with a ball as Pac-Man
- All other players without a ball
- Playing area 15 x 15 adjust as necessary



Instructions

- 2 Pac-Man start with a ball chasing the other players without a ball
- Pac-Man pass the ball and strike a player at the knee or below and that player must then go get a soccer ball and become a Pac-Man
- Play until no players left without a ball
- ALTERNATIVE starting game: All players with a ball try to pass the ball and hit the Coaches below the knee. Each hit counts as a point.

Coaching Points

- Agility without the ball changing speed and direction
- Head up with the ball dribbling and changing direction
- Passing technique to accurately pass the ball
- Awareness of when to pass the ball and when to dribble closer before passing

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FUN ACTIVITY DEFENDERS: SOCCER MARBLES

Setup:

- Each player with a ball inside the playing area
- Two players with pinnies designated as Kings or Queens
- Playing area 15 x 15 adjust as necessary



Objective:

The Kings or Queens are trying to avoid having their soccer ball hit by another ball

Instructions

- Players begin by dribbling in the playing area
- Players are trying to pass their ball so that it hits the soccer ball of a King or Queen
- If the King or Queen's ball is hit, then he or she joins the Peasants
- Play until the Kings or Queens are gone
- Give each player a chance to be King or Queen

Coaching Points

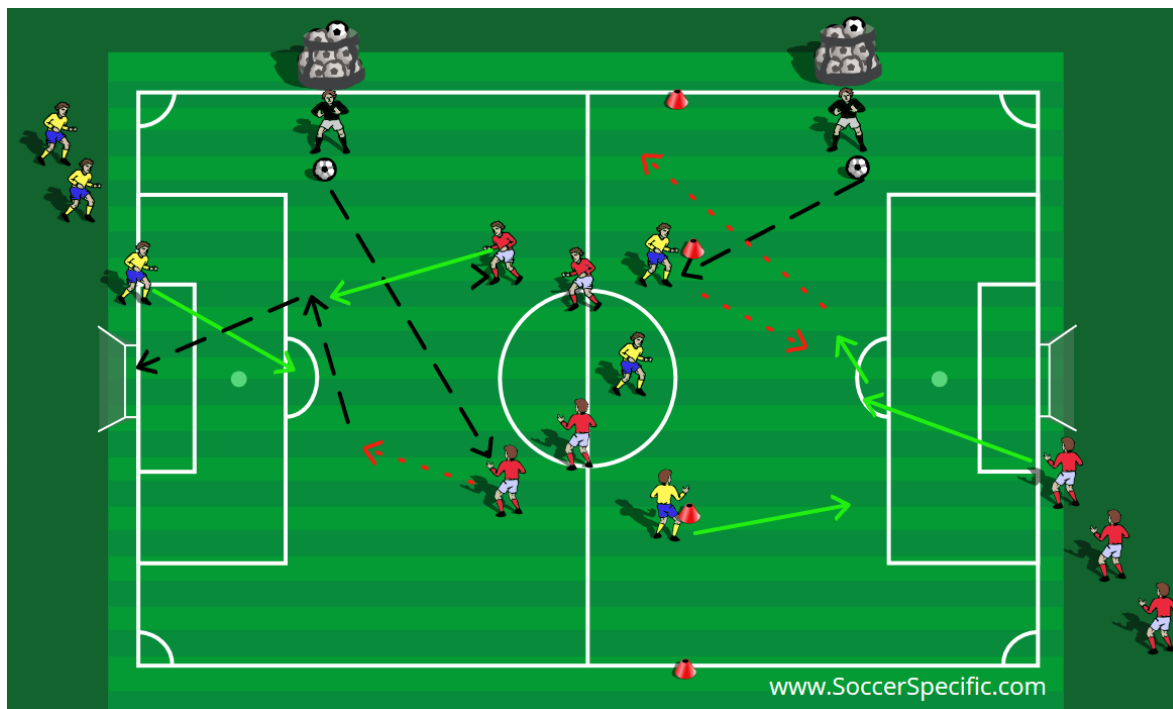
- Agility with the ball changing speed and direction
- Head up with the ball dribbling and changing direction to avoid getting hit
- Passing technique to accurately pass the ball
- Awareness of when to pass the ball and when to dribble closer before passing

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FUN ACTIVITY WITH DEFENDERS: 2 v 1 to GOAL

Setup:

- Half a 4 v 4 field with PUGG goal at the end
- 2 or 3 waiting defenders next to the PUGG goal
- 4 or 5 waiting attackers either side of midfield circle
- Coach with a supply of soccer balls serving balls into play from side of field
- With 2 coaches and 9 or more players, you may do this with 2 groups, 1 in each half



Instructions:

- Coach pass the ball to 1 of 2 attackers
- 1 defender come into the field of play to defend
- Attackers score in the PUGG goal
- Defender win the ball and dribble or pass to coach's area
- Play to first of 10 seconds, goal scored, defender earn point, or ball out of play
- Players rotate in and out and remain attack or defend each round
- Play 3 minute round, count the goals and then switch attackers and defenders
- ALT: Defender win ball and dribble through cone goals either side of center circle
- **Progression:** Add a 2nd defender and play 2 v 2 instead of 2 v 1

What to Look For:

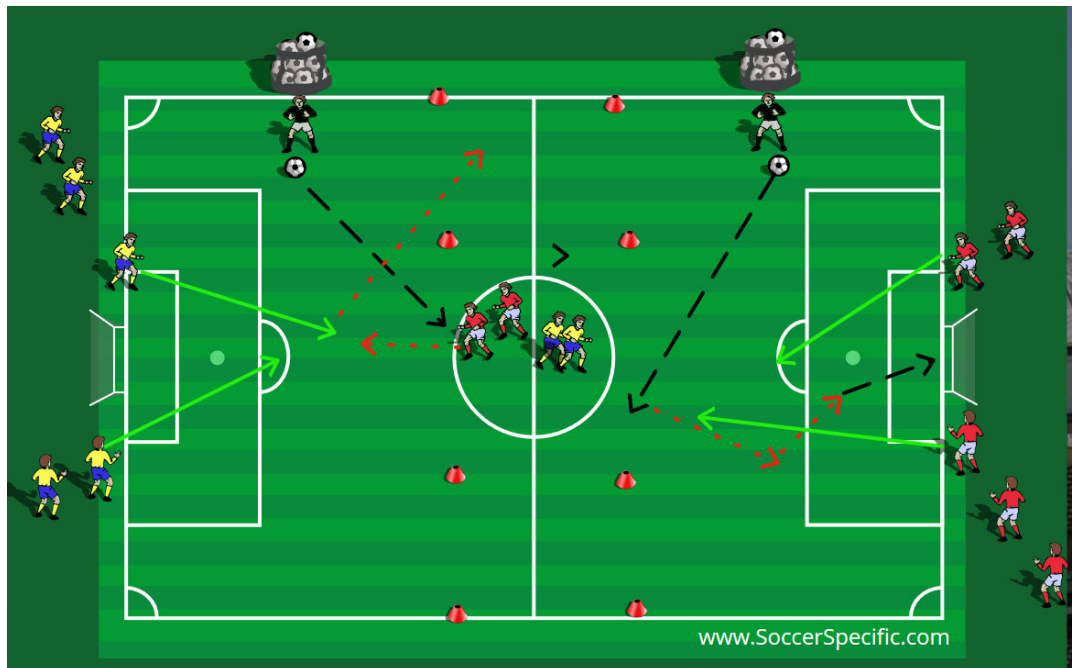
- Player receive ball inside of foot pass out in front under control
- Quick and decisive attack to goal
- 2nd attacker in space, not right next to his teammate with the ball
- Dribble or pass to beat the defender
- Defenders must close down, please discourage goaltending

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FUN ACTIVITY WITH DEFENDERS: 1 v 2 to GOAL

Setup:

- Half a 4 v 4 field with PUGG goal at the end
- 2 or 3 defenders each side of the goal
- 3 or 4 attackers inside the center circle
- Cone goals 4 meters wide one each side of center circle
- Coach with a supply of soccer balls serving balls into play from side of field
- With 2 coaches and 9 or more players, you may do this with 2 groups, 1 in each half



Instructions:

- Coach pass the ball to the attacker
- Both defenders come into the field of play to defend together
- Attacker scores in the PUGG goal
- Defender wins the ball and dribbles through 1 of the 2 cone goals either side of center circle
- Play to first of 10 seconds, goal scored, defender earns point, or ball out of play
- Players rotate in and out and remain attack or defend each round
- Play 3 minute round, count the goals and then switch attackers and defenders
- **Progression 1:** Defenders get "split" by the attacker with a dribble or shot and do 5 jumping jacks at the end of the round
- **Progression 2:** Add a 2nd attacker and play 2 v 2 instead of 2 v 1

What to Look For:

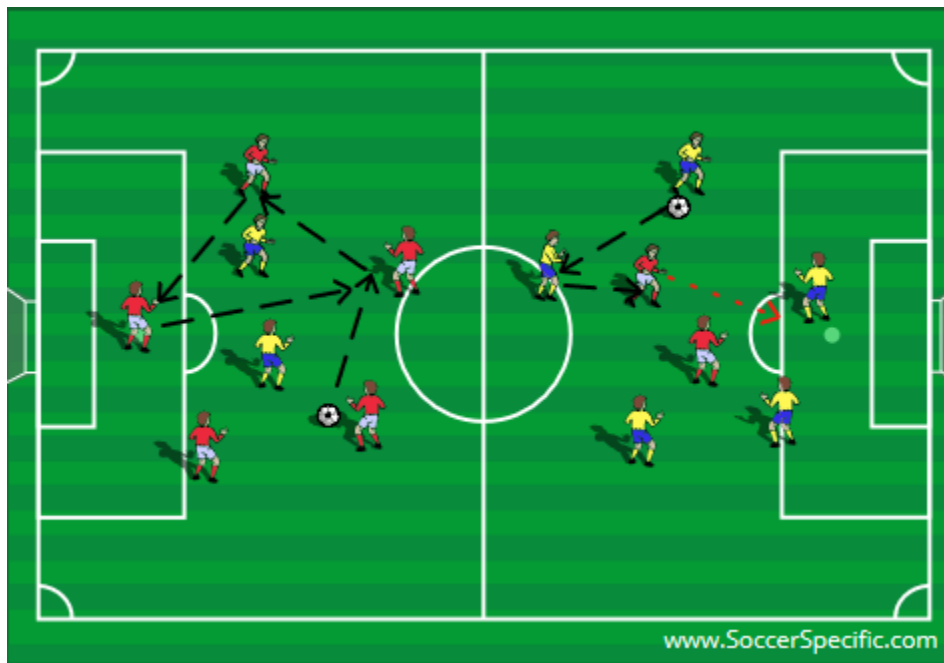
- Defender closest to the ball closes down first and closes down quickly, under control
- Defenders work together, stay close together
- 2nd defender stays close enough to 1st defender to prevent the split
- Defenders win the ball and quickly get through cone goals

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FUN ACTIVITY WITH DEFENDERS: KEEPAWAY HALVES

Setup:

- Players split into two teams of 5 to 7 players
- 4 v 1, 4 v 2, or 5 v 2 in each half of the field
- One soccer ball each half of the field



Objective:

Attackers keep ball away from defenders. Defenders win the ball and attack the goal.

Instructions:

- 1 or 2 players from each team go into the other team's half of the field to defend
- Group of 4 or 5 keep the ball away from the 1 or 2 defenders keeping the ball in their own half of the field
- 4 v 1, 4 v 2, 5 v 1 or 5 v 2 keepaway each half of the field
- When the defender or defenders win the ball, they win a point and then win 3 points when they score a goal
- Ball out of bounds, coach send in a 50/50 ball
- Play one minute and switch defenders
- Team with the most points at the end of the game wins the game
- Progression: defenders pass the ball out to the coach on the side for a point

Coaching Points:

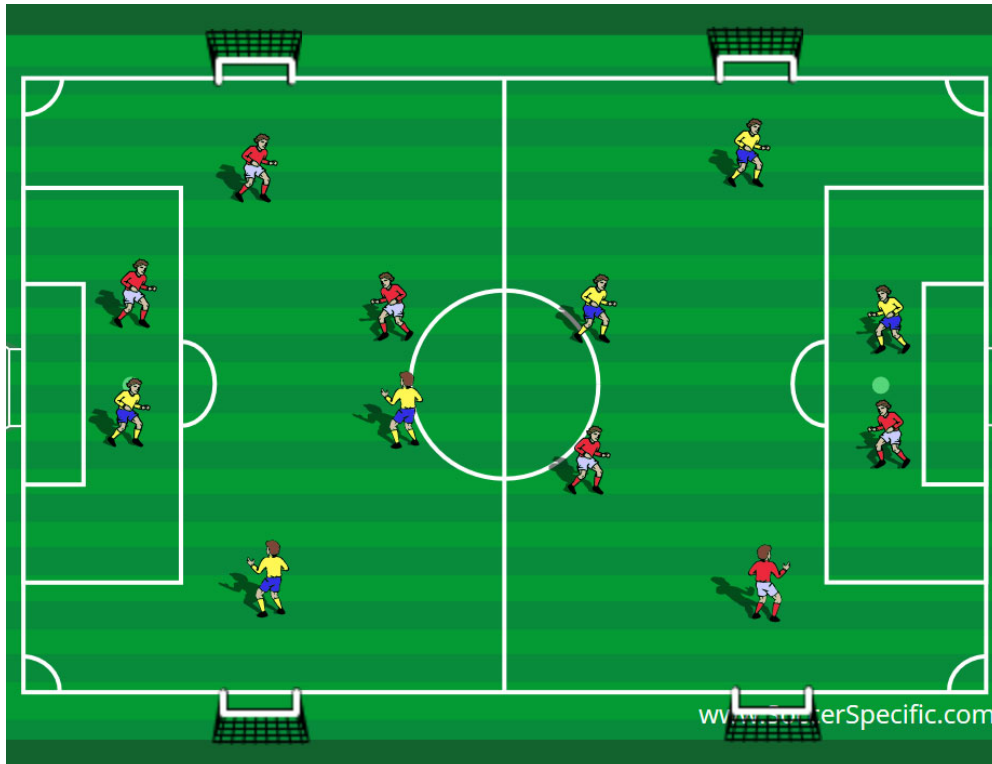
- Quick and accurate passing
- Think ahead before the balls comes to you
- Defenders work together to close down passing lanes
- Defenders quick attack when the ball is won and attackers quickly transition to defending

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END GAME FREE PLAY: 3 v 3 x 2

Setup:

- 2 playing areas each half a 4 v 4 field
- Goals on the sideline / end of each playing area
- May use cones or End Line in place of PUGG goals
- 3 v 3 each playing area 1 soccer ball per playing area



Instructions:

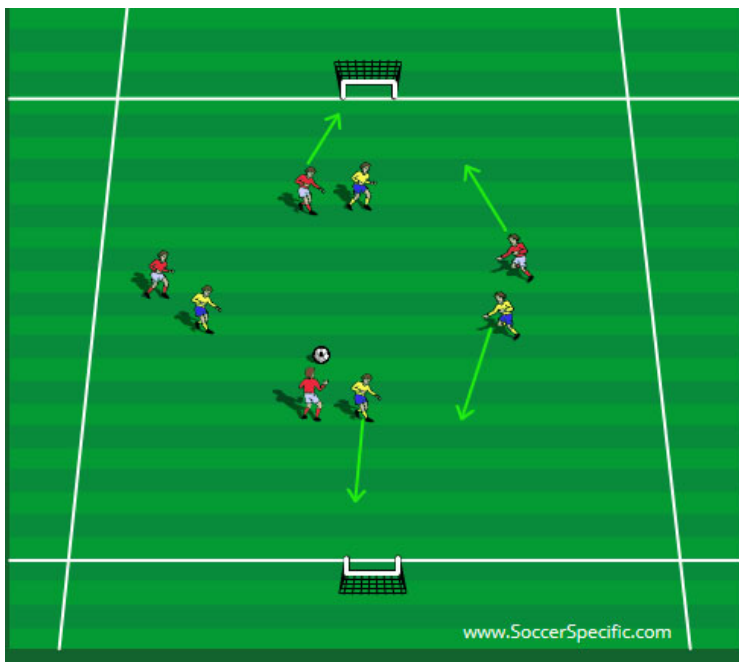
- One coach per field (or 1 coach in center circle between fields)
- Supply of soccer balls
- Normal game rules apply
- Play 4 or 5 minute games and rotate teams
- Each team play the other 3 teams

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END GAME: 4 v 4

Setup:

- 4 v 4 field with PUGG goal at each end
- Split players into two teams
- No more than 4 players per team on a field at a time
- Have a supply of soccer balls beside the field to keep playing moving



Instructions/Objective:

- Game day rules apply

Note:

If teams are uneven, switch players so the teams are balanced or you may create one team with more players than the other team. For example: play 4 v 3 with the team of 3 consisting of stronger players

CONDITIONS THAT MAY BE ADDED TO GAMES:

Coach may apply ONE condition for a portion of the END GAME

- One Goal Game: 3 teams of 4 players. 2 teams play 4 v 4, one team rest. Play until first goal and team that scores stays on. Play 2 minute games max and rotate teams on and off.
- Goals count double when everyone on your team is past midfield when the goal is scored
- Play with Two goals at each end (2 PUGGS one end and 2 cone goals other end) similar to the INTRO game. Switch Directions after 3 minutes.
- Opposite Directions: One team attack PUGG goals on the ends, the other team attack cone goals on the sides. Switch directions after 3 minutes.
- No Go Zone: Normal game of 4 v 4, but players not permitted in center circle