

PLANNING YOUR PRACTICES

Well-planned practices will have a significant influence on your team. Each practice should consist of the following six key components.

WARM-UP

Warm up activities should prepare the body for more intense activity, thereby reducing the risk of injury. Begin each practice with some simple warm-up exercises. These can include easy-paced skills and drills. Practices for youth do not need to begin with a prolonged period of stretching or calisthenics. Warm-up should be fun.

PRACTICE PREVIOUSLY TAUGHT SKILLS

Are there certain skills your players really need to improve? All players can benefit from working on the fundamentals. In this part of the practice, have the players work on improving the skills they already know. Organize drills so that everyone is involved, given encouragement where you notice improvement, and offer individual assistance to players who need help.

TEACH NEW SKILLS

Young players respond best to challenges. Try to build on the foundation of existing skills and give your players something new to practice each session. When you present a new skill, give a brief explanation, demonstrate what you want (use skillful players if you can't demonstrate), then let your players try the skill. Remember, players learn more from doing than listening, so keep your instructions to a minimum. As the players are practicing, give encouragement and try to correct errors. Be positive in your comments, so players experiencing difficulties are not discouraged.

PRACTICE UNDER COMPETITIVE CONDITIONS: SCRIMMAGES

All athletes love games and competitions. Competitive activities are fun, and they increase the likelihood that skills learned in practice will be used in your league games. Try to think up activities that stimulate the contest conditions your players face and that will develop useful team skills. These can include competitive drills, modified games, and regular full-court practice games. When players are scrimmaging, a useful technique is to divide the playing time in half, coach one half, then keep quiet for the remainder of the game. (This is the hardest task!)

TEAM CIRCLE

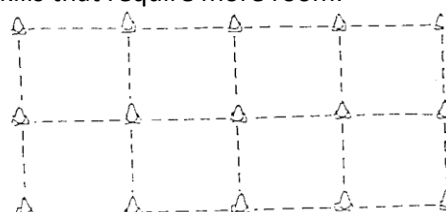
In a Team circle, players and coaches get together to talk about a topic related to soccer. The Team circle is an ideal time to discuss Character Counts Values.

EVALUATION

Conclude your Team circle by reviewing what was learned in practice. Ask yourself, your assistants, and your players, was the practice effective? Then record this information and use it when planning your next practice. Finish practice by giving your players a skill or drill to practice at home.

THE GRID SYSTEM

Dividing the practice field into a series of grids is a good method for organizing practice sessions and conducting drills. Use cones or other markers to mark grids about 10 yards by 10 yards. Players can pair up and practice skills inside individual grids. Two or more grids can be combined to play mini-games or to practice skills that require more room.



PASSING AND SHOOTING DRILLS

❖ TAKE A WALK

Organization: Players pair up and pass the ball to each other. Then, players walk along the field passing the ball back and forth and gradually progress to passing while jogging and running.

COACHING POINTS: Emphasize accurate, quick passes, and proper receiving techniques.

VARIATIONS:

- Pass Ahead: Partners pass ahead, leading players with the ball
- Pass through Cones or Legs: Partners can pass through cones to each other, or through each other's legs.
- Pass and Shoot: Partners pass the ball to penalty circle and shoot at goal.

❖ PASS AND MOVE

Organization: Three players pass the ball inside a grid with one defender trying to intercept. The object is to teach players to pass to players who are open and to move to an open area after passing.

COACHING POINTS: Players should move to the side of the defensive player rather than hiding behind the defensive player. Defensive player should try to anticipate passes and move toward the passer to reduce the passing angle.

❖ GOALIE DIVE PRACTICE

Organization: (for 7th-9th grade players only) Teach diving after ball from a kneeling position. As players become comfortable catching the ball and falling on the ground, progress to diving from a squatting position, then to a crossover step and dive.

COACHING POINTS: Allow players to progress at their own rates. Some players will not want to dive after balls, whereas others will enjoy the challenge.

❖ SOCCER BASEBALL

Organization: Establish a field with home plate, bases and out-of-bounds lines. Divide players into teams of even ability, and play ball. Pitchers pass the ball to kickers with their feet. The runner is out if touched with the ball, if the ball reaches the base before the runner, or if the ball is passed back to the pitchers before the runner reaches first base.

COACHING POINTS: Keep the game moving and the players interested in the game by not keeping outs. Each team "bats" until each player has kicked. Of course, outs are important because they keep players off the bases and out of scoring position.

❖ CIRCLE PASSING

Organization: Players form a circle and pass to each other. Pass to any player in the circle except to players on either side of the player with the ball.

COACHING POINTS: Passes should be crisp and accurate. Powerful passes are difficult to receive.

VARIATIONS:

- Pressure Passing: One player is in the middle of the circle and tries to intercept passes.
- Pass Around: Player in the middle of the circle passes around the circle to each player.

❖ SCRAMBLE

Organization: Three or more players line up, passing the ball between each other. The player who passes runs around to the other side in time to receive the next pass.

COACHING POINTS: Encourage one-touch control and accurate passes. Player should pass accurately.

❖ TARGET PASSING

Organization: Players stand away from a circle of rope, hula hoop, or some type of hoop and try to pass the ball into it. Passes on the ground should stop inside the hoop. Lofted passes should first bound inside the hoop.

COACHING POINTS: Emphasize correct passing techniques. As players become better skilled they should move farther away from the hoop.

❖ VOLLEY/HALF VOLLEY PRACTICE

Organization: Players pair up and take turns tossing and kicking volleys or half-volleys. Begin with easy tosses, moving farther apart as players improve.

COACHING POINTS: Begin with volleys using the inside of each foot. Progress to using the top of the foot. Stress the importance of timing and balance for volleys and half-volleys.

ROLL AND SHOOT

Organization: Line up players in front of penalty area and roll or toss balls for shorts to goal. Wait for each player to retrieve his or her ball before tossing to the next player.

COACHING POINTS: Stress accurate shots away from the center of the goal.

TRAPPING AND CONTROL DRILLS

❖ TOSS OR PASS AND TRAP

Organization: Player pair up and toss or pass the ball to each other. Receiving player traps the ball.

COACHING POINTS: Emphasize moving to the ball, reaching out the foot, leg or chest to meet the ball, cushioning the ball, and keeping the ball close to the feet.

VARIATIONS:

- Trap with inside, outside, and top of feet.
- Trip with top of thigh.
- Trap with chest.

❖ DROP, KICK AND CATCH

Organization: This is a good drill for players to learn how to juggle and how to develop a “feel” for the ball. Hold the ball over the foot or thigh, then drop, kick and catch. As players improve, encourage them to kick the ball twice, three times, and as many times as possible before catching.

COACHING POINTS: Stress watching and moving to the ball.

VARIATIONS:

- Keep the ball in the air using the legs and feet.
- Juggle Skill Check: Players count the number of times they can juggle.

❖ JUGGLE AROUND THE WORLD

Organization: Each player chooses the name of a country; then everyone forms a circle and juggles the ball around the world. Players can call out the name of a country and juggle the ball to that player; that player then calls out another country and passes.

COACHING POINTS: Keep the ball in the air as long as possible by watching and moving to the ball.

❖ PEPPER

Organization: One player called the passer stands in front of some teammates. These players pass the ball in the air until the passer makes a poor pass or lets the ball touch the ground. If other players make poor passes or let the ball touch they move to the end of the line. Players at the front of the line takes the passer's position.

COACHING POINTS: Players should try to develop a feel for the ball playing Pepper.

DRIBBLING DRILLS

❖ FUNNY DRIBBLE

Organization: Players pair up and dribble the ball while making funny faces at their partner.

COACHING POINTS: Use any part of the feet to dribble. This is a drill for fun and enjoyment.

❖ DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE

Organization: Players form a large circle and sit down. Coach selects one player to dribble the ball around outside of circle. Player walks dribbling the ball and must lightly touch head of each seated player and say the word duck or goose. Seated player remains in position if called duck, but if called goose, must get up fast and chase the dribbler. In the meantime the dribbler must dribble the ball as fast as possible around the circle and sit down in the goose's

position before being tagged. Goose takes dribbler's role if tag is not made.

COACHING POINTS: Fun drill for young players. Useful for developing change of speed when dribbling. Make sure everyone gets a chance to be the goose.

❖ RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT

Organization: Every player has a ball and lines up along one of the field. One player is selected as the caller and stands at the other end and calls the commands, "red light" or green light." Players can dribble toward the coach "green light" but must stop quickly on "red light" because the caller spins around to spot any moving players. Players seen moving are sent back to the starting position. Players try to get beyond the caller without being spotted.

COACHING POINTS: Good with younger players. The variation puts players in position of making fair calls. To ensure honesty, it may be necessary for an assistant coach or a player to watch the moving players.

❖ WIGGLE DRIBBLE

Organization: Each player has a ball. Players gather inside a grid and dribble trying not to touch the other players or the balls.

COACHING POINTS: Good game to teach players to look up when dribbling.

❖ DRIBBLE, DRIBBLE, PASS

Organization: Set up cones or other markers 6 to 10 feet apart. Players dribble in zig-zag motion around the cones. This can be practiced around cones making grid practice area.

COACHING POINTS: A good drill to practice touch control and dribbling with each foot. Begin with players walking. Progress to jogging, then running at game speed.

❖ ZIG-ZAG

Organization: Set up cones or other markers 6 to 10 feet apart. Players dribble in zig-zag motion around the cones. This can be practiced around cones marking grid practice area.

COACHING POINTS: Players should dribble as fast as they can control the ball. As players become better skills, they can speed up and change directions as they dribble around cones.

VARIATIONS:

- **Dribble around Cones Skill Check –** Mark a starting line and turnaround line 10 yards apart and space six cones evenly apart between the lines. Players are timed as they dribble in and out of the cones to the turnaround line and back.
- **Shuttle Run Skill Check –** Use the same starting and turnaround used for Dribble Around the Cones. Players are timed as the dribble to each line twice.

❖ DRIBBLE/RELAY RACES

Organization: Players line up at one side of the field and race each other, dribbling to the other side and back again. Players can choose several teams to have relay races. Each team member dribbles across the field and back, then passes to the next teammate.

COACHING POINTS: Players will dribble faster using both feet and controlling the ball rather than kicking the ball hard and running fast.

❖ WHISTLE DRIBBLE

Organization: Use a whistle and point in the direction players are to dribble or use commands such as “stop,” “forward,” “right,” and “left.”

COACHING POINTS: Players will enjoy this fun drill because of the spontaneity of your commands, so keep them guessing. Also this is

a good drill to practice changing directions quickly, as players must do in game situations.

OFFENSIVE PLAY DRILLS

❖ PASSING LINE

Organization: Players line up across the field and pass the ball to each other. Begin passing while walking and gradually progress to passing while jogging, then running.

COACHING POINT: Players must keep their heads up in order to be aware of the ball and of other players. Emphasize controlling the ball with one touch, then passing.

❖ EXPLOSION

Organization: Players stand in a circle, passing a ball to a “passer” inside the circle. After each pass, players take a step toward the passer until the ball cannot be passed. Then the passer calls out “Explode” and players run back to the outside of the circle.

COACHING POINTS: This game demonstrates the difficulty of passing to teammates who crowd together and the importance of spreading out of the offense.

❖ FAKE-OUT

Organization: Players pair up and face each other. One player has a ball and tries to fake out and dribble away from the other player.

COACHING POINTS: Players must watch the defender to fake him or her out. This drill also reaches players to dribble the ball close to the feet.

❖ OFFSIDE PRACTICE

Organization: Two teammates play defense (one player goalie) and two play offense. Offensive players try to pass the ball for a shot while defensive players try to make offensive players be offside.

COACHING POINTS: Ideal game to practice actual game maneuvering to receive passes and to be aware of offside. Stress communication among offensive players and among defensive players.

EFFECTIVE SCRIMMAGING

❖ THE COACH PLAYS

Coaches who possess good soccer skills often enjoy playing in the scrimmages. This can be an effective and enjoyable teaching technique when coaching players who lack skill development and confidence. Also the athletes are given the chance to see good soccer skills and motivates them to perform as well as they can. However, to be effective, it is important that coaches remember that the purpose of their participation is to further player development, not to impress or embarrass their players. When the coach plays, it often helps to introduce some or all of the following restrictions.

- The coach plays on the team that has the ball. If the ball is turned over, the coach switches teams and always remains on offense.
- The coach can only pass-no dribbling or shooting.
- The coach cannot receive throw-ins or take free kicks or corner kicks.

FULL-COURT OR SMALL-SIDED GAMES?

Small-sided scrimmage formats, for example, 2 on 2 or 3 on 3, give everyone the chance to handle the ball skilled or less experienced players who might otherwise tend to be ignored by the better players. Playing different types of mini games, such as No Dribble Mini games, allows players to concentrate on certain skills. Increased contact with the ball because of fewer players will produce a faster rate of improvement.

Occasional full-court games are fine in fact, they are essential when preparing players for league competition – but do not play them all the time. There are many activities that will give your players competition and still permit maximum participation and involvement. Soccer is intended to give all players an enjoyable and beneficial playing experience.