



**INDIANOLA
SOCCER TRIBE**

Indianola Soccer Tribe U7/8 Curriculum Plan Version 1

Player Development Philosophy: At the grassroots level, children learn and develop their full potential through game-like experiences in an enjoyable environment that supports individual growth.

HOW TO COACH

6 important things to remember for every session you deliver:

The soccer ball is the world's most popular toy

It's great fun to play with and it's even more fun with friends. This means fun is implicit, you don't need to manufacture fun. As long as you start and end with a game, they will have a great time.

You don't need to over complicate things.

Too many practices in a session means you spend a lot of time setting things up and kids spend more time learning the session than the actual skills. Keep it simple and they'll get more time on the ball.

Make sure they get lots of opportunity to play

It's their game. Whilst you're there to teach them they need space to work things out and express themselves. Stopping things too often can be counter productive, so try to be concise with feedback

You are working with young children

You have to be encouraging and patient. Some of them might not be able to do the skills, don't worry, it's just an age thing. Also, little humans are brilliant at listening, even when you don't think they are.

If you can, try to involve the parents.

Involve all the stakeholders, they'll appreciate it. You can even send them the curriculum that you are working from, they will love that you are taking so much care of the development of their kids.

If they improve, they will want to keep coming back

There's a risk in modern coaching that we sit back and observe. If you can help a player get something right (and praise them for it), their learning will accelerate and they'll enjoy it more.

U7/8 Curriculum Plan

The U7/8 level is similar to U6, especially when there are players who have never played before. The “new to soccer” U7/8 players will require the same explanation of rules and basics as U6 players in order to learn the game of soccer. However, there may be some U7/8 players that are on their 3rd or 4th season of soccer based on when they started and their birthday. Coaches should make sure to challenge these players as well as encourage first time players. U7/8 players are better able to understand a few more concepts of the games than their U6 counterparts, and coaches should build on that by teaching basic concepts of shape and passing throughout the season.

U7/8 player objectives for the season

- Improve ball mastery skills: Toe taps, Inside/outside dribbling (both feet), outside and inside hook turns, and V pushes
- Improve changing direction with the ball
- Learn simple passing combinations with teammates
- Have lots of fun!

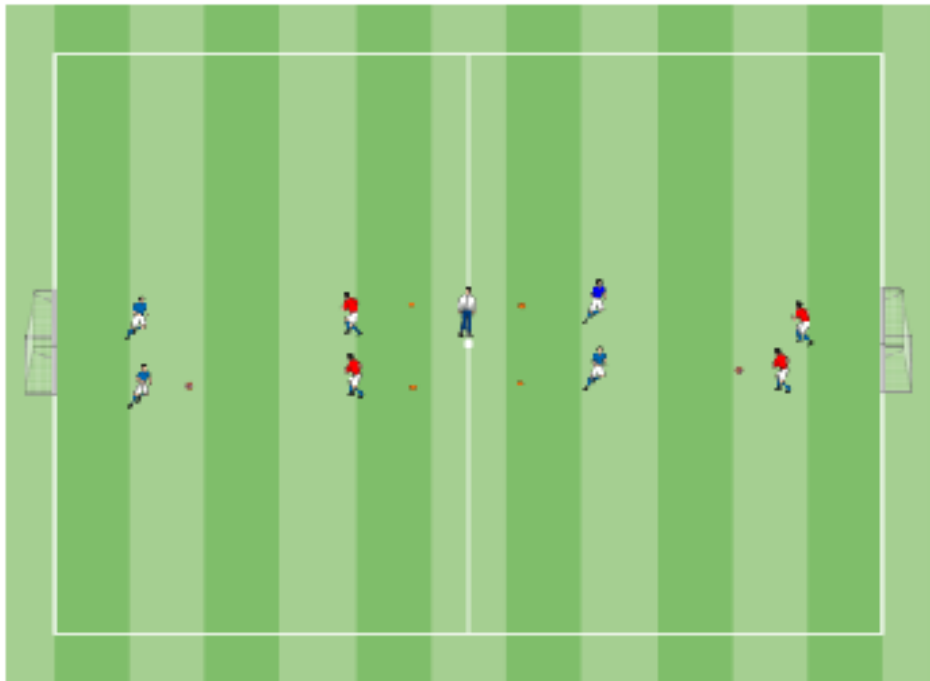
U7/8 Curriculum Plan

Basic format for season

- 9 week season
- 2x practices a week (45-60 mins each), 1x game each weekend
- Recommended practice format: Play 1 – Ball Mastery Skills – Practice Activity – Play 2
 - Play 1: As the kids arrive, divide them up into two small sided games (2v2) and just let them play soccer.
 - ~10-15 minutes, with a “half time” water break where you discuss and ask some basic questions to get them engaged and learning before playing again.
 - Ball Mastery Skills: These skills are the perfect introduction for young players because it teaches them to use the inside, outside, and sole of the foot. They also start building the neural connections between the brain and the feet to help with agility, coordination and balance.
 - ~5-10 minutes. Pick 2-3 per practice to focus on and by the end of the season mix and match all 5 skills as desired
 - Practice activity: Use a fun activity to teach a concept and/or reinforce ball mastery skills
 - ~10-15 minutes, with a water break in between to discuss and ask questions on the concepts you trying to teach
 - Play 2: Finish practice with a 4v4 scrimmage (if able given field constraints)
 - ~10-15 minutes, with a water break in between to discuss and ask questions on the concepts you trying to teach
 - If you aren't able to do a 4v4 scrimmage, end with small sided games from Play 1 or mix in another fun practice activity

Play 1

- Have field ready when kids show up, with it divided into two halves with two goals in each half.
- You can use the goals on the field and then just set up two cones on each half for the other goal. If you only have ½ a field, divide it in half length wise and set up four goals with cones on the side so as not to shoot into the other half where another team is practicing.
 - If this makes the field too short, play end line to half line, but for the goals near the half line, put them a couple feet in front of the half line to minimize the amount of spill over into the other half.
- As players arrive, divide them into two teams on each field and have them start playing against each other, you don't need to wait for the entire team to get started. You can start with a 1v1, then make it 2v1, then 2v2.
- Coach positioned in the middle to watch both halves/help corral the balls when kicked into the other half
- Intent is to get them playing the game of soccer. Provide lots of positive reinforcement when they do something well.



Ex. Guided questions for “halftime” of Play 1

Q: What should attackers do when the path to the goal is open?

A: Dribble towards it as quickly and directly as possible

Q: How close to the goal do you need to be before shooting?

A: As close as you need to be to kick it all the way into the goal (don't need to dribble it into the goal)

Q: How do you find an opening?

A: Look up to see where the defenders are and then find the space between them

Ball Mastery

For all activities: Demo, start slow, and as they build confidence/skill, increase speed. The key is to get the technique right.

Inside/outside dribbling (one foot): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiR2OI0NCv4>

- The key to this activity is *small* touches, it is not a race! Reinforce that early and often. Have the kids line up on one sideline and dribble to the other using their dominant foot. Then dribble back and repeat. Then do two more back and forth, but with non-dominant foot. They will struggle with the non dominant foot, that's ok, by teaching them early they will become more comfortable with it throughout the season, and be set up for longer term success.

Toe taps: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VT8KF3_ssqU

- Start slow with this, they may not be able to hop quickly back and forth when first doing this. The key to this activity is *light* touches with the sole of the foot (just the toe), not the middle of the foot, as they will likely put too much weight down when doing so and it will throw them off balance. If you have some players who get decent at this, challenge them by having them do toe taps in a 360 around the ball and forward and backward toe rolls to continue to work on balance and coordination (see #2 and #3 of the video for those demos): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaktBhbJUyg>

Outside hook turn: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ywich-FF0w

- Set up a row of cones about 5 yards from a sideline. Have the kids start on the sideline and do a hook turn every time they reach the row of cones and sideline. Pick a number (ex. 6) and tell the players to dribble back and forth making hook turns until they do so 6 times. Then pick a new number and do the same.

Inside hook turn: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e48Lpw_W6DI

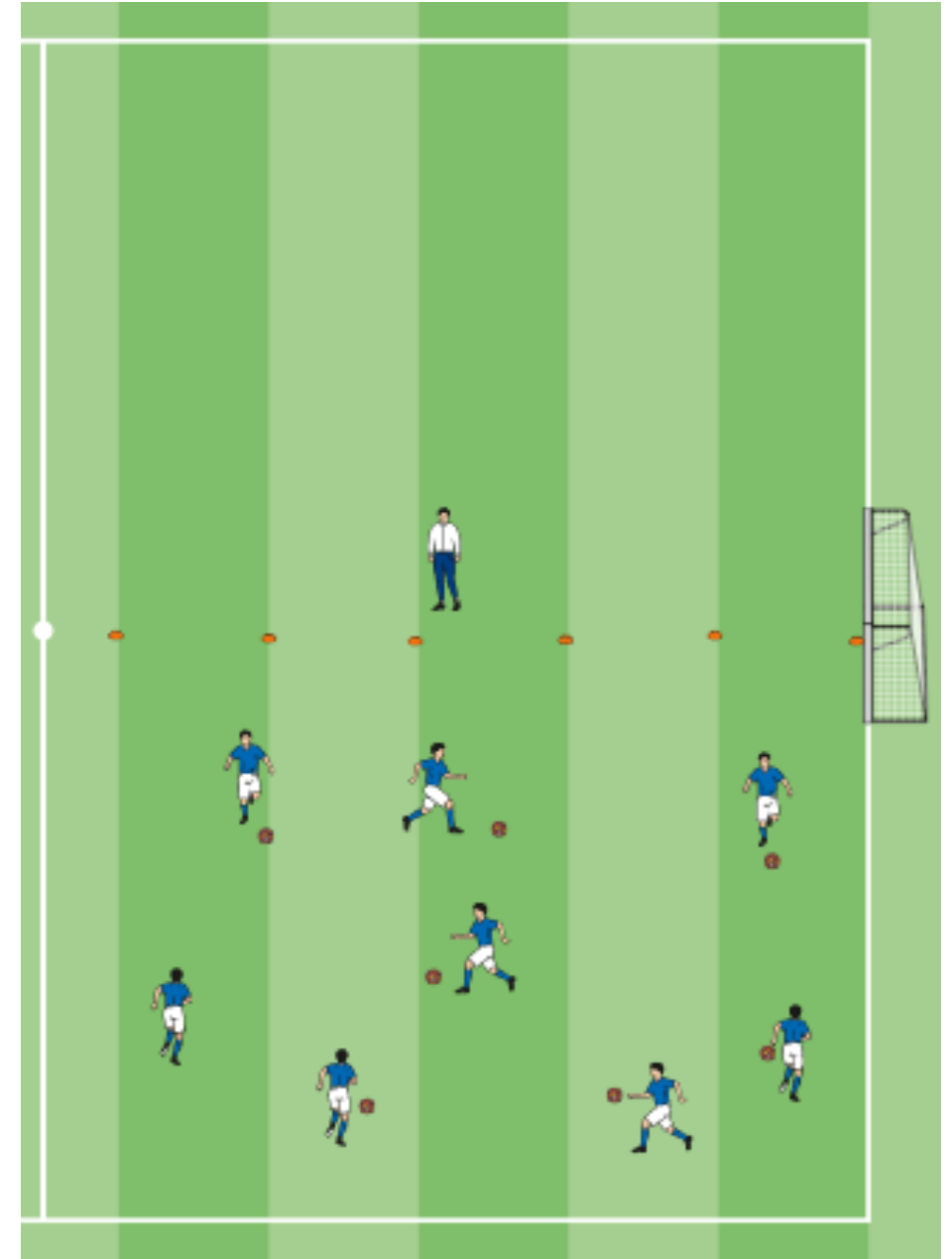
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V pushes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tx99fNc0Dr4>

- This one may be a challenge for many of the kids, that's ok, start slow so they can learn the technique. Space the kids out, each with their own cone, and have them practice doing the v-push around the cone.

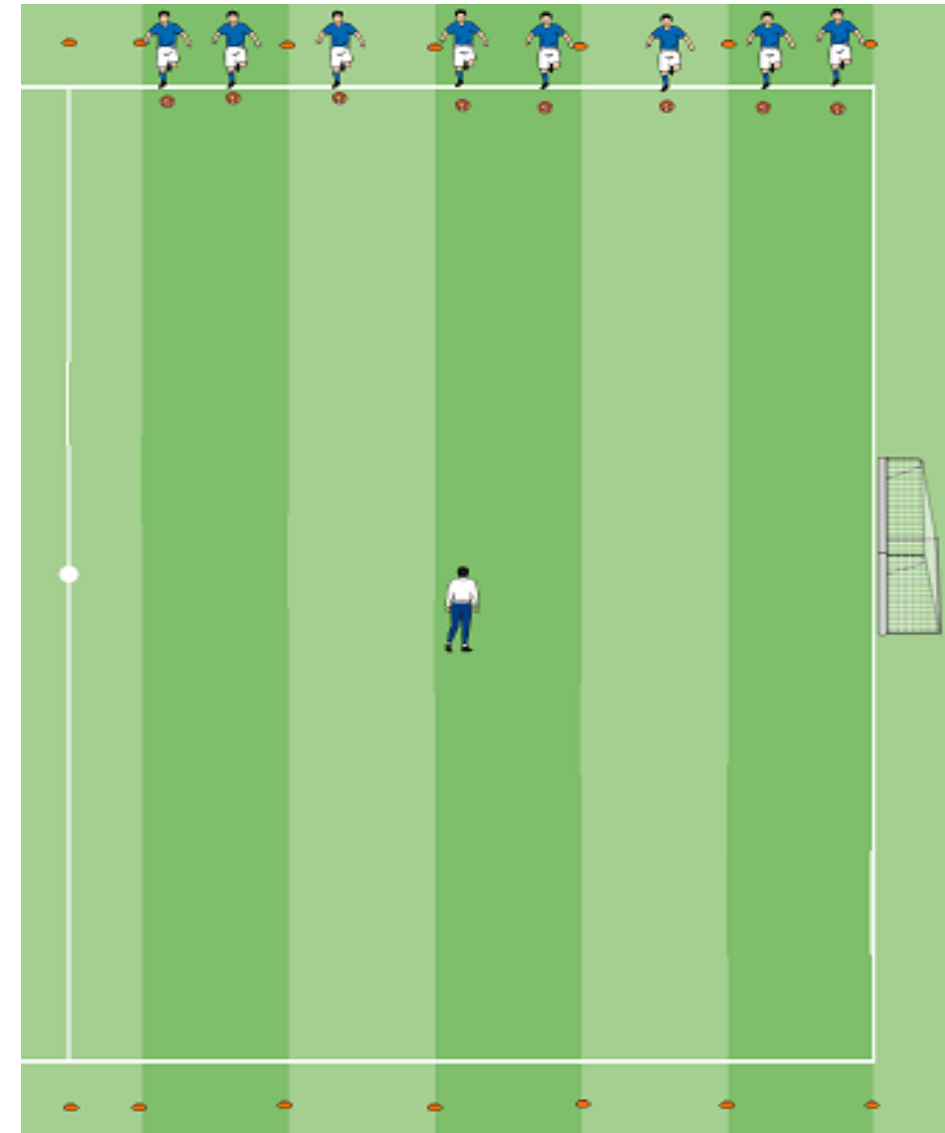
Practice Activity: Red light/Green light

- Set up a line of cones ~1/2 way down the field.
- The intent is to create an area big enough for them to dribble, but small enough that they need to pick their head up to not run into each other. If it's too much chaos, expand the area as needed. If the area is too big and they don't have to pick their head up much to avoid each other, make it smaller.
- Stand outside the area and call out different light colors as they dribble around in the area
 - Green = go fast
 - Yellow = go slow
 - Red = stop with foot on top of the ball
 - Blue = do toe taps
 - Purple = show off your best dance moves
- The goal is for them to practice dribbling (you can reference the inside/outside ball mastery concept) and turns (inside/outside hook) while picking their head up to avoid traffic.
- Key points: Head up, small touches (using ball mastery inside/outside dribbling and hook turns), change of direction, and listening skills



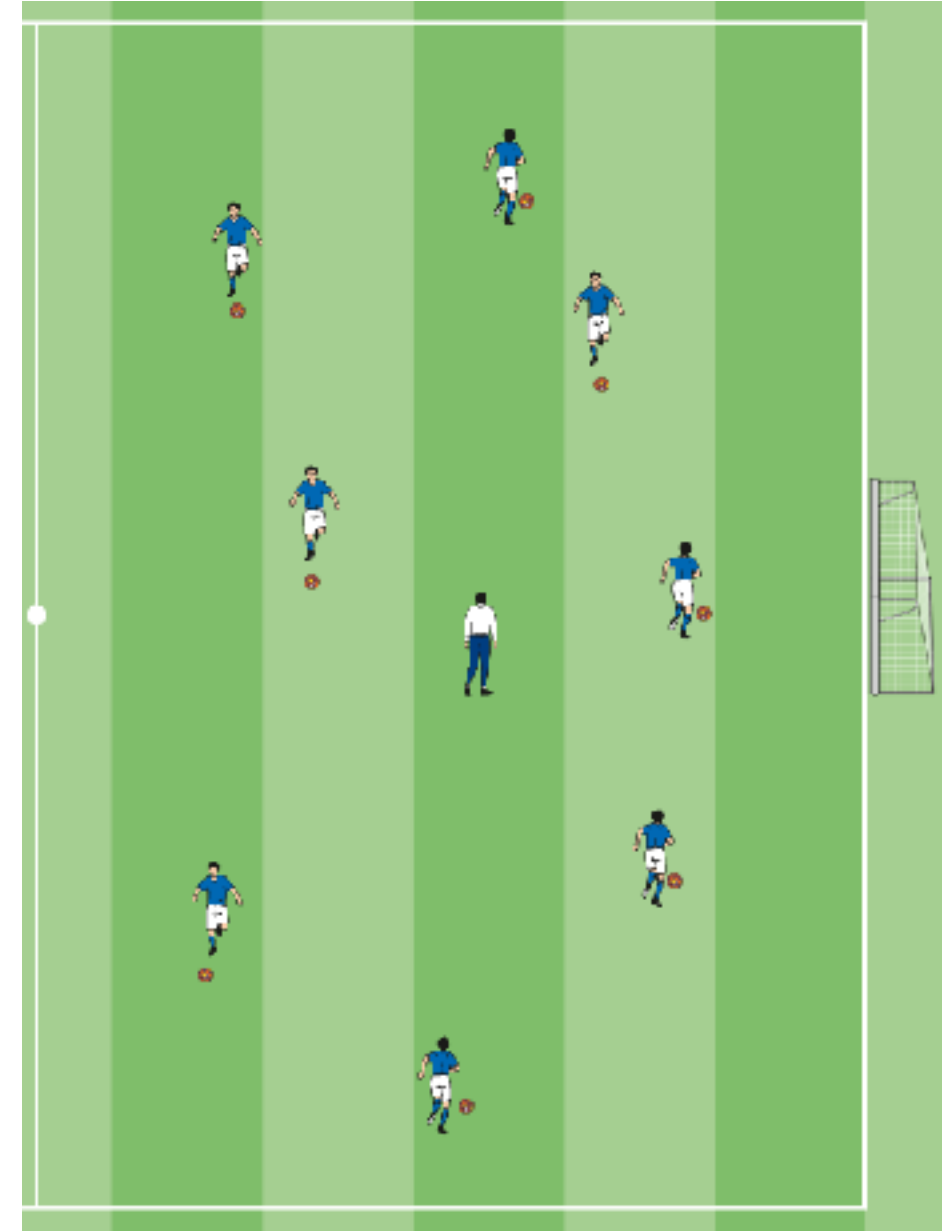
Practice Activity: Sharks and Minnows

- Everyone gets a ball and lines up on one end of the field or sideline (recommend going side to side instead of goal to midfield).
- Put a line of cones about 5 feet behind both lines they are dribbling to/from to form “end zones” that the players are trying to reach. The reason for the end zone is to help teach them to not just boot the ball all the way across the line, but to dribble it, keep it controlled, and stop it in the end zone.
- The coach starts as the shark in the middle.
- The object is to dribble to the opposite end zone without letting the shark get your ball. Let them go 1-2 rounds without getting a ball, and then get someone the next time. If a player dribbles out of bounds or out the back of the end zone, they are a shark next round as well.
- After touching their ball, that player is out for that round, and then joins as a shark the next round. Do this until no one is left. After there are 1-2 kid sharks, the coach doesn't need to be a shark.
- They usually like this one and in the games you can remind them to "be a shark" and get the ball from the other team instead of running back towards their goal.



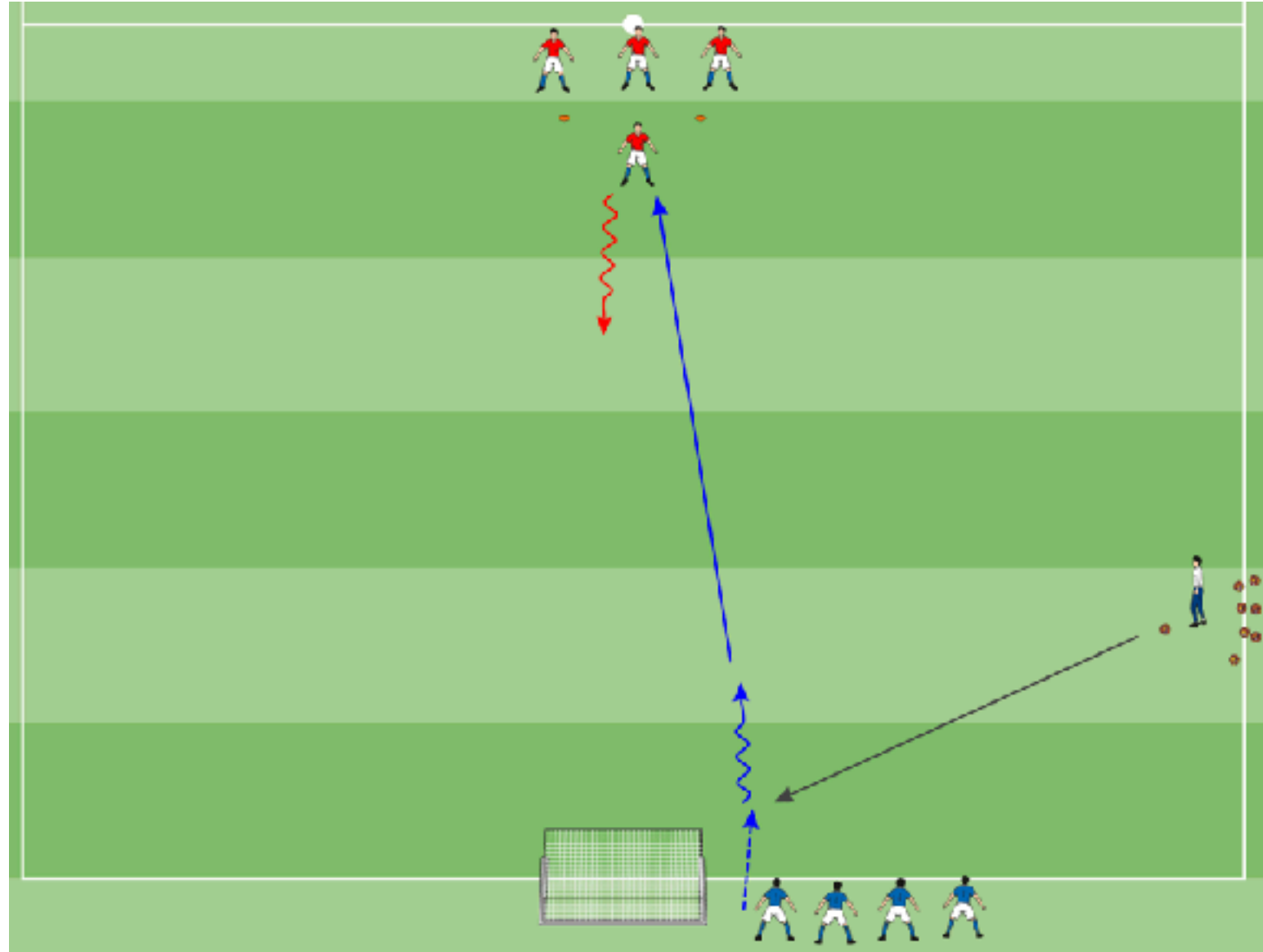
Practice Activity: Freeze Tag

- Start with the coach as "it" and the players dribbling around one half (must stay in bounds or they are frozen).
- Tag them by touching their ball. Once tagged, players have to put their hands on their head and spread their feet (making a goal with their legs).
- To get unfrozen, teammates have to dribble a ball through the "goal."
- Run around catching different kids for a while and try and get them all at the end, or tell them you can't catch them all and they win.
- Subsequent rounds can have two players start as "it" instead of the coach.
- This game teaches them to look up as they are dribbling to avoid whoever is "it" and running into each other.
- Key points: Head up, small touches (using ball mastery inside/ outside dribbling and hook turns), change of direction, ball shielding



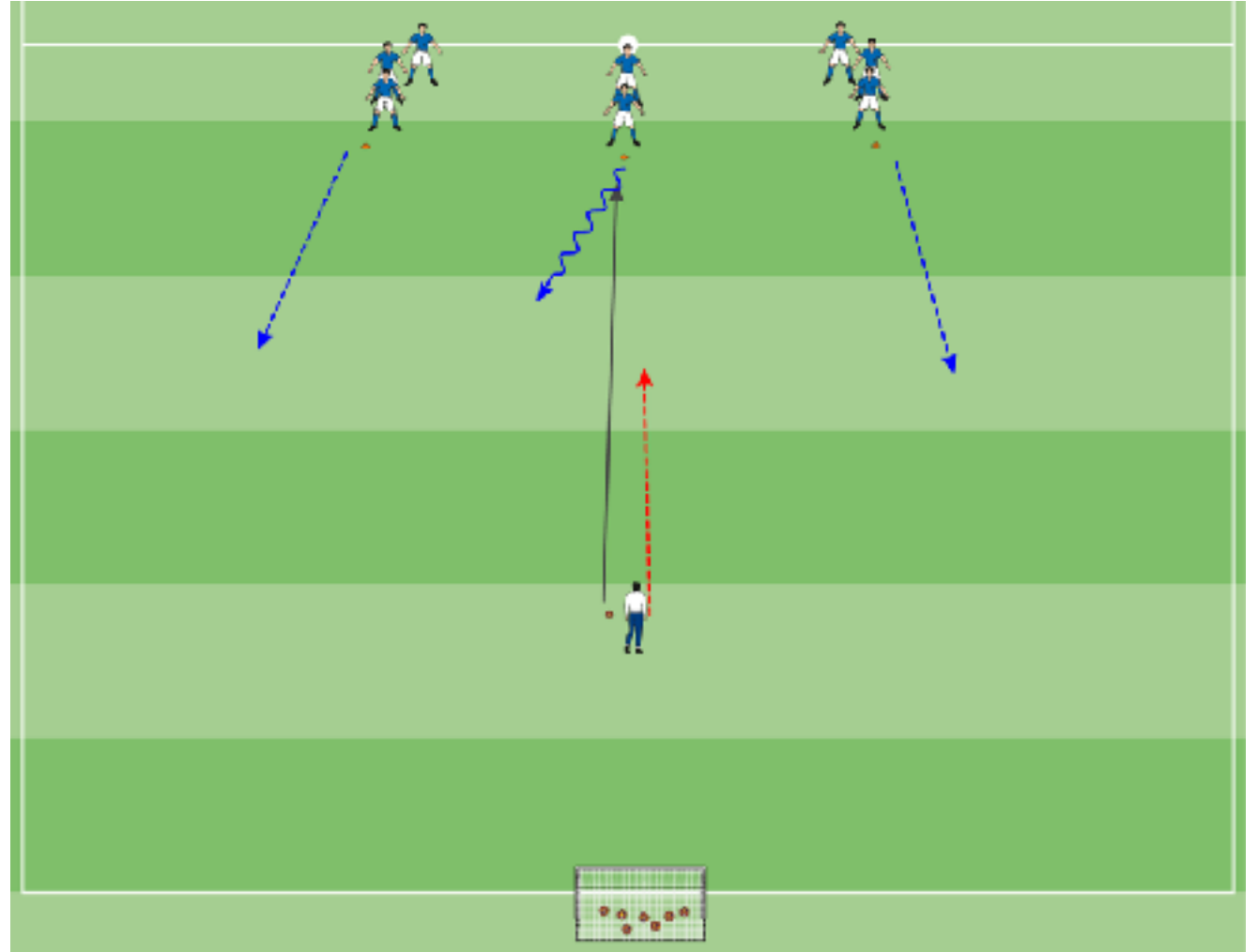
Practice Activity: 1v1

- Divide the kids into two groups, defenders by the goal, attackers by the half line
- Have the coach start with the balls along the sideline
- The coach calls out a defender and plays the ball in front of the net. The defender runs forward to receive it, takes a few small dribbles forward and then passes to the attacker at midfield. The attacker settles the ball and then goes 1v1 against the defender.
- The attacker tries to score, the defender tries to win the ball and score/pass the ball through the cone goal to the waiting attackers who are standing behind it.
- Let each player rotate through 2-3 times and then swap the attackers/defenders and repeat.
- Key points: Soft touch to receive ball (keep it close), solid pass to the attacker, and then have the attacker use change of speed and/or direction to try and get by the defender
- Progression 1: Make it a 2v1 by having two attackers.



Practice Activity: 3v1

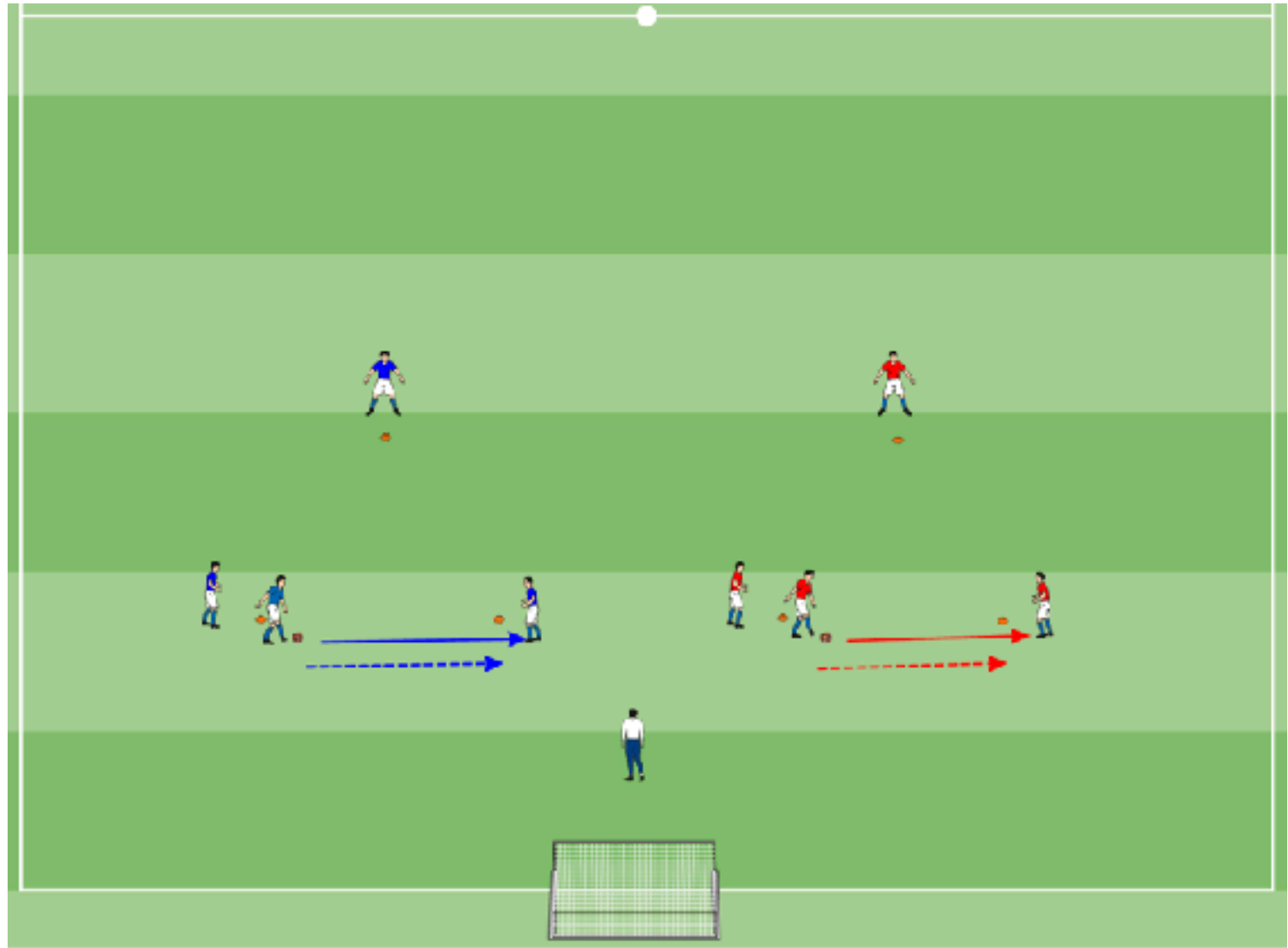
- Line the kids up in three lines at midfield, cones can help space them out
- The coach is the defender and starts with the ball, keep the other balls in the net to use for each subsequent round
- The coach passes the ball to any attacker and then steps in as a defender to force the player to make a decision (pass or dribble forward).
 - Having the coach start the activity with a pass vs. the kids starting to just dribble themselves from the center allows extra opportunities for the kids to work on receiving the ball when it's passed to help with their touch.
- Key points: Soft touch to receive ball (keep it close), head up to find space, players without the ball need to stay spread out vs. running to the ball, shoot with laces (no toe)
- Progression 1: The coach can be replaced by a player as the defender after several rounds. This allows the defender to practice good passes to start the exercise and work on defending as well.



Coaching tip: There will likely be times when one of the players doesn't get the ball based on the decisions made by those with the ball. That's ok, let the outside player who didn't get the ball, but stayed in the correct supporting position, know that he/she did a good job to provide positive reinforcement for proper positioning.

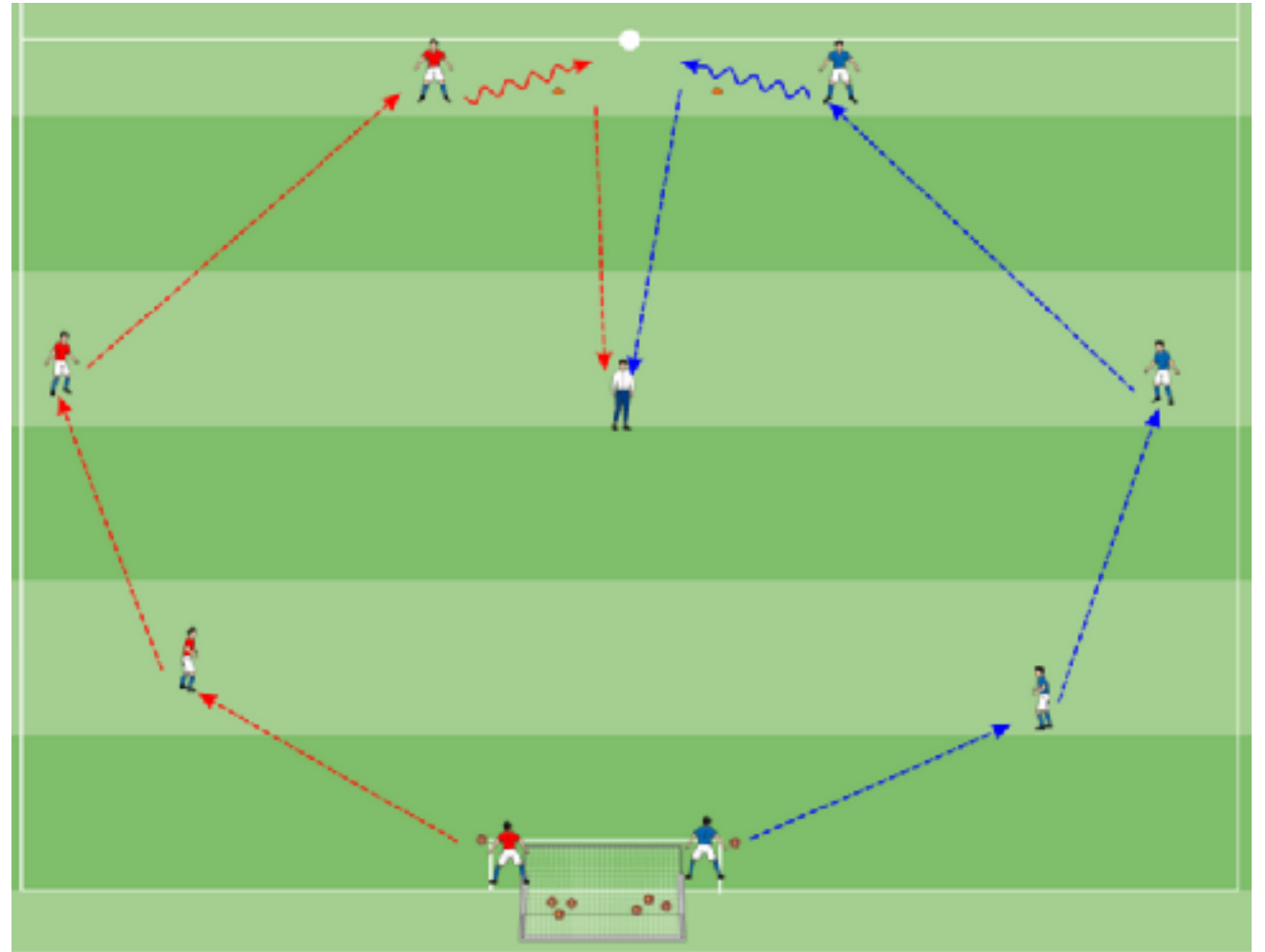
Practice Activity: Triangle Passing Relay

- Set up two equal sized triangles with the distance between cones about 10-15 feet.
- Divide the kids into two teams and put a player on each cone, with two players together on the first cone with the ball.
- All players follow the ball to the next cone after passing it there.
- Objective is to get the first player who passes the ball back to their original cone before the other team does the same (takes 9 passes).
- If the players just focus on speed, their passes won't be very good, and it will slow them down as they chase the ball.
- Key points: Good passing (inside of the foot, look where you want to pass, plant foot pointed in that direction), soft touch to receive ball (keep it close)
- Progression 1: Limit the players to two touches, one to receive, and one to pass.
- Progression 2: "Monkey in the middle." Put the 4th player in the middle and tell the outside players they can pass in any direction they want. Goal is to get 3 passes in a row, then swap defender.



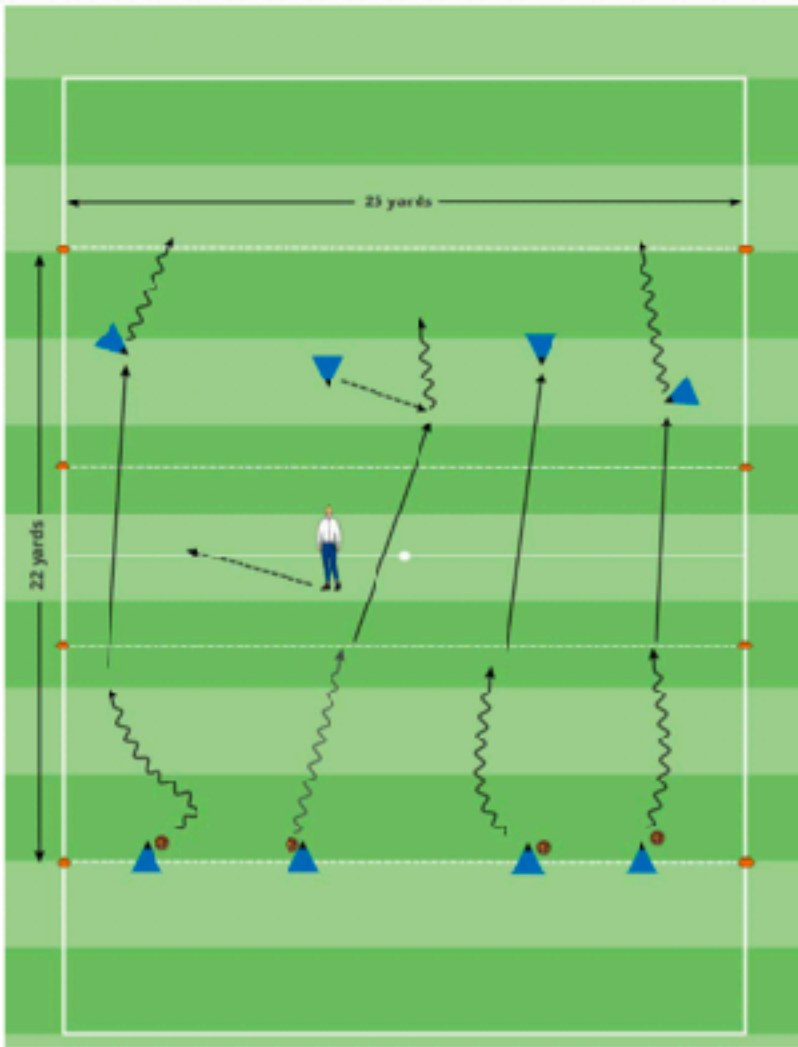
Practice Activity: Building from the goal kick

- Divide the kids into two groups, and set up each group along one side of the field as depicted in the picture.
- This is basically a “set play” piece since there are so many goal kicks in this age group, and it starts teaching them to play the ball out from the back, then up the sideline and into the middle to attack.
- Instruct the kids on proper passing (inside of the foot) and receiving and turning (soft, controlled touches). It is not a race between the teams, focus is on proper passing so you may need to stagger when each group starts to prevent that.
- The goal is to use 2-3 touches to receive and then pass the ball to a teammate.
- When the 4th player receives the ball they should dribble towards a cone to “take on” the defender and go around them, and then pass the ball back to the coach in the middle.
- Have the players rotate positions after 4-5 rounds so they start to learn what they should do in each position.
- Key points: Good passing technique (look where they want to pass, plant foot pointed in that direction, inside of the foot (no toe) to pass the ball), players receiving the ball along the sideline should have their backs to the sideline (not midfield) to be open to the field and able to turn/see defenders from the direction they want to play the ball
- If you have an assistant coach, put both coaches in the middle and each coach can focus on one group of player



Progression 1: Only have one group of four build from the back and use the other team in groups of two as defenders. The defenders will start at the half line (like they will in a game) and attempt to win the ball after the goal kick. The objective of the players building out of the back is to get the ball across the half line.

Practice Activity: Passing game



PRACTICE (Core Activity): Passing Game

OBJECTIVE: To pass the ball past opponents and move the ball forward.

ORGANIZATION: Mark out a 22 x 25-yard field with an 8-yard center zone. Assign four players to each end of the field. One of these groups (the attackers) has one ball for each player; the other has none. The attackers all try to get the ball across the center zone and pass to a player on the other side. Receivers dribble across the endline and start over again. The coach stands in the center zone and acts as a defender, blocking passing lanes and intercepting balls. Play for 20 minutes with two breaks.

KEY WORDS: Look up, pass, be open

GUIDED QUESTIONS: 1) When can I pass to a player on the other side? 2) How can I tell if it's open? 3) How can the players on the other side help?

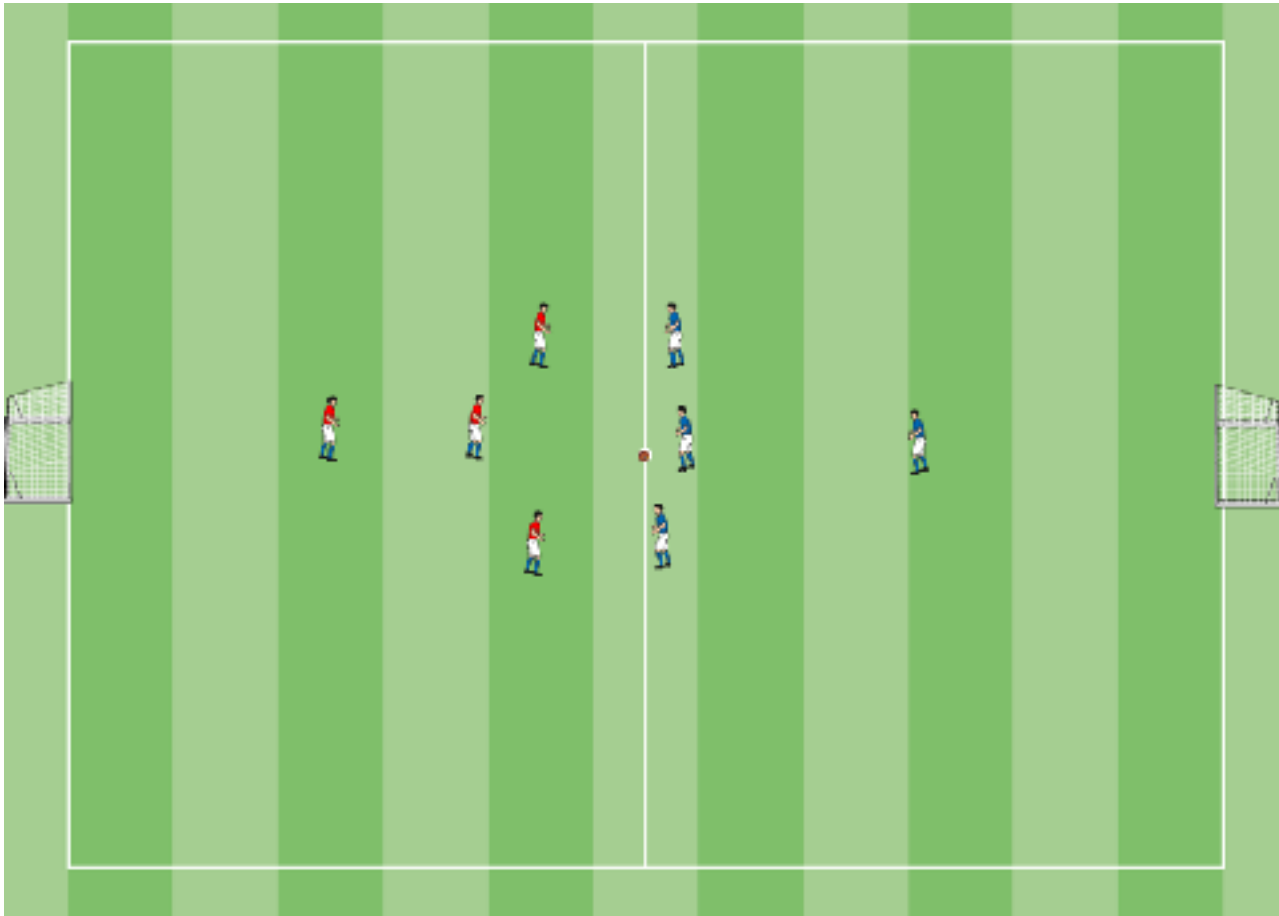
ANSWERS: 1) When the passing lane is open. 2) Look up from the ball and see the position of the defender. 3) Show for the ball in good receiving positions (open lanes).

NOTES: Start here at the Core Activity after the first play phase. Decide if the challenge is too easy or too difficult. Spend a total of 20 minutes in the Practice Phase.

The picture shows this set up across both half of the fields, but just shift the zones down to one half of the field if that's all you have or set up the zones horizontally across the field. To make it less challenging, move the players a little closer and/or shorten the middle zone. To make it more challenging, have two of the players be defenders in the middle zone instead of the coach. Encourage the kids to call to their partner by name when they are open.

Play 2

- Play as close to a full sided game as field availability/number of players allows
- Focus on key phrases/points from earlier in the practice to reinforce them
- Begin teaching the kids about shape during these scrimmages. DON'T have one kid stand in front of the goal, but do encourage them to think about being in a 3-1 type shape. Make sure to rotate who is playing defense.
- Take a halftime break for the kids to get water and ask them 2-3 guided questions about the concepts, then play the second half to finish practice



Ex. Guided questions for “halftime” of Play 2

Q: How do you keep the ball close?

A: Be gentle/soft with the ball

Q: How do you dribble faster?

A: Use harder touches

Q: What’s the difference between dribbling forward and dribbling to the side?

A: You have to use a different part of the foot

Sample U7/8 Season Plan

- **Week 1:** Objective- Meet new friends, have fun with lots of touches
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (Inside/Outside dribbling and toe taps), Practice Activity (Red light/green light), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling and toe taps), Practice Activity (Sharks and minnows), Play 2
- **Week 2:** Objective- Improve control and intro passing combos
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, toe taps, inside hook turn), Practice Activity (Freeze tag), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, toe taps, inside hook turn), Practice Activity (Building from goal kick), Play 2
- **Week 3:** Objective- Improve ball control and attacking
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, toe taps, outside hook turn), Practice Activity (Triangle passing relay), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, toe taps, outside hook turn), Practice Activity (1v1), Play 2
- **Week 4:** Objective- Improve shape and passing
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, v-pushes), Practice Activity (3v1), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, v-pushes), Practice Activity (Passing game), Play 2
- **Week 5:** Objective- Continue working on passing combos and ball skills for attacking as an individual
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (Inside and outside hook turn, v-pushes), Practice Activity (Building from goal kick), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (Inside and outside hook turn, v-pushes), Practice Activity (1v1), Play 2
- **Week 6:** Objective- Improve shape and ball control
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, toe taps, v-pushes), Practice Activity (3v1), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, toe taps, v-pushes), Practice Activity (Triangle passing relay), Play 2
- **Week 7:** Objective- Improve attacking with a teammate and passing
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (Inside and outside hook turn, v-pushes), Practice Activity (2v1, progression from 1v1 activity), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, v-pushes), Practice Activity (Passing game), Play 2
- **Week 8:** Objective- Demo improved ball control skills
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (Toe taps and I/O hook turn), Practice Activity (Red light/green light), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (I/O dribbling, toe taps) Practice Activity (Sharks and minnows), Play 2
- **Week 9:** Objective- Have fun at the last week of practice!
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (kids choice), Practice Activity (kids choice), Play 2
 - Play 1, Ball Mastery (kids choice), kids vs. parents scrimmage

Coaching Games

- Don't be a puppet master and constantly direct the kids where to go/what to do (you'll have to sometime, but let them learn through playing)
- Use key words/phrases from practices to help them during the game, but let them make decisions and have fun!
- Don't park a kid in front of the goal all game. It's ok to try and get them to understand the concept of defending by having a player drop back a little, but not by standing two feet in front of the goal when the ball is on the other half.
- Halftime
 1. Tell me something you did well
 2. Can we improve one thing in the second half? Think about (a concept from practice)...
 3. Team cheer
- End of game
 1. Positive reinforcement of things they did well, give each kid a specific area they did well
 2. Team cheer
 3. Snacks
 4. Acknowledge and thank the parents

Final Thoughts

- The overall intent of this curriculum pack is to help provide a 90% solution for coaches that provides a fun and focused soccer experience for the kids in our program. You are not required to follow it exactly, but whatever you do, please try and make sure you are working towards the U6 player development objectives of learning ball mastery, learning how to change directions, and having fun.
- When working with young kids, patience and flexibility are key qualities needed by our coaches. Adjust things as needed, cross talk with other coaches, and reach out to our coaching director with any questions or feedback.
- There are tons of great resources online for learning more about coaching
 - US Grassroots online 4v4 course
 - It's about two hours and cost \$25, which the board will refund once you complete it
 - <https://learning.ussoccer.com/coach/courses/available/26/details/10386>
 - The Coaching Manual
 - Awesome resource from England that has tons of material (requires a paid membership for the full features), but their youtube channel has a lot of good (free) videos as well
 - <https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/@TheCoachingManual/videos>
- Feel free to share this curriculum pack or other resources you plan on using with your team parents. If there are specific activities (like the ball mastery ones) that have good and quick videos, ask them to show their kids. That may help them when it comes time to practice, and some kids may start practicing on their own at home once shown how to do these activities.