



Coaching Manual
A-B Division

Principles of EPSA Coaching

This handbook is designed to help coaches run simple, effective, and engaging soccer practices that maximize player development and enjoyment. Every session follows the Play-Practice-Play (PPP) model, ensuring players learn through the game while getting plenty of touches on the ball.

1. Engage Everyone, Actively

- No standing in lines—everyone should be involved and moving at all times.
- Game-like activities and small-sided games ensure lots of touches on the ball.

2. Make It Fun

- If the kids are smiling, they're learning.
- Practices should be high-energy and engaging, not repetitive and boring.

3. Keep It Age-Appropriate

- Younger players focus on fun, coordination, and confidence.
- Older players develop technical skills, tactics, and decision-making.

4. Use Game-Like Scenarios

- Players learn best through playing, not through isolated drills.
- Every session ends with small-sided games that mirror real soccer situations.

5. Steady Progression, Reinforced Over Time

- Skills and concepts build week over week, reinforcing prior learning.
- Sessions follow a logical flow, so players improve consistently.

6. Easy To Implement

- Each session is simple, clear, and structured for easy execution.
- Coaches don't need to reinvent the wheel—just follow the plan and adapt as needed.

Age-Appropriate Development

Division A-B (Pre-K - K)

Session Duration: 60-70 Minutes

General Developmental Focus

At this age, soccer should be all about fun, exploration, and movement. Players are developing basic coordination, balance, and comfort with the ball at their feet. The focus is on engagement and activity rather than structured tactics or competition.

Specific Skills to Develop

1. **Basic dribbling** – moving the ball with different parts of the foot
2. **Balance and coordination** – running, stopping, changing direction
3. **Basic control** – stopping the ball with feet
4. **Spatial awareness** – recognizing field boundaries
5. **Engaging with teammates** – playing and sharing the ball

Coaching Tips for This Age Group

- **Keep it fun and imaginative** – use playful themes and leverage games the kids already know (Ships Across the Ocean, Mr. Fox What Time Is It?, Red Light Green Light, Simon Says, etc)
- **Encourage movement** – no waiting in lines, maximize touches.
- **Limit tactical coaching** – just let them play and explore.
- **Praise effort and participation over performance.**

Session Structure: Play-Practice-Play

The Play-Practice-Play model is designed to engage players in a game-centered learning approach. This method ensures that players spend as much time as possible with the ball at their feet, making decisions in realistic game situations.

Each practice is structured into three phases:

1. Play (Game-like activity) – Opening Phase (30%)

- **Purpose:** Immediately engage players in a game-like scenario.
- **Format:** Activity or small-sided games with minimal instruction.
- **Coach's Role:** Observe and identify key focus areas for the session.

2. Practice (Skill Focus) – Development Phase (40%)

- **Purpose:** Improve specific technical or tactical skills in a structured environment.
- **Format:** Individual, partner, or small-group activities that reinforce session objectives.
- **Coach's Role:** Provide guided instruction, demonstrations, and constructive feedback.

3. Play (Game w/ Learning Emphasis) – Closing Phase (30%)

- **Purpose:** Reinforce the skills practiced in a game scenario.
- **Format:** Small-sided or modified full-field games with guided challenges.
- **Coach's Role:** Encourage players to apply learned skills while letting them play freely.

Practice 1 | Focus: Develop familiarity with ball

A-B Division

-0:05 Setup & Invitation

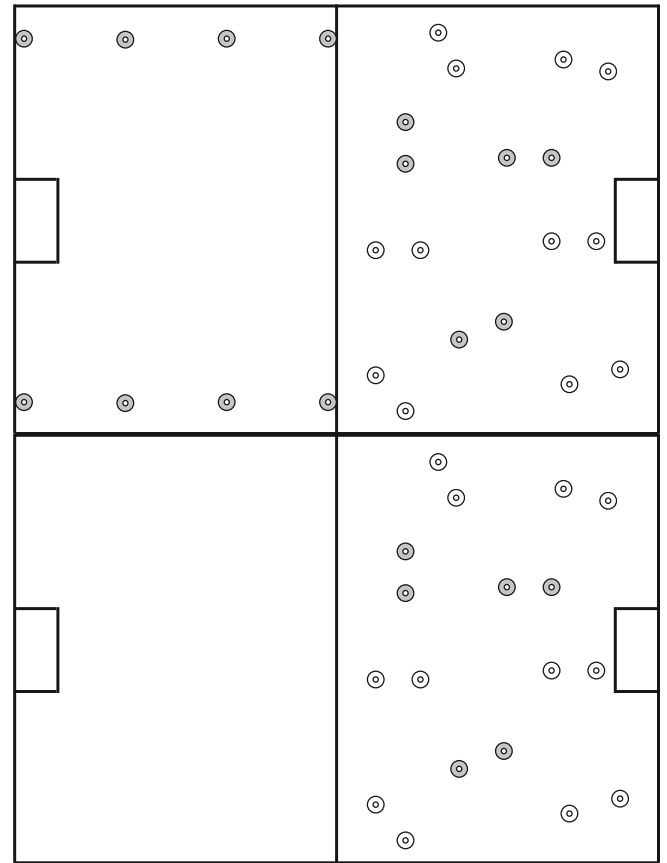
- Arrive 5 minutes early to setup Gates Game and Ships Across the Ocean on either side of field.
- As players arrive, invite them to walk/run dribbling ball through gates in any order. Not timed during this phase.
- Once team present, gather for intros and ice breaker questions - favorite color, animal, food...

0:10 Play - Gates Game

- Spread players out with their ball among gates.
- Players dribble through as many gates as they can to 30 second timer.
- Play multiple rounds, encouraging players to beat their previous best.

Coaching points

- Encourage keeping eyes up.
- Knees bent. Low center of gravity.
- Toes down to go straight. Inside/outside to turn.

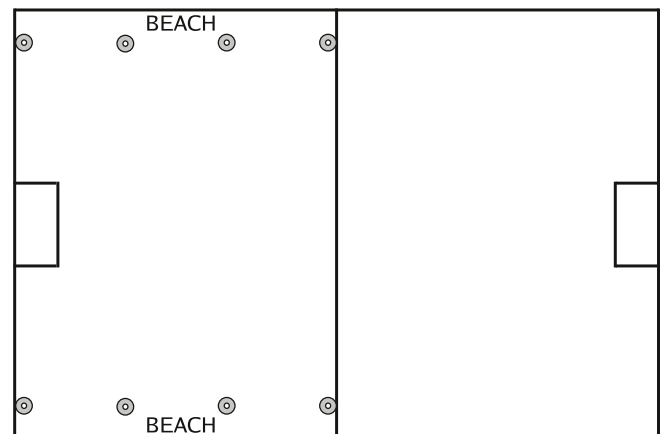


0:20 Practice - Ships Across the Ocean

- All players start with ball at one side and dribble across ocean to other beach.
- If shark (initially coaches) steal ball from player and dribble it out of bounds, player joins sharks.
- Don't kick ball away, encourage player to fight back possession and continue to beach.

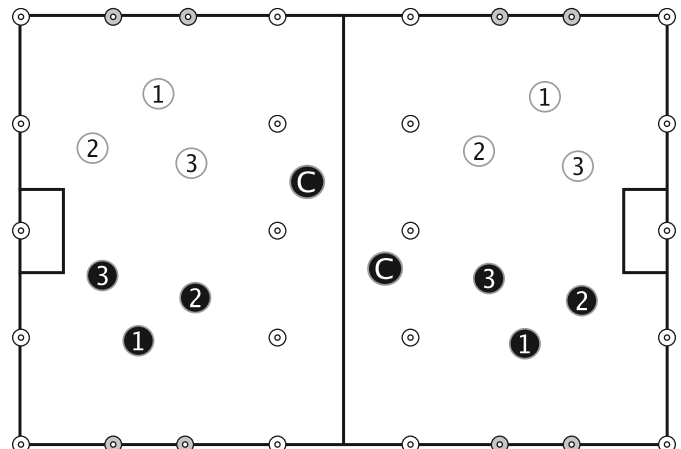
Coaching points

- Change direction and speed to evade.
- Which part of feet to turn with?



0:40 Play - Small Sided Games

- Using pinnies, split team into two groups of ideally 3v3.
- Encourage players when they employ coaching points from earlier in session.
- Chaos is to be expected! Just make sure they are going to proper goals. Encouragement when doing the right things.
- Introduce kick ins, corner kicks, etc as they happen.



Close with a team cheer!

Practice 2 | Focus: Passing & Receiving

A-B Division

-0:05 Setup & Invitation

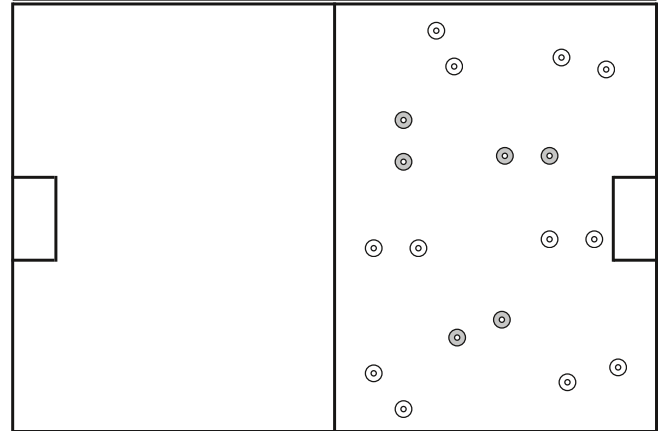
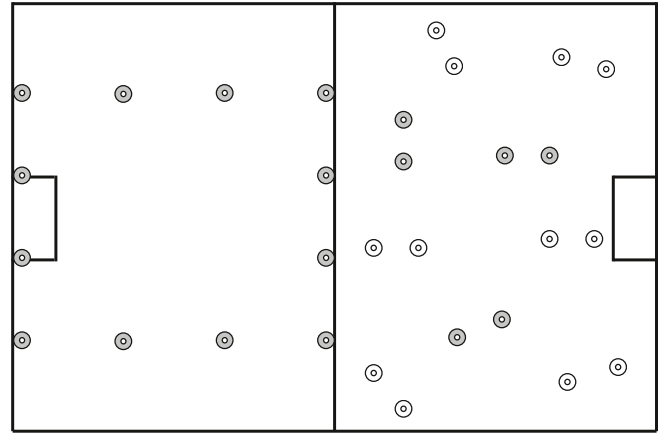
- Arrive 5 minutes early to setup Gates Game and Ouch Game cones.
- As players arrive, invite them to walk/run dribbling ball through gates in any order. Not timed during this phase.
- Ask for parents willing to help with Ouch Game.
- Once team present, gather for intros and ice breaker questions - favorite color, animal, food...

0:10 Play - Partner Gates

- Pair 2 players with 1 ball.
- Play Partner Gates to a 30 second timer.
- Teams pass ball through gates to score.
- Play multiple rounds, encouraging teams to beat their previous best.

Coaching points

- Inside of foot for passing.
- Who decides which gate to go to next? (Player who received ball)

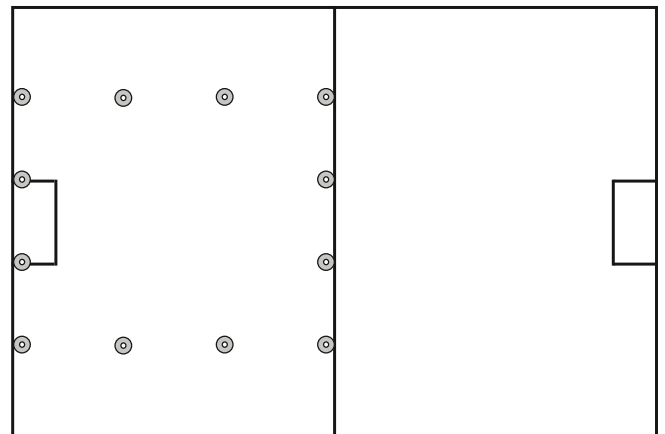


0:20 Practice - Ouch Game

- Players start with their ball, spread out.
- Adults (coaches + parents) roam in space.
- Players try to pass ball into adults legs. If they hit below the knee, adult says "Ouch!"
- Play multiple rounds. Adults slow at first. Then move faster.

Coaching points

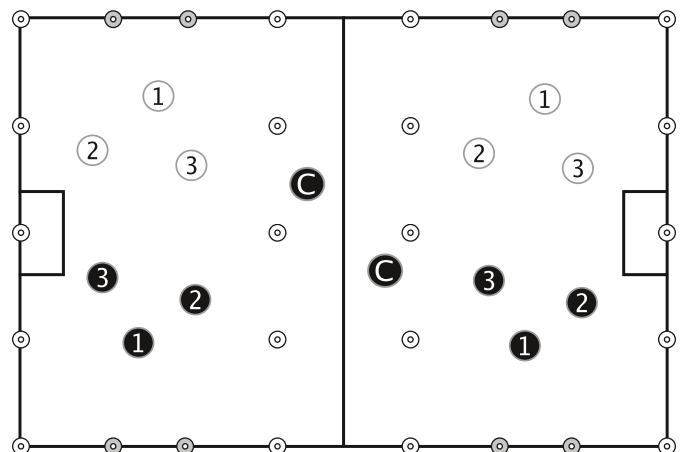
- Eyes up to find adults. Both feet to move ball.
- Accurate kick with inside of feet.



0:40 Play - Small Sided Games

- Using pinnies, split team into two groups of ideally 3v3.
- Encourage players when they employ coaching points from earlier in session.

Close with a team cheer!



Practice 3 | Focus: Dribbling

A-B Division

-0:05 Setup & Invitation

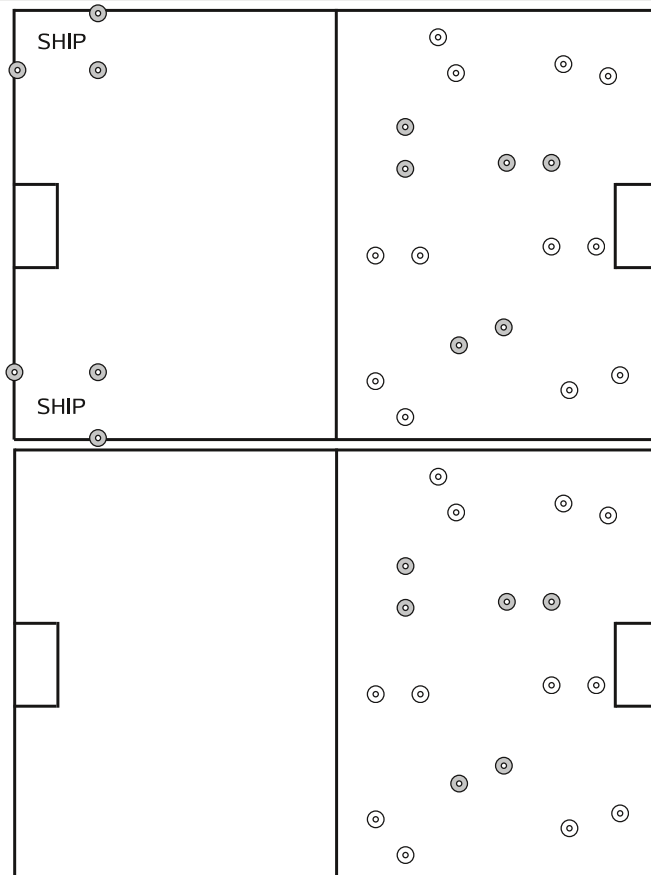
- Arrive 5 minutes early to setup Gates Game and half of Capture the Treasure cones.
- As players arrive, invite them to walk/run dribbling ball through gates in any order.
- Ask for parents willing to help with activity.
- Invite players to try pullback or sole flick through gate in preparation for Gates Game.

0:05 Play - Gates

- Spread players out with their ball among gates.
- Play Gates Game to a 30 second timer.
- Move through gate to score (pullback, flick, etc)
- Play multiple rounds, encouraging players to beat their previous best.

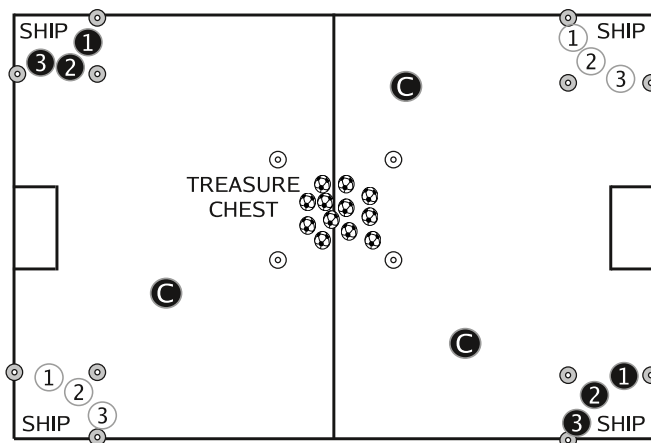
Coaching points

- Encourage use of various moves.
- Feel free to demonstrate.



0:20 Practice - Capture the Treasure

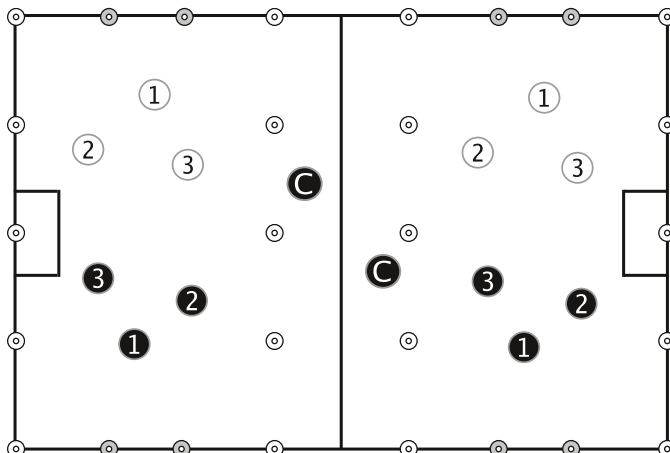
- Divide into 4 teams, each with a "ship".
- Place all balls into center "treasure chest".
- At start, players run to center and grab balls. Also steal from other team ships.
- Team with most balls in ship at end of 2 minutes wins.
- Rounds 1-2: let players go
- Rounds 2-4: adults (coaches + parents) roam as obstacles.



0:40 Play - Small Sided Games

- Using pinnies, split team into two groups of ideally 3v3.
- Encourage players when they employ coaching points from earlier in session.
- Introduce pass / dribble move (pullback, sole flick, etc) challenges (e.g. 3 passes or pullback before scoring)

Close with a team cheer!



Practice 4 | Focus: Attacking & Defending

A-B Division

-0:05 Setup & Invitation

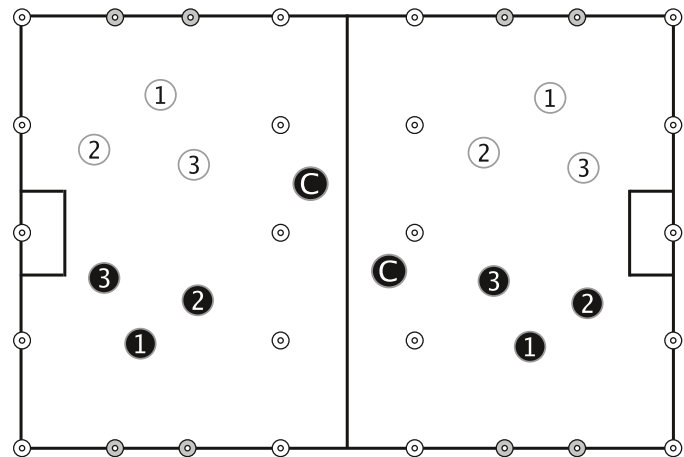
- Arrive 5 minutes early to setup Small Sided Game fields.
- As players arrive, using pinnies, split team into two groups of ideally 3v3.
- Let them play without instruction.

0:05 Play - Small Sided Games

- Minimal instruction.

Coaching points

- Encourage passing and finding open space
- Encourage eyes up

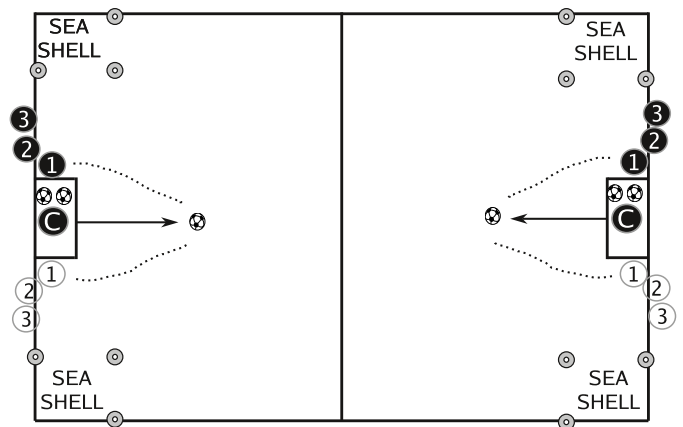


0:20 Practice - Capture the Pearl

- Divide into 2 teams, lined up next to coach.
- Coach serves ball, first players in each line run after ball "pearl" to bring back to their "sea shell" cone area.
- Point for team if player stops ball in their sea shell.
- Round 1: Single game 1v1 to introduce activity
- Round 2: Split team into two 1v1 games
- Rounds 3-4: Experiment with 2v1 or 2v2

Coaching points

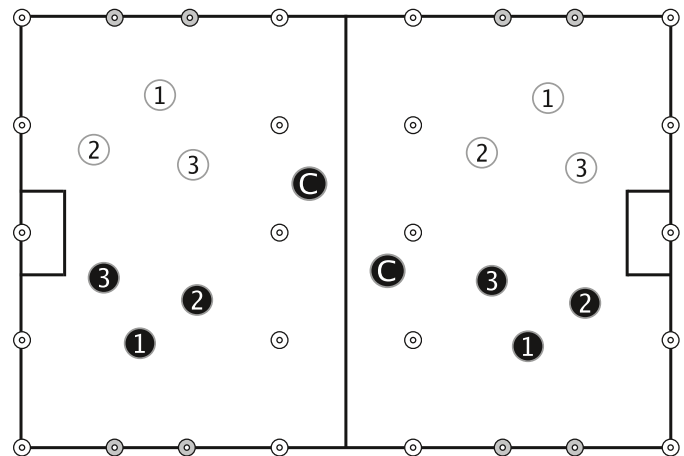
- Encourage stealing. How to protect ball?



0:40 Play - Small Sided Games

- Using pinnies, split team into two groups of ideally 3v3.
- Encourage players when they employ coaching points from earlier in session.
- Pass / dribble / move challenge.

Close with a team cheer!



Game Day

A-B Division

-0:05 Setup & Invitation

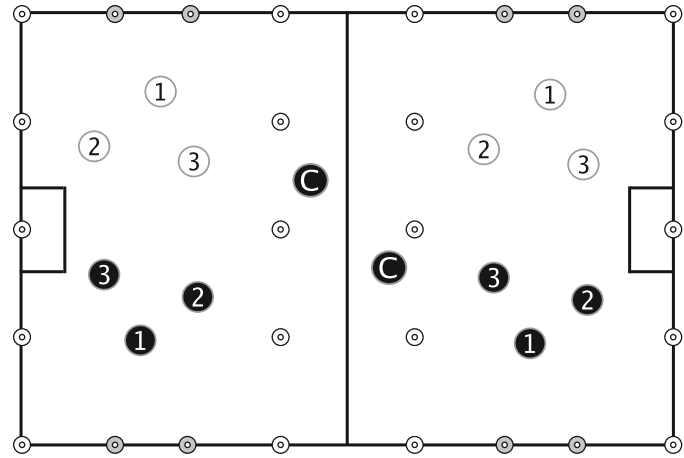
- Arrive 5 minutes early to setup Small Sided Game fields.
- As players arrive, using pinnies, split team into two groups of ideally 3v3.
- Let them play without instruction to warm up

0:15 Gear check

- Line up team for referee so they can do gear check.
- Tape/remove earrings, no necklaces.
- Shin guards required, cleats optional.

0:18 Split teams & Play!

- Once gear check complete, split team into more beginner-advanced skill bands.
- Coordinate with other coach which skill band on which field. You will always be on N-S field pairs.



Coaching points

- Give tons of high-fives
- Avoid "joysticking". Encourage positives.
- NO: "Pass the ball to Jimmy!"
- YES: "Way to find open space!" "Nice move!"

Close with high fives to other team!

