



# Coach's Season Handbook

A guide to Play-Practice-Play

DIVISION D

# Principles of this Coaching Handbook

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.
- ✓ Small-sided games and game-like activities 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 starts and ends with small-sided games that mirror real soccer situations.

## 5. Build 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. Make It Easy for Coaches 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 D (3rd–4th Grade / U9-U11)

Session Duration: 90 Minutes

## General Developmental Focus

Players develop **more advanced control, passing, and tactical awareness**. The focus is on **decision-making under pressure and basic team roles**.

## Specific Skills to Develop

1. **Dribbling with different parts of the foot** – control at different speeds
2. **Passing and receiving** – first touch awareness
3. **Defensive positioning** – basic marking and awareness
4. **Shooting under pressure** – accuracy and composure
5. **Introduction to teamwork roles** – basic attacking and defending principles

## Coaching Tips for This Age Group

- Encourage game-like scenarios** – make training reflect real play.
- Introduce small-group tactics** – support play, spacing, and movement.
- Reinforce positive decision-making** – reward the right choices, not just goals.
- Keep it fun and competitive** – balance challenge and enjoyment.

# 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 (Small-Sided Games) – Opening Phase (30%)

- **Purpose:** Immediately engage players in a game-like scenario.
- **Format:** Small-sided games (e.g., 3v3, 4v4, 5v5) 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%)

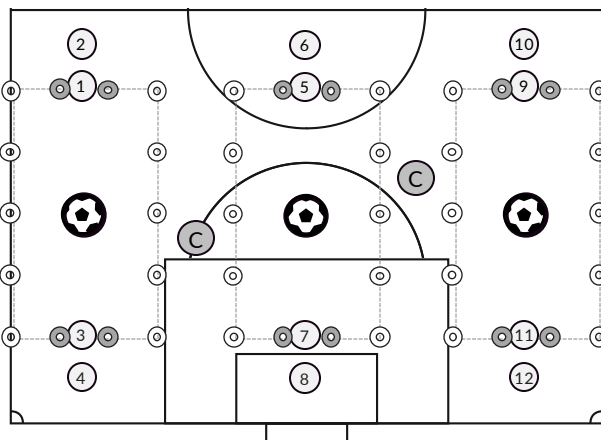
- **Purpose:** Reinforce the skills practiced in a game scenario.
- **Format:** Small-sided or modified full-field games with guided challenges.
- **Coach's Role:** Encourage players to apply learned skills while letting them play freely.

# Session Structure: Small-Sided Games

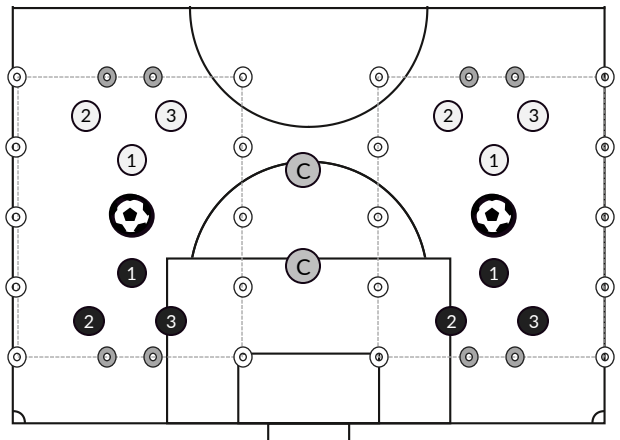
Small-sided games (e.g., 2v2, 3v3, etc.) are a core part of Play-Practice-Play because they **increase player engagement, decision-making, and touches on the ball**. These games replicate real match situations while ensuring that each player has more opportunities to develop skills in an **active, fast-paced environment**.

Small-sided games typically involve setting up smaller areas of play with boundaries and goals.

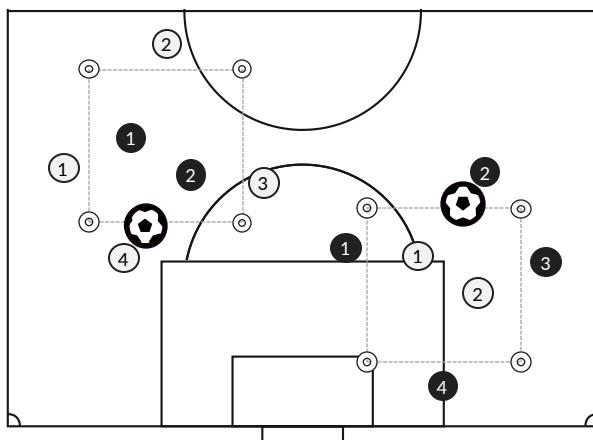
### 1 vs 1



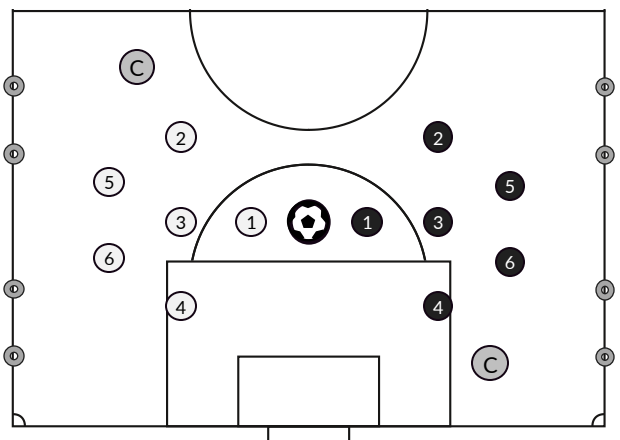
### 3 vs 3



### Rondo 4 vs 2



### 6 vs 6 w/ 4 goals



# Full-Season Practice Plan

Division D (3rd–4th Grade / U9-U11)

This table provides an **overview of the full-season practice plan**, outlining key areas of focus and associated drills for each session. Each practice follows the **Play-Practice-Play (PPP) model**, ensuring that players develop skills in a game-like environment.

Practice #	Focus	Drills & Activities
1	Dribbling & Ball Control	Dribbling Challenges, Shielding in Pairs
2	Short Passing	Partner Passing, Passing Gates, Pass & Move
3	Power Kicking & Shooting	1v1 Quick Fire, E2E Power Kicks, Target Practice, Rolling Ball Shot
4	Game Restarts	Throw-ins, Goal Kicks, Kick-offs

Each session builds on previous practices, reinforcing key skills while introducing new challenges. Coaches should adjust drills based on player development and engagement.

# Practice 1 | Dribbling & Ball Control

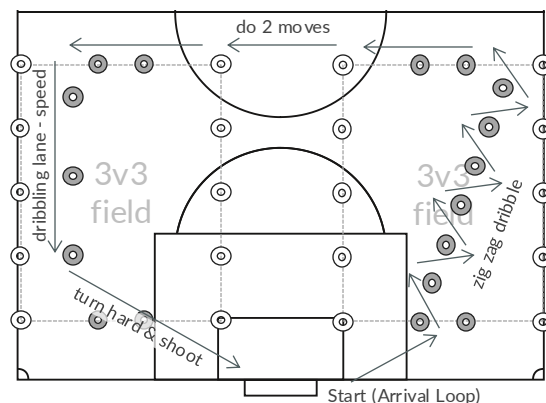
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## 5 min **Arrival Loop (Dribble & Shoot)**

1. Dribble through a **cone course**
2. Finish with a **shot on goal**
3. Retrieve the ball, repeat

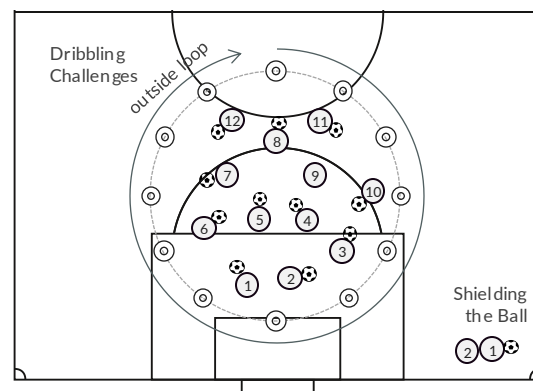
## 20 min **Play: 3v3 (2 fields)**

→ Small-sided free play. Encouragement.



## 20 min **Dribbling Challenges**

1. **Outside circle loop**, stop, change directions – slow down, speed up
2. **Inside circle** – avoid other players – challenge with various moves
3. **Traffic jam** – “red light, green light” inside the circle, continue avoiding other players – speed and direction changes

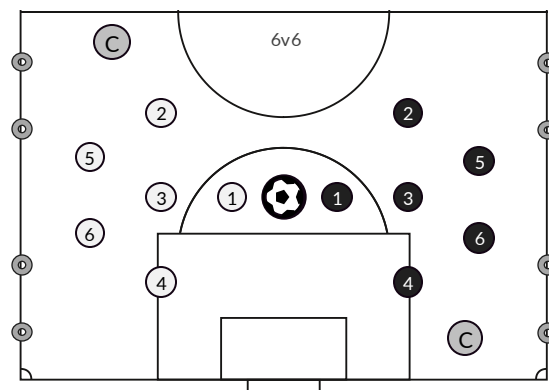


## 10 min **Shielding the Ball**

1. Get into **pairs**, 1 ball per pair
2. 1 partner **controls ball** with foot and **protects ball with body** – in place
3. Other player puts **pressure** on their partner
4. Change roles

## 25 min **Play: 6v6**

→ Encourage application of dribbling



# Practice 2 | Short Passing

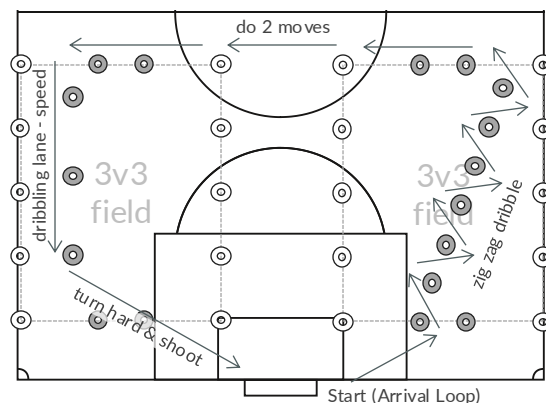
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## 5 min Arrival Loop (Dribble & Shoot)

1. Dribble through a **cone course**
2. Finish with a **shot on goal**
3. Retrieve the ball, repeat

## 20 min Play: 3v3 (2 fields)

→ Small-sided free play. Encouragement.

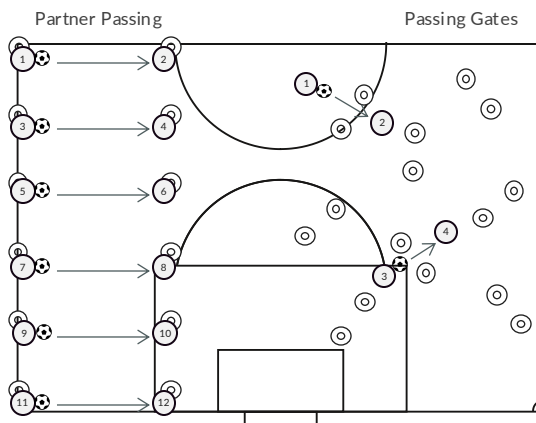


## 10 min Partner Passing

1. 1 ball per pair, **inside of foot** passing
2. **2-touch**, trap then pass
3. Count consecutive passes under control

## 10 min Passing Gates

1. Same pairs, adding movement and targets – the gates
2. Pairs **pass** the ball **through each gate**
3. Only **clean passes** count – doesn't touch gate and received under control
4. Can't use same gate twice in a row

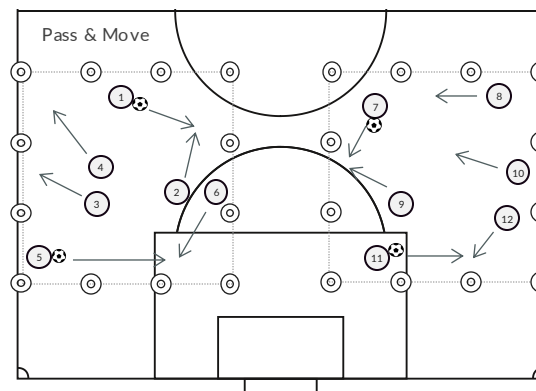


## 10 min Pass & Move

1. Player with ball passes to someone moving into space
2. Players without ball move into space to receive a pass

## 25 min Play: 6v6

→ Encourage application of passing

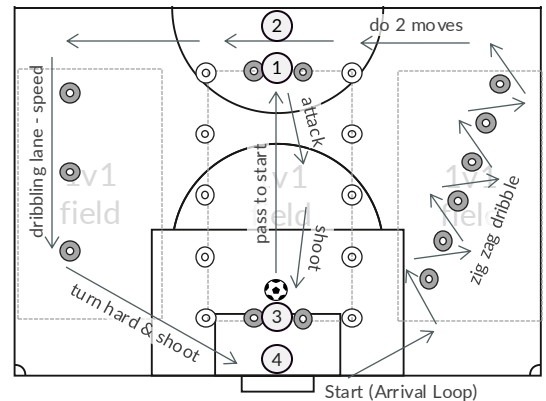


# Practice 3 | Power Kicking & Shooting

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## 5 min Arrival Loop (Dribble & Shoot)

1. Dribble through a **cone course**
2. Finish with a **power shot** on goal
3. Retrieve the ball, repeat

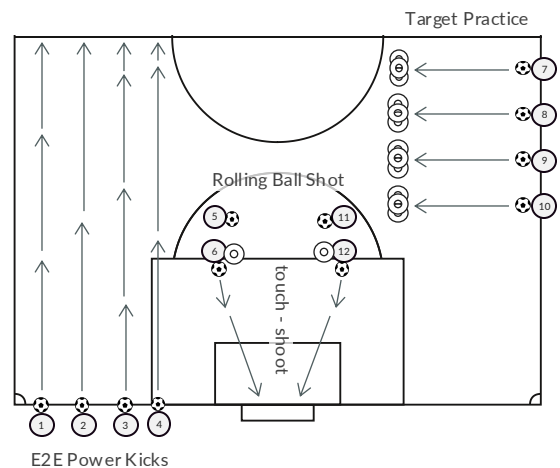


## 20 min Play: 1v1 Quick Fire (3 fields)

1. Player at one end **passes** to player at other end to start, then defends
2. Receiving player **rapidly attacks and shoots** - turn is done after ball scores or goes out
3. Rotate players, each should rest between

## 10 min End to End (E2E) Power Kicks

1. Demonstrate kick - strike ball w/ laces
2. All players start at end line, kick as far as they can, kick again until at midfield
3. Try for fewest kicks. Turn, repeat back.



## 10 min Target Practice

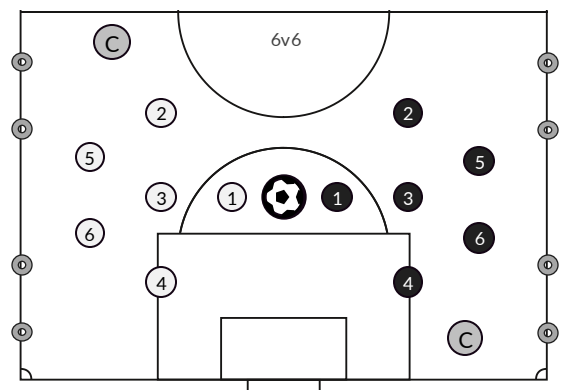
1. Tall or stacked cones 12 yards out
2. Players do laced kick from line and try to knock over the targets

## 10 min Rolling Ball Shot

1. Touch ball forward, shoot while rolling

## 25 min Play: 6v6

→ Encourage application of shooting



# Practice 4 | Game Restarts

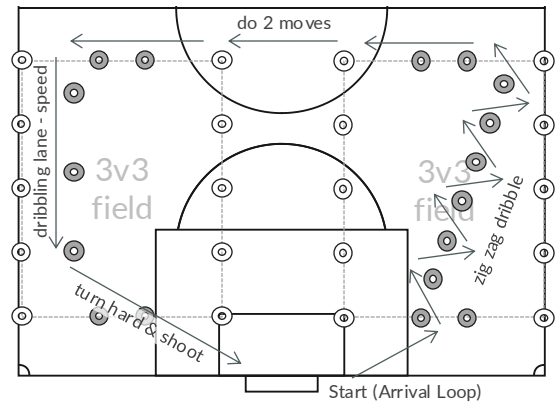
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## 5 min Arrival Loop (Dribble & Shoot)

1. Dribble through a **cone course**
2. Finish with a **shot on goal**
3. Retrieve the ball, repeat

## 20 min Play: 3v3 (2 fields)

→Small-sided free play. Encouragement.

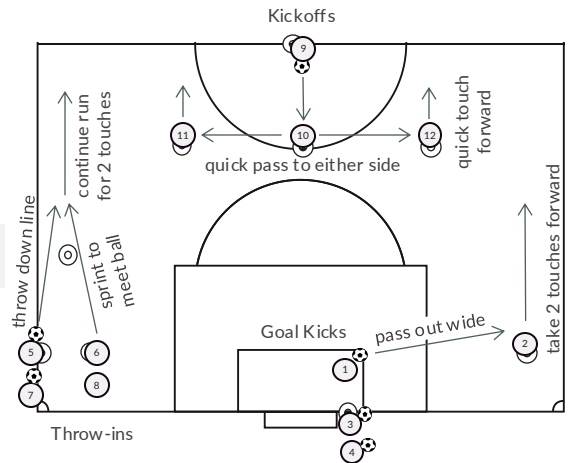


## 10 min Throw-ins

1. 1 player outside field w/ ball, 2<sup>nd</sup> player on field nearby
2. Player w/ ball picks up and throws down line, 2<sup>nd</sup> player times run

## 10 min Kick-offs

1. Kickoff to player straight behind
2. Quick pass to wide teammate
3. Immediate touch forward (attack-like)

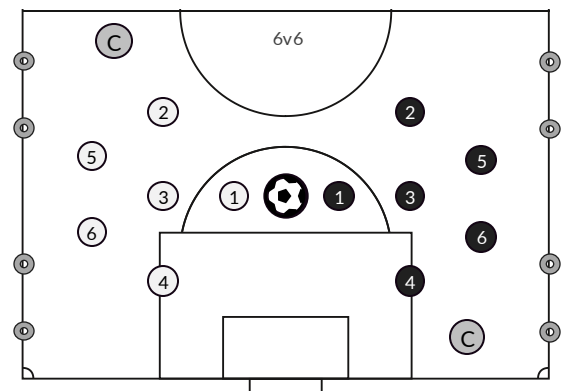


## 10 min Goal Kicks

1. Emphasis on getting ball wide, not down the middle
2. Immediate action forward upon receipt

## 25 min Play: 6v6

- Encourage application of restarts
- Get ball out wide, then down the line



# Implementation Tips

## Adjusting on the Fly

If drills take longer than planned – **that's okay**

- ❑ Just **drop a drill** or **shorten the final Play phase** to keep things on track

## When Energy Dips

If players seem tired, distracted, or disengaged:

- ❑ Take a **quick water break and reset**
- ❑ Lighten things up with an **energizer game**

## Role Splitting

One coach can **organize & demo each segment**, while the other:

1. Focuses on **individual encouragement**
2. Pulls players aside for **quick support**
3. Manages **other setup needs**

### Energizers that kids love:

- ✓ Ships Across the Ocean
- ✓ Red Light, Green Light
- ✓ Sharks and Minnows
- ✓ Clean Your Backyard
- ✓ Freeze Tag (with a Ball)

## Game Day Warm-ups

There are 20 minute allocated to pre-game time

- The **arrival loop** is a great way for players to engage quickly and get lots of touches on the ball
- There's typically time to run **one drill** before the game – use this to reinforce skills the team may need to focus on

## Have Fun With It!

Your enjoyment will be contagious