

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, there are five basic areas that can be included in each practice. This section explains tactical skills and gives examples of drills to practice these skills. Although each practice needs to begin with a warm up and stretching, whether all other areas are included in each practice is up to the discretion of the coach. If your team needs more work on a certain tactical skill (e.g. corner kicks or kick offs), the coach could choose to skip the technical portion of a practice to focus on this need. The coach's assessment is what determines the focus and activities of each practice.

Tactical Skills

Tactical skills in soccer refer to the ability of a player to make good decisions during a game. It is easy to think of tactical skills as the mental part of soccer—for a given situation on the field, do the players know where to position themselves? If a player has the ball, do they have an idea of what the best action with the ball might be? Many tactical skills are best learned in small sided drills that emulate game situations.

Tactical Drills

For beginning soccer players, learning the basic positions on the field is a good place to start. An effective way to teach positioning is by using shadow play. Shadow play is done by lining up players in the positions on the field. Next, move the ball around the field and show each position where they would position themselves given the ball position. For instance, if the ball is on the left side of the offensive half of the field, where would the midfielders and defenders position themselves?

Beginning players also need to learn where to position themselves for dead ball plays (kick offs, throw ins, corner kicks, and goal kicks). This is also a great opportunity to teach when and why each dead ball play occurs. Lining players up for each dead ball scenario and walking through where to position and how to bring the ball back into play is an effective way of teaching this. These ideas can be reinforced during small sided games and scrimmages.

Behind Enemy Lines-

Objective-passing through opposition, getting behind defenders, anticipation

Set Up-45x20 yd area, divided into 3, 15 yd zones (each zone will be 15x20 yds)

Activity: Players are divided into 3 even teams. One team goes into each zone. The two zones at the ends are teamed together. The middle zone is the enemy. Play begins with one end zone passing the ball amongst themselves. They must get the ball to the opposite end zone with a pass below head height. If the pass is intercepted or mis-hit out of the area, that team must switch with the team in the middle zone. Can count the number of completed passes in a specified time—2 or 3 minutes might be good to start. Can progress by allowing one member of the middle team to come into the end zone and pressure ball. Also, can add one more zone

area and have first and third zone be against second and fourth zone and see who can get most passes.

Coaching points—instruct players to move to open area so they are available to receive a pass. May need to physically show players where to go, until they begin to understand. Can also instruct players to look for the open pass—don't necessarily need to pass through opposition. Sometimes best pass is within your zone to allow a teammate to make a quick pass through the opposition to their teammates in the other end zone.

Marking Game

Objectives-creating space for self and others, good first touch, dribbling, marking, intercepting

Set up-30x20 yds (or whatever seems appropriate for you team size/age) with goals at each end (goals can just be cones)

Rules-Players are divided into two even teams, Players are paired with a player from the opposite team (best if paired with a player of similar skill). Teams are going to scrimmage, but the only player that can steal the ball from another player is the one they are paired with. Players must move to make space to receive a pass from their team or move so they make space for one of their teammates. Can progress by adding another player who is always on the team who has the ball.

End Zone Passing

Objective-short passing, quick play, defending, intercepting passes

Set up-25x30 yds with 10 yd. end zones (end zones will be 10x25 yds)

Rules-Players are divided into 2 teams and start in opposite end zones. Each player is numbered within their team (1, 2, 3, 4.....). Each team is passing the ball in the order of their numbers. The coach will call out a number and the players with that number will run across to the other end zone and try to intercept the ball as that team passes. Once a number is called, teams no longer need to pass in the order of their numbers. The first player to win the ball or knock it out of the end zone wins a point for their team. Make sure all number are called, but not necessarily in order. First team to 10 wins. Progression-can call two numbers at once or can limit the number of touches allowed for the passing players.

2v2/3v3/4v4 with one neutral player—neutral player is always on the offensive team. Emphasize to offensive team how to get open (move to a position where the player with the ball can pass to you, no defensive player between you and the player with the ball, close enough for an easy pass). Defensive players need to be looking to intercept the pass—thinking about passing lanes for player with ball and cut those off. Play for set amount of time (2-3 minutes) and see which team completes most consecutive passes.

Strong Sides-the team concept is best taught with unbalanced drills (2v1, 3v2) This will make the idea of team play very obvious. Begin with 2v1, teaching how to pass around the defensive player, once players understand 2v1, can move to 3v2.