

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, there are five basic areas that can be included in each practice. This section explains technical skills and gives examples of drills to practice each skill. 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.

## Technical Skills

Technical skills are the basic soccer skills of the individual players. The technical skills addressed here are dribbling, passing, ball control, shooting and defending. The remaining technical skills, heading and goal keeping, are not addressed at this age.

### *Dribbling*

Coaching points—Players should use the inside, outside and shoe lace area of foot. Ball is pushed rather than kicked. Player should keep their head up while dribbling. A few different dribbling techniques are listed here:

Long touch—player pushes the ball 2-3 yards ahead of themselves then sprints to meet ball, used for open areas, straight line, when not marked by other players, can run faster with long touch

Short touch—player keeps ball close to feet using many soft touches, used for cutting and turning, when in crowded area, generally slower moving

Cutting with ball—a quick change in direction, most effective cuts have a change in direction and a change in speed, used to get around opposing players

Pull backs—player is dribbling in one direction, puts foot on top of ball and pulls it back, turning body 180 degrees to dribble the ball in the opposite direction, used for quick turns or to shield the ball in congested areas

Shielding ball—player puts their body between the ball and an opposing player.

### Dribbling Drills

#### Cone Dribbling

Objectives: Good dribbling technique, using proper touch (long vs. short)

Set Up: Players in 2-3 lines (best if not more than 3 kids per line. Make as many lines as needed.) Set up 4 cones in a straight line in front of each line. Cones are approximately 2 yds. apart.

Activity: Have first player in each line dribble first. Go slowly and demonstrate often until players understand the drill. There are many activities that can be done with this set up. A few are:

Have players weave between cones. Have them use just left foot (using inside of left foot to push ball to right and outside of left foot to push ball left), just use right foot (same technique as left foot), just outsides of feet, etc.

Have players dribble down left side of cones, turn around last cone and return on right side of cones. Emphasize long touches, sprinting to ball on the straight sections and short, close, controlled touches for the turn. Again, have them use just right foot, just left foot, just outside of feet, just shoe laces, etc.

Have players dribble to the third cone, do pull back, dribble back to second cone, do pull back, dribble to last cone. Make sure to practice with both feet.

Have players dribble straight at cone and practice doing a quick cut to each side. The most effective way to dribble around a player is by using a change in direction paired with a change in speed. Use long touches for the straight dribbling, short touches when close to the cone and for the cut. Practice using each side of each foot.

#### Offense vs. Defense

Objectives: dribbling with pressure, using long touches to move with ball quickly

Set Up: Players in two lines approximately 30 yds. from goal. Goal can be two cones. Lines are 2-3 yards apart, facing goal. Coach stands between the lines with a supply of balls.

Activity: Coach feeds ball out between the two lines. First player in each line chases ball. First player to ball is offense, other player is defense. Offensive player takes the ball to the goal and attempts to shoot.

#### Stop That Ball

Objectives: ball control, familiarity with dribbling

Set Up: 15yd. x 15yd. grid

Activity: Players dribble in square. Coach yells stop and how to stop ball (can be goofy—with elbow, forehead, sitting on it, etc.). Have players dribble the ball in different ways (with L foot, with R foot, only with insides, outsides, etc.)

### Dribble Across the Square

Objective: dribbling with head up

Set up: 15yd. x 15yd. square

Activity: Divide players into two even teams. Players line up on adjacent sides of square. On coach's whistle, players dribble across the square, keeping control of their ball and avoiding other players.

### Dribbling Gates

Objectives: ball control, using short vs. long touch, keeping head up

Set Up: Gates are two cones that are about 1 yd. apart. Gates are spread throughout an area. There should be more gates than players. Gates are placed at all angles.

Activity: Players begin by standing in gate (one player per gate). Players dribble through gates, cannot go through same gate twice in a row. Have players dribble for 30 seconds and see how many gates they get through. Players must keep eyes up and make a decision on which gate to go to next.

### Hit the Cone

Objective: practice in 1v1 situation, ball control

Set Up: 10yd. x 15yd. area with a cone midpoint on each of the 10yd. ends.

Activity: Two players play at a time. One player begins on each cone. Coach feeds ball out and players compete 1v1. A goal is scored by hitting the opposite cone with the ball. Players must use cuts and changes in speed in attempt to beat their opponent. Can widen rectangle if ball is going out of bounds too quickly. Switch players every 2-3 minutes.

### Ghost Busters

Objective: dribbling, close control, turn away from defenders

Set Up: 15-20 yard square

Activity: Inside area all players have a ball except whomever is the ghost. (If 6-10 players, can have 1-2 players be ghosts.) The players must dribble their ball around the area. They can move in any direction as long as they stay within the area. They must try to stay away from the ghost(s). The ghost(s) attempt to tag the dribbling players. Once a player has been tagged, they freeze and stand with their feet apart, holding their ball above their head. See how many

players the ghosts can freeze in 1 minute. After each game, have new ghosts and all back in the game.

### Pirates of the Caribbean

Objective: basic ball control, ball familiarity, changing directions

Set up: 10yd. x 20yd. area, shaped like a ship (a rectangle with a triangle on one of the short ends.)

Activity: All players have a ball. Begin by telling players names for parts of the boat—bow (front), stern(back), port(left), starboard(right). Pirates (the players) dribble around on the “deck” (within the area) and the captain (coach) calls out one of the four names (coach may need to also point to area until players learn different names.) The pirates must dribble to that end or side. The last pirate to reach side called has a small job to undertake (something easy—5 jumping jacks, 5 toe taps on ball, etc.).

Can progress to adding more:

Scrub the deck - control the ball using the inside of feet, either static or moving.

Climb the rigging - do toe taps on top of the ball as quickly as you can

Captain on board - must balance on ball while trying to salute the captain

Cannonball - hit the deck and lie down as quickly as possible to avoid the blast

Be creative! You can add anything you’d like to work on a given skill.

### Cats and Mice

Objective: dribbling, ball control, quick turns

Set up: 15yd. x10yd. rectangle

Activity: Mice line up with ball on long side of rectangle. Inside the rectangle, 1-2 cats are standing 2-3 yards from mice. On coach’s whistle, mice try to dribble their balls across rectangle without getting tagged by cats. If a mouse is tagged, they are now a cat. All mice who made it across, turn around and, on coach’s whistle, again try to dribble across rectangle while cats try to tag. Mice must not exit the rectangle on the sides or they are cats. Continue until 1-2 mice are left and then they are the new cats and game begins again.

### Follow the Leader

Objectives: dribbling, keeping head up,

Set Up: 15yd. x 15yd. square

Activity: Players are divided into pairs. Within each pair, one player is leader and one is follower. On coach's whistle, the leader in each group begins dribbling within square. Each follower must follow their leader, imitating type of dribble and any moves the leader might make. Encourage leaders to use both feet, different parts of feet, and different moves. After a minute, switch leaders & followers. After a few rounds, change partners.

## Ball Bump

Objectives: dribbling, shielding

Set Up: 15yd. x 15yd. square

Activity: Players are divided into pairs. One player in pair has ball in hands, other has ball at feet. On coach's whistle, player with ball at their feet begins dribbling within square. Player with ball in hands attempts to throw or roll their ball and hit their partner's ball. Each time they hit their partner's ball, they score a point. At end of minute, roles change. Player with most points wins.

## *Shooting*

Coaching points—The first shot to teach is the shot with the instep (shoe lace area of foot.) Players should approach ball slightly from the side. Position the nonkicking foot next to the ball and a few inches to the side, with toe pointing in the direction of the target. Using the kicking foot, point the toe down, lock the ankle, and make contact with the laces. Strike through the center of the ball. Follow through in the direction of the target.

This can be a difficult skill for the players to learn. If players are using their toes instead of instep, can have players take off cleats and kick with just socks. Always work on form and accuracy before power.

## Shooting Drills

Basic Shooting Drill —for fewer players (6 or fewer), a simple line taking turns shooting and retrieving balls is a great beginning for learning to shoot. For more than 6, players may have too much time in line. Coach can split line and have one line serve and one line shoot. Have players switch lines after each turn or stay in same line and switch all together after 2-3 times through line. Easiest serves are those coming from behind and slightly to the side of the shooter. Ball must be on ground and in front of shooter. Shooter should be facing sideways so he can see both the ball coming and the goal. Next easiest are serves coming from the goal on the ground back to the shooter who is facing the goal. Hardest are those coming across the field from either side.

One version of the setup: Line up in front of goal about 15 yards out. First player in line has no ball. Second player in line pushes ball from behind to in front of the first player so that the ball is rolling toward the goal. The first player catches up to the ball and takes a first time shot. First player retrieves ball and goes to end of line, second player moves to front of line. Coach will need to instruct and/or demonstrate to them about passing the ball slowly enough that the first player can reach it, but hard enough that it does get in front of him. One way to begin this is to have the first player facing the goal with his legs spread and the second player passes between the first player's legs. That puts the ball between the player and the goal and, as long as the pass is not too hard, the first player should be able to get a shot off.

### Between the Legs Game

Objective: learning to strike the ball with instep, accuracy of shots

Set Up: Players are in pairs, approximately 3-5yds. apart (depending on skill level), each pair has 1 ball.

Activity: One player starts with the ball. Their partner stands with their legs apart. The player with the ball attempts to shoot the ball between their partner's legs. Each time they are successful, they score a point. Can play for a set amount of time and see which pair has the most points. Make sure to practice with both feet.

### Line Shooting

Objective: first touch shooting, shooting accuracy

Set Up: Make 3yd. goal with cones. Approximately 6-7 yds. from goal, line up 3 balls, 5 yds. apart. Balls will be parallel with endline. A cone is placed 5 yds. behind the center ball.

Activity: Player starts at cone and runs to first ball. First ball is shot with first touch. Player runs back and touches cone before running to second ball and shooting with one touch. Player repeats with the third ball. Have players perform with both feet. Could have remaining players shagging balls behind goal.

### Wall Passing

Objective: shooting accuracy, ball control

Set Up: Goal made from cones.

Activity: Players line up 20 yds. from goal with balls. Coach is to side, midway between players and goal, acting as a wall. Players pass ball to coach. Coach passes back, setting player up for 1 or 2 touch shot. Practice both 1 and 2 touch shots, from both sides and with both feet. Can progress by having a player be the wall.

## *Passing*

There are many types of passes. The most simple pass is a short pass with inside of foot.

Coaching points for inside of foot pass

- Place nonkicking foot next to ball with toes pointing in direction of pass
- Inside of kicking foot is aimed toward target
- Lock ankle on kicking foot
- With inside of foot, strike through center of ball
- Follow through toward target

Another simple pass is a pass with the outside of the foot. This pass is most often done while player is dribbling.

Coaching points for outside of foot pass

- Position ball as if dribbling with outside of foot
- Nonkicking foot is behind and to side of ball
- Kicking foot is positioned to inside of ball so that contact will be made with outside of foot.
- Bring kicking leg back and as it moves forward, rotate ankle slightly inward so that outside of foot strikes ball.
- Strike center of ball with follow through toward target.

Accuracy and pace are important. Players will need to learn how to properly pace their passes so they are neither too hard nor too soft. Passes should be aimed to the feet of their teammate or into the space their teammate is running.

## Passing Drills

Passing Gates (this is an easy one to do just after the Dribbling Gates listed above)

Objective: accurate passing, communication

Set Up: Gates are two cones that are about 1 yd. apart. Gates are spread throughout an area. There should be more gates than players. Gates are placed at all angles.

Activity: Players are in pairs with 1 ball per pair. Pairs begin at gate with only one pair allowed per gate. On coach's whistle, players pass the ball through the gate to their partner. The receiving player dribbles to another gate and passes through to their partner. To be efficient, players must communicate which gate they are moving to next. Have players count the number of gates they pass through in a given amount of time.

## Two touch passing with a partner

Objective: proper passing technique, using first touch to set up good pass

Set Up: Players in pairs with 1 ball per pair.

Activity: Players pass ball back and forth using only 2 touches. First touch is set up, second touch is to partner. Make sure players understand what is meant by 2 touch passing. Can time them and see how many passes in a minute.

Progression: One touch passing with partner. This is a much harder skill. Have players move closer together, 3-4 yds, and use gentle passes.

## Pass and Move

Objective: proper passing technique, ball control

Set Up: Players are in two lines facing each other. There is one ball between two lines.

Activity: First player in line passes ball to first player in other line. Player that passed, follows pass going to end of other line. Have players practice doing 1 & 2 touch passing.

## Receive and Turn

Objective: develop turning technique, accurate passing

Set Up: 10yd. x 20yd. rectangle, set up several rectangles

Activity: Players are divided into groups of 3, one player is in middle of rectangle, other 2 players are positioned on short ends of rectangle, Play starts at one end, ball is played into middle player who turns with ball and plays to teammate on opposite end, end player may take 1 or 2 touches and play ball back to middle player and pattern continues. End players must play ball from behind line, each time ball is returned to first player, team scores one point, a point is not scored if ball goes over sideline or if it is not played from behind line. Winning team is first to 20 (or whatever score seems appropriate for particular team). Change middle player and repeat game.

## Two Touch Gate Passing

Objective: Improve passing and ball control

Set Up: 10yd. x 10yd. square with two cones in middle of square. Cones are placed approximately 3 ft. apart to form a gate. Will need to set up enough squares so that every two players have their own square.

Activity: Players are divided into pairs, one pair per square. One player begins with ball and passes it through the gate to their partner. The partner must control the ball with their first

touch, then pass it back through the gate with their next touch. Ball must not stop moving and must stay in square. Players can keep track of how many successful passes they can do in a row. Possibly switch partners after 2-3 minutes. Coach can increase or decrease difficulty by changing the size of the gate or the size of the square.

## *Ball Control*

Coaching points—The first touch a player has when receiving the ball is the most important touch they will have. The first touch dictates whether they will keep possession of the ball. Keeping possession allows them to set up for dribbling, passing, or shooting the ball.

For a successful collection, the player should cushion the ball so it slows and is left within reach in front of them. Don't encourage players to stop the ball under their foot or trap it so close to their body that the ball is stuck between their feet. The ball should be kept moving. Many parts of the body can be used for collecting the ball—feet, thighs, and chest are most common at this age. Using the head for trapping is not appropriate for this age.

### Ball Control Drills

Juggling—player starts with ball in hands, drops ball on thigh and catches again, can progress to thigh-high-catch, thigh-foot-catch, etc.

#### Control Gates

Objective: good first touch, accurate passing

Set Up: Players are in pairs positioned about 10yds. apart. In front of each player are two cones approximately 1yd. apart. Player stands between and 2-3 steps behind the cones.

Activity: One player in each pair begins with the ball. The first player passes the ball through both sets of cones. The receiving player uses his first touch to position the ball to the side of the cones. With their second touch, the player passes back to their partner between through their partner's cones. Play for 2-3 minutes and switch partners.

Progression: Once players can accurately control and pass the ball with two touches, coach can have players do specific touches, e.g. first touch is with outside of left foot to the left.

#### Pass to the Open Player

Objective: good first touch, controlled passes

Set Up: Players are in groups of 4. There will be 3 servers and 1 target in each group. The servers will stand 2yds. apart. The target will stand 5-7yds. away from the servers.

Activity: To begin, two of the servers will have a ball. One server passes the ball to the target. The target will take the appropriate number of touches (set by coach—can be 1,2, or 3

depending on skill level of players) and pass the ball back to a server. The target cannot pass the ball back to the server who just passed to them and cannot pass to a server who already has a ball. After first ball is passed back, the second ball is passed by the next server and the target returns it using the guidelines above. For younger players, coach can have just two servers and one ball. Target will receive ball and pass back to other server.

## Square Drills

Objective: ball control, accurate passing

Set Up: 5-10yd. square, size dependent upon age and skill of players

Activity: This is a set up that can be used for many drills. Evenly distribute players on the corners of the square. Have more than one square if more than 3 players are in each line. (must have a minimum of 5 players per square). If only 5 players, have 2 players on one corner and one player on each of the other corners. One ball per square. Ball starts on corner with the most players. First player in line with the ball passes to first player at next corner (can go either direction—always make sure to switch directions.) Passing player follows pass and goes to end of line at that corner. Receiving player takes first touch as control touch, setting up pass to next corner. Ball is passed to next corner, with passer again following ball. Here are a few variations of this drill:

- Do 1 touch pass to next corner
- Have receiver dribble halfway toward next line before passing
- Do a give & go—passer dribbles halfway down to receiver and passes ball, receiver does quick pass back to passer and begins jogging toward next corner, passer passes ball to receiver as he jogs down line
- Can have players pass in one direction and rotate around square in opposite direction e.g. pass to right, but move to line on left

The skill of ball control is inherent in almost any soccer drill. To have ball control be the focus, the coach can use any drill and simply instruct and emphasize the ball control portion of that particular drill.

## *Defending*

### Coaching Points

The first defensive skill to teach is delaying. This is a technique used to slow the offensive player who has possession of the ball. To delay, the defender positions themselves between the player with the ball and the goal. The defensive player has their knees bent and feet spread to shoulder width apart. The defensive player keeps themselves approximately 1-2 yds. in front of the offensive player and shuffles backward to keep the appropriate distance between themselves and the ball. (If any of the players have played basketball, it could be helpful to explain that this is just like playing defense in basketball.)

Defensive player keeps their eyes on the ball at all times. Patience is key here! The defensive player holds their position between the ball and the goal until the offensive player makes a mistake. At that time, the defensive player can strike and attempt to make contact with the ball. The defensive player should never stab at the ball with their feet while the offensive player has good control. The offensive player will simply take the ball around the defender.

Delaying will look a bit different for each player. A defensive player with a lot of speed and quick feet will be able to play closer to the offensive player and may be able to strike the ball due to only a slight miscue by the offensive player. A defensive player with a little less speed will need to keep a bit more distance between themselves and the offensive player. If the players have learned the concept of delaying, they will both be equally effective.

Players should never be positioned side by side when on defense. It is much more effective to position them front to back. This allows for the delaying player to have another player behind them in case they are beaten. If a player is beaten on defense, they should turn goal side and sprint toward their goal, allowing them to back up the player who is now delaying.

Marking is another basic tenet of defense. Marking is when the defensive player is guarding an offensive player who does not have the ball. The defensive player should stay between the offensive player and the goal. The defensive player stays with the offensive player with the goal of keeping the offensive player from being part of the play. Marking most commonly occurs on a dead ball play (e.g. corner kick, goal kick, or throw in).

Players often aren't ready to begin next level of defense until U9 or even older, so be patient in teaching the basics. This will ensure a strong base to allow for further soccer development.

### Defending Drills

#### Defensive Tag

Objective: learning good defensive positioning, good delaying techniques

Set Up: 20yd. x 20yd. square

Activity: Players are divided into pairs. Each pair has one ball. One player per pair is "it." This player begins with the ball. Second player in pair is trying to avoid getting tagged. The second player must always be facing the player that is it. They must shuffle back and forth using good defensive positioning to avoid being tagged. If player is tagged, rolls reverse.

#### Guard the Square

Objective: good delaying technique, patient defense

Set Up: 20yd. x 20yd. square, in middle of this square make a 5yd. x 5yd. square

Activity: Choose 4 players to guard square, each takes one side. Other players are offensive players and each have their own balls. Offensive players attempt to dribble their ball into the inside square. Defensive players need to use good delay technique to prevent offensive players from entering square. Play continues for a set amount of time (3-4 minutes) and then new

defenders are assigned. If there are too many offensive players for the defensive, just allow 4 into the large square at a time.

### 1v1 Defending

Objective: patient defense, marking

Set Up: 10yd. x 15yd. rectangle, can set up many so can have more than 1 game going at once

Activity: Players are in pairs, one pair per rectangle. Players begin on opposite ends of rectangle. One player has ball. To score a point, player must stop the ball on the opposite end line.

### Through the Box

Objective: improve dribbling, improve delaying on defense

Set Up: Using cones, make a 10yd. x 5yd. rectangle midway between the circle and the goal box, the size of the rectangle can be varied dependent upon the players' skill level and size.

Activity: Players in a line at the bottom of the circle. Each player has a ball. The first player in line is assigned as the defender and places his ball to the side. The defender takes up position inside the rectangle. The next player in line dribbles toward the rectangle with the goal of dribbling through the rectangle. The defending player attempts to stop the player dribbling by using good delaying techniques. If the defender takes possession of the ball or if the ball leaves the rectangle by going out one of the sides, then the offensive player is now defense and the defensive player retrieves his ball and goes to the end of the line. If the offensive player is able to dribble through the rectangle, they go on to shoot a goal, return to the end of the line and the defensive player continues playing defense against the next offensive player.

### 4 Zone Game

Objective: good defense, accurate passing

Set Up: Divide field into 4 sections running across the field. Cones can be used for goals at each end.

Activity: Divide team into 4 even groups. One group goes in each section of the field. Alternating groups are on the same team. The groups nearest the goals are defending that goal. They are trying to pass the ball 2 sections ahead to their offensive players. The offensive players are trying to score a goal by dribbling, passing and making a good shot. All players must stay in their assigned area.

Progression:

- Allow 1 player from opposing team to enter into other team's area.
- Allow 1 player from offensive section to enter section in front of goal to receive pass from teammate.
- Increase the number of sections on the field.