

# **Freedom Optimist Soccer**

## **Coach's Guide**

## **Letter from the League**

Dear Coaches:

Thank you for taking on the most important assignment in the Freedom Optimist soccer program. In your capacity as a coach, you directly affect a dozen or more young citizens of our community. You have an impact on their enjoyment of the sport, and their personal growth, for which the soccer board and I sincerely appreciate the commitment of your time and energy.

The program has reached record levels of participation in the past couple years, and in the coming season, around 2000 boys and girls will participate in our recreational leagues. As those numbers grow, so does the need for the volunteered time of concerned adults like you.

This book is full of information useful to anyone coaching in our program, but is particularly geared to those of you coaching soccer for the first time. The book blends technical tips along with some of our philosophies of the recreational program – sportsmanship, teamwork, full participation, having fun, safety, trying new experiences, and deriving satisfaction from good play regardless of the result.

I welcome any suggestions you have to make the book more useful, and I look forward to working with you in this important responsibility we share. Have a great season.

Freedom Optimist Soccer

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## **1.0 Getting Started with Your Team**

Your division coordinator formed your team. Based on player evaluations from the previous season and on registration information, the coordinator tried to give you an overall balance of older and younger players, and experienced and inexperienced players, including kids with parents who may have volunteered to assist you or to be a team parent.

### **1.1 Making First Impressions**

It's best to contact your players and parents as soon as you get the roster. If for any reason the parent or the child has the impression that the player isn't supposed to be on your team, contact your coordinator immediately.

Set the tone right away with parents and players. This is a recreational league where every player plays at least half the game, so you should emphasize having fun and learning about soccer. There's a section later in the book about structuring practices to provide variety and to minimize boredom.

Let the parents know that no matter how little they may know about the game, you can use their help at practice. In the section on practices later in the book, we'll look at using as many volunteers as possible to keep the kids busy.

When contacted, the parents expect to hear the following information:

- Your name and phone number
- When and where practices will be held, and for how long
- What to bring to practice
- Some parents will inquire whether certain of their child's friends are on the team
- Reiteration of league information, such as when the first games are, how many games there will be, and so forth.

### **1.2 Practice Fields**

When your coordinator gives you the roster, or shortly thereafter, he or she should let you know when and where you will be practicing. Because of the limited amount of practice fields in the area, the coordinator must assign the practice times and fields. The program has arranged for exclusive use of the fields you are assigned at the times assigned - you have the absolute right to practice there.

The fields will be lined, the goals erected and netted on the last Saturday in July each year, prior to the first week of practices. **PLEASE VOLUNTEER TO HELP OUT WITH THIS PROCESS IF YOU POSSIBLY CAN** – many hands make light work.

The county is responsible for cutting the grass on the school fields.

### **1.3 Player Equipment**

You should let the parents know that each player is expected to wear **shin guards** and bring **water** and a **soccer ball** to all practices. For games, a ball is not necessary, but each player **must** wear shin guards and should bring water.

#### **1.3.1 Mandatory Player Equipment**

In soccer, in all levels of play, it is mandatory for each player to wear **shin guards** as a matter of safety, whether in a recreational league like this, or the finals of the World Cup. **Players will not be allowed to play in games without shin guards.** Thus it is a good idea for you as coach to require all your players to get in the habit of wearing them for every practice. Shin guards are inexpensive and available just about anywhere sporting goods are sold in the area, including our local national chain retailers. Younger players can wear just about any style, older players should consider guards that cover the ankles as well as the shins.

#### **1.3.2 Recommended Player Equipment**

Practice starts in August, so a filled **water bottle** is essential. (Arriving with an empty bladder is a good idea too.) Players should also bring a **soccer ball** of the right size to each practice. Check with your age group coordinator for the latest information, but in the past clinic teams have used size 3 soccer balls, players from 1<sup>st</sup> grade through 6<sup>th</sup> grade used size 4, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade and above used size 5 soccer balls.

Players should wear soccer cleats or sneakers, and athletic clothing appropriate for the weather. Soccer cleats are slightly different from football cleats, and are very different from baseball spikes. The size and shape of the cleat is actually regulated by the laws of soccer, and spikes are illegal. Football cleats tend to have a cleat up in the forward-most part of the toe, but this is a nuisance in soccer, as players need to be free to kick the ball.

### **1.4 Coaching Equipment**

The League will supply you with soccer balls in a ball bag, a set of cones and/or discs, pinnies and a goalkeeper's jersey. These are the only essentials, but you might find additional equipment handy:

- A ball pump, to inflate balls (important)
- First Aid Kit (important)
- A few extra balls (helpful)
- Extra Cones and/or Discs (depends on your coaching style, can do without)
- Paper & pen, or dry-erase board for diagramming positions (optional)

### **1.5 Assistants and Team Parents**

If there were enough volunteers to go around, your division coordinator assigned an assistant coach and a team parent to you. If there weren't enough to go around, a top priority for you should be to convince a couple parents to assume these roles.

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The **assistant coach's** job is to assist you in running the practices and games. The assistant coach need not know much about soccer, for the most part they will be organizing kids in accordance with your plans. There is no end to the number of assistant coaches you can find uses for. You will need help with lineups, pre-game warm-up drills, making sure shoes are tied, keeping players together and behaving on the sideline, etc., etc. Never, ever turn down someone who is offering to help out. And don't feel bashful about asking parents to help out – they're willing, just not aware of what you need help with. If you like, you can apply titles, like Bench Coach, Substitution Coach, Other-Side-Of-the-Field-Coach, Shoelaces Coach, etc.

The **team parent** handles many of the administrative details for the team, and there are quite a few such details. Many of these fall into the category of helping the coach to communicate with the parents - things like disseminating the team picture information, arranging a schedule of which parents are to bring snacks for each game, filling out the game summary forms, helping to arrange an end-of-season party, and so forth. The team parent does quite a lot for the team -- be sure to thank your team parent with an end-of-season gift.

## **2.0 Making Your Practices Work**

### **2.1 Training for Soccer Coaches**

The league organizes coaching clinics and licensing sessions to enable coaches to learn soccer coaching techniques from top coaches and players in the area. Don't be intimidated by the sound of 'Licensing sessions,' these are outstanding! The league even subsidizes the cost of these sessions. They are geared for people coaching younger players, and they run you through hours of ideas and examples of things you can do to make practices more effective and more fun. And you will personally come to understand the importance of remembering to bring water to practice!

You can find these by looking at the league website:

[www.eteamz.com/fosoccer](http://www.eteamz.com/fosoccer)

or by looking at the organizations that run these training sessions:

[www.nscaa.com](http://www.nscaa.com) (The National Soccer Coaches Association of America)

[www.msya.org](http://www.msya.org) (The Maryland Youth Soccer Association)

Coaching materials, age-appropriate manuals and other instructional information is available for you from the league and website. In addition to those materials here are some guidelines, approach recommendations and possible drills for you.

### **2.2 Planning your practices**

#### **2.2.1 Assistants:**

You will need to be able to demonstrate a variety of soccer techniques to the players during your practices, throughout the season. If you aren't the right person for this task, find someone who can fill this role – an assistant coach or a parent. Another idea would be to enlist the aid of a middle- or high school age soccer player in need of community service hours and arrange to have them be your assistant for the season in exchange for signing off on the hours they assisted.

#### **2.2.2 The Practice Plan**

Prior to each practice, write down an approximate sequence of activities for the players and the time for each. Work through in your mind how the practice will flow from one drill to the next, will you need pylons, the goals, when will the breaks be, etc. Share this with your assistant coaches and deputized parents in advance if possible. You will enjoy great returns on your investment of 10-15 minutes of planning before each practice. By writing down a practice plan beforehand, you'll be assured of using the time you have in the most efficient way possible.

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On the subject of time, consider the policy of John Wooden, the great men's basketball coach at UCLA. Wooden very seldom scheduled a practice to last more than two hours, claiming that to go beyond that time limit was counterproductive. At the same time, Wooden's practice plans were legendary for their efficiency. If two hours was a limit for Wooden and his world class athletes, there's a lesson for all of us: organize; practice hard; don't overdo. Once the kids pass a certain point of mental and physical fatigue, they're going to check out on you mentally and emotionally. They may still be at practice, but they're not learning any more. Remember, practice makes permanent, not perfect. If your players are too tired, they will develop lazy practice habits that your repetitions are reinforcing. Worse yet, they're not having fun. Go for quality repetitions in your drills, and when the drills get old, move on. Practices for elementary school age kids should last 60-120 minutes, but only the older kids will really last longer than 90 minutes.

In teaching motor skills to kids, it is important to set a solid foundation and build upon it. Nelson McAvoy, in his book *Teaching Soccer Fundamentals* has these guidelines on the pattern of buildup:

- "- Go from individual work to team work
- Go from structured to unstructured
- Go from low work rate to high work rate
- Go from least gamelike to most gamelike
- Go from low pressure to high pressure
- Go from least fun to most fun
- Quit before they want to quit
- Emphasize only one theme per practice and make corrections only in that area."

Another benefit of the practice plan is that it earns you credibility with the players. One of the neat things about coaching is seeing a group of player's progress from being strangers to being a unit. That unit needs a leader, and you're it. A practice plan gives the kids the impression that you've got it together, even if you don't particularly feel like you do. Know what you're going to do, and deliver the material with a sense of authority.

If you do try a drill or practice game that doesn't work, don't force it. Drop it and move on - it happens to everybody. That's why it's not a bad idea to have a little more planned than you intend to use. Draw a line across your practice plan where practice will stop if all goes well, but have something in reserve if you hit a clinker.

Most parents will be able to relate to the final reason for developing a practice plan in advance. It's a lot easier coming up with an organized strategy in the comfort of your family room, enjoying your favorite beverage, than it is to make snap decisions with the enthusiastic input of a dozen spirited kids.

### **2.2.3 Themes**

One effective approach to a practice plan (again, this is primarily a suggestion directed toward the novice, it's not the only approach) is to have one or two themes for the session. For example, you might have a practice session dedicated solely to dribbling or passing, and everything you plan for that evening is intended to stress some fundamental aspect of dribbling or passing.



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Typically, you'll start with a **brief** description of why the skill is important in the scheme of things, followed by a verbal description of how the technique is performed and, ideally, a demonstration of the proper execution of the technique. In any event, keep the talking and demonstrating short - they're not going to sit still forever. Then it's time to have the players try the technique. This is where having one ball per player and **willing parent volunteers** really pays off. Think back to when you were a kid. Was there anything more boring, more get-into-trouble-inducing than standing in line? Try to **keep the lining-up to a minimum**, and have as many kids participating simultaneously as possible. If each player has a ball, and you get three or four parents, siblings, etc., to help, you can keep your lines down to one or two persons per line. There are many drills and practice games in which everyone who has a ball can participate at one time.

### **2.2.4 Fun/Work/Fun/Work**

The sections above advised you that you should make it clear that practice has to stay under control. At the same time, it's a recreational activity which is, by definition, supposed to be fun. These don't have to be contradictory concepts. You can provide the fun by using any of a number of time-tested practice games that are fun, yet force them to use soccer skills to succeed. One approach is to alternate more serious drills with this type of practice game. As an incentive to work hard at the serious drills, you can use the possibility of playing favorite practice games if the players concentrate on the serious drills.

### **2.2.5 The First Practice of the year**

You'll probably come face to face with your team for the first time at your first practice. If you've never coached before, this can be an anxious time for you, but following a few proven tips will make it easier.

You'll have a lot of names to remember and the players will need to learn each other's names and get to know each other socially. Try having each player introduce themselves by giving their name and school, and maybe something about soccer such as a favorite position. Emphasize learning the names during the first few practices. One good way is by having an initial kick-around in a circle, where **the players must call the name of the player they're passing to**. This is a good habit to get into anyway, so you might want to continue this drill on into the season.

Introductions and learning names is particularly important with the younger kids. This removes a little of the strange, new-authority-figure atmosphere by establishing that they're important, too. Keep in mind that this is a new experience for many of them, and that some of them may be feeling a little insecure (like the head coach?).

On the other end of the spectrum, some of your new charges may be feeling a little **too secure**. Again, it's time to set the right tone with your team. For anything positive to come out of practice, there has to be structure and a sense of direction. Let the players know that you'll have fun, but that practice isn't synonymous with free play. Saying this isn't enough, you need to run practices with structure and direction, and the players will take the cue for the most part. Again, having a well-considered **practice plan** makes things run smoothly.

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A final thought while on the subject of having fun, and this is dealt with in more detail in the section on game day concerns: **set the right tone with your parents** during practice, too. Parents should be encouraged to support their kids by **attending practice**. In case practice needs to be halted due to a sudden thunderstorm, they will be there to bring their kids home. You might want to keep your ears open for attitude problems among the parents. It is rare, but sadly not rare enough. Parents need to understand that this is a recreational league for the fun of the kids. Though competition and playing to win is an important part of learning sports, fun is the primary objective of this league, and negative attitudes are not welcome. Be prepared to talk to a parent about it, if it becomes more than a rare occurrence. Everyone will be a little more enthusiastic on game day, but if you establish a supportive atmosphere in practice, the supportiveness often carries over to the games.

### **2.3 The Sandwich**

In one of the coaching courses available, for the introductory USSF “F” license, the instructor suggests that a practice follow the structure of a sandwich: bread, meat, bread. To start the practice, take the players through a set of warm up exercises. This will burn off some of the energy and excitement, and hopefully get them just tired enough that they will listen to your instructions. They’ve been cooped up sitting in their seats in school all day, and are itching to run around. The meat of the practice will be the skill development drills that the players need for soccer. This manual will supply you with a few ideas here, enough that you can use your own creativity and adapt them to the needs of your team. There are plenty of inexpensive coaching books available, and some of the better ones are listed in the reference section of this manual. The bread at the end of the practice will be a game-like activity that gives an opportunity to use the skills they have been working on in a game setting.

#### **2.3.1 Top Bun - Warm up Drills**

##### **Individual Practice At Home**

Let the players know that you want them working with the soccer ball on their own. One excellent activity is **ball-juggling** and **Personal Bests**. Teach the kids to use their thighs, their feet, even their heads, to keep the ball in the air, and count the number of touches. Each player should keep track of his personal best number of touches and try to beat it. Perhaps you would want to jot them down at the first practice and measure improvement over the season, and present an improvement award at the end-of-year party.

Another activity widely recognized for improving ball touch is **wall work**. Take your ball to a wall and bang it against the wall. Make a chalk number one on the wall and a number two and so on, and practice hitting the numbers in order. This activity is great because the wall gives all the feedback you need. If you hit it poorly, the wall will let you know. No nagging from adults is necessary.

##### **To Open Practice:**

Some coaches like to do the same warm up before every game and practice. The advantage of this approach is that the players get familiar with the routine, so they have an immediate sense of

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purpose (a good thing to have before, say, a 9:00AM game). That way, you're not trying to herd them together and instruct them in the sometimes limited amount of time that exists between the end of the prior game and the beginning of your game. Something basic to start the warm-up, like jumping jacks, gets the kids used to the idea that they're doing a group activity.

### **Warm-Up Drills:**

The idea here is to get all the players moving in soccer movements.

**Tag** – Mark off a square 10 x 10 yards with pylons and make one player "IT." They must tag another player who becomes IT. Tag-backs are fair game. This gets the kids moving in soccer movements, change of direction and pace, faking, dodging.

**Stop/Turn/Go** (Emphasizes dribbling under control) – Use the same 10x10 square as above. Each player begins with a ball, spread out in the square. Coach yells, "GO" and the players dribble their ball in the square, trying to avoid hitting another player or ball, keeping the ball close to them. When the coach yells "STOP" the players stop with their ball. When they go again they must sharply change direction and keep dribbling. Coach will vary the STOP/GO calls. Have the kids practice feinting (faking) moves.

**Red Light/Green Light** – Similar to the above. Players line up, each with a ball. A coach, the "traffic cop", positions him/herself at a distance away from the line which will vary based on the age group and skill level. The object of the game is to be the first player to get to the traffic cop. When the traffic cop is facing the players, the red light is on, and all players should be still, with the stopped ball close to their bodies. Anyone who continues to dribble, or whose ball continues to roll while the red light is on, is sent back to the starting line. Use discretion on what is a reasonable ball control level for your age group and skill level. When the traffic cop turns his/her back on the players, the green light is on, and the players should dribble, under control, as fast as they can. Emphasize that the players need to dribble with their heads up (a prerequisite skill for developing passing skills later), so that they can stop quickly when the red light comes on. As the season progresses, the dribbling skills should improve, and you should become more demanding in how quickly the kids stop when the red light come on.

**King of the Square** – use the same 10x10 square as above. Players spread out, each with a ball. At the start signal, the players dribble around, keeping their own ball close by, while trying to kick other balls out of the square. Once your ball is kicked out, you CANNOT kick other balls out, you must fetch your ball and wait outside the square, maybe juggling the ball. Last player with their ball in the square is the King. Some coaches object to knock-out games, since the players most in need of work get knocked out first. To remedy this, add a "hospital" or "rest station" to the game. When the first player gets knocked out, he waits in the first bed of the three-bed hospital. The second and third players knocked out wait also. When the fourth player is knocked out, the first player in the hospital goes back in, so that there are always no more than three players out at a time, and the player out the longest goes back in next.

**Hunters and Elephants** – One player (hunter) is stationed at the top of the penalty area. All the other players (elephants), each with a ball, start at midfield. At the start signal, the elephants dribble the ball and try to score. The hunter kicks balls out of bounds, and once he/she has

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kicked one out, can go for more. Once your ball is kicked out, you must fetch it, and the next round you become a hunter. Continue this until there are no more elephants.

**Dribble Around the Circle** -- This is a bit like Duck, Duck, Goose, but the soccer version is that this is done dribbling the ball. Pair up the players and number the pairs, say 1 through 5 for 10 players. Line up players around the center circle (or any circle approximately 20 yards in diameter) so that numbers are opposite one another, with one of each pair having a ball. Call out a number ("Fours!"). The player with the ball dribbles around the circle counterclockwise to his original spot, while the other player gives chase, trying to tag the dribbler. Call another number at random. After a circuit, the player without the ball gets the ball for next time.

**Dribbling Relay Race** -- Two parallel lines of players each behind a cone, facing a cone 5 yards ahead and a target cone 25 yards ahead. At the signal, the first in each line dribbles around the far cone and back to the near cone, where they deliver a pass to the next player in line. As they complete their leg of the race, each player sits down at the back of the line. Repeat several times with a short rest between races.

**Team Dribble Tag** -- mark a large area 25 by 40 yards. Divide the squad into four teams. Each player has a ball. One team is "it". Players from the "IT" team dribble and try to tag other players with a hand. The other players all have a ball too and must dribble away to avoid being tagged. Players tagged, or dribbling out of the area, are out, and must exit the area. Play several times, with each team being "it" at least once.

**Crabs and Minnows** -- (Emphasizes dribbling under control against a defender) - Use cones to make a square about 10 yards on each side. You can vary the size of the square based on the outcome of a trial game or two. Two players are designated the "crabs", and they assume their crab positions inside the square with their feet flat on the ground, in a semi-seated position, holding themselves up with their hands. The minnows, each with a ball, enter the square and begin to dribble around, trying to steer clear of the crabs. The crabs pursue, crab-crawling, trying to kick the balls out of the square. When they succeed, the player whose ball was kicked out becomes a crab and joins in the hunt until all minnows have been turned into crabs. **TIP:** because most players like being crabs, some will allow the crabs to kick their ball out right away, defeating your purpose for having the game. To prevent this, make the first two minnows that lose their balls dribble monotonously in a circle around the square. This will serve as an incentive for the kids to work harder to avoid the crabs.

**Steal the Bacon** -- Set up two lines, one on each side of the goal, about twenty yards out (vary depending on age), and mark a smaller goal, say 3 yards across, another 10 yards out. When the coach serves the ball, the players at the front of the two lines try to win the ball. The first one to the ball goes for the big goal, the other defends. If the defender wins the ball, he goes for the small goal with the other player in hot pursuit.

Whatever you come up with, remember that the object is to get all of them moving and ready for a good practice or game, so standing in lines is not a good idea.

### **2.3.2 The Meat – Technique work**

Once they are warmed up, you will have a brief window of opportunity to teach a technique that they can practice. This is the foundation of their ability to play the game. Listed in this section is a short list of the individual techniques each player should begin to master under your tutelage. There are many techniques to master in soccer – passing, trapping, shooting, heading, dribbling, goalkeeping, defending, tackling, throw-ins, and so forth.

**Kicking the ball is the one skill that makes the biggest difference.** Only when kids can kick the ball a certain distance does it make sense for them to spread out and stay in position. Start early in the season on proper kicking techniques – inside of the foot for passes, instep (shoelaces) for shots and long passes – and mix this into almost every practice. It is truly rewarding to see kids "get it" when they get the feel of the instep kick, and can strike the ball with some power and accuracy, without necessarily being much stronger. Conversely, it is disappointing to see players who have been playing for several years still kicking with their toes -- in their case nobody in all their years of practices took the time to teach them proper technique. If you can do no other skill work, be sure to develop proper kicking techniques: the inside of the foot push pass and the instep drive.

#### **2.3.2.1 Kicking**

Your first week of practice should emphasize learning the kicks of the game. Every practice should involve kicking drills.

##### **➤ Push Pass**

Used for most passes to teammates, this technique does not come naturally to players. In fact, at first it is awkward for them to stand on one leg, rotate their foot so it is perpendicular to the support foot, lock their ankle, and kick through the ball. But take them to a game, or watch a game on TV, and they'll see how often this is used.

**Support foot** (left foot, for a right-footed kick) should be next to the ball, slightly behind it, pointing to the target, ideally a teammate a few yards away.

**Strike Surface** is the inside of the foot, the arch of the foot, with the foot perpendicular to the support foot. They should strike the ball in the middle of the ball (not over or under).

Bend the knee slightly, **lock the ankle at 90 degrees**, and swing from the knee.

Players should master this with both feet.

#### **DRILLS --**

Players can practice against a wall, a table turned on its side, or a teammate.

Put two cones about four feet apart, and have pairs of players pass to each other through the cones.

Have them practice striking balls that are on the move as well as stationary balls.

By the end of the season, most players should be able to do 100 push pass touches in a row against a wall without mistake.

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### ➤ *Instep Drive*

Used for shots on goal. The idea here is to keep the ball low as you hit it hard.

**Support foot** should be next to the ball, as for push pass, pointing to target.

**Strike Surface** is the instep, the hard bone on the top of the foot, about where the shoelaces are.

**Lock the ankle, toe down**, swing from the knee.

**Keep the knee over the ball** (to keep it low)

**Keep the shoulders square** with the target and over the ball (to keep it low)

Strike **through** the center of the ball, keeping head down.

### DRILLS --

Wall work, or passes to a teammate (from farther away).

SLAM is a good game. Get four players, a ball, and a wall. Players are given numbers, and kick in order: 1, 2, 3, 4, 1 and so on. Player one strikes the ball against the wall. Player two must get to the ball and kick it against the wall. Then Player three and so forth. If a player fails to hit the wall, or if they kick the ball and it rebounds and hits them, they are given an "S", next mistake gains an "L", and if they spell "SLAM" they are out. Last survivor wins. You may need to add local rules, such as any ball on the roof gets automatic two letters, or whatever.

### ➤ *Chipping*

Used for long passes and free kicks (goal kicks, corner kicks).

This is much like the instep drive, except the idea is to get the ball high and far.

One trick for learning the proper approach to the ball (the way you take a few steps to run up to it) is to have players use the outside of the foot to flick the ball to one side, then take a step and hit it. They need to learn to strike moving balls as well as stationary balls, and this is a great way to do it.

**Support foot** should be next to the ball, slightly further behind, pointing at target.

**Strike Surface** is the instep, just like for the instep drive.

**Lock the ankle, toe down**, swing from the knee

**Lean the shoulders back a bit**, but still square with the target.

Strike **through** the lower portion of the ball.

### DRILLS --

Generally, give the players a target object to kick over. For older players, have them hit it over the crossbar of the goal. Or get them in 10x10 squares and hit it over a teammate's head. For younger players like first graders, have one player stand on the goal line and see if he can hit it in the air to a teammate on the edge of the penalty area. As they get better, adjust the distance. By midseason, you want to have a few players who are able to kick the ball to midfield (of the size field they're playing on) all the way in the air from a goal kick.

**Kick to your Partner Race** Pair up players, one ball to a pair. One player is the server, the other is the kicker. Server throws underhanded with both hands about knee or thigh high. The kicker kicks it with the instep back to the server. Then the kicker advances to where the server was standing when he caught the ball, and the server backs up. They advance up the field this way,

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racing the other pairs who are doing the same thing. If the server doesn't catch it, the server can't advance. This drill is good because the player gets positive feedback without coaching -- players simply must lock the ankle down to kick the ball properly with the instep. If they hit it on the top of the toe, or if their ankle is relaxed, it won't feel very good. When they lock the ankle down and strike it on the instep, the ball will leap off the foot and into the hands of the partner.

Soccer Golf. This requires some preparation beforehand, and does nothing for conditioning, but is a fun game to mix up kicking techniques. Players will need to mix long kicking skills and short passing skills to go from the tee to the "hole" which might be hitting a cone, or a goalpost. You can use interesting obstacles like hitting it over (or around) the goal, and so forth. Mix it up by requiring players to alternate which foot they use (right then left). Or have a foursome alternate who kicks, so that everybody's shot is used.

### 2.3.2.2 Trapping

Trapping the ball means receiving the ball and getting it under control. Every ball played on one end is received on the other end. Trapping the ball is an essential skill. You don't have to stop it dead, the main idea is to get the ball under control where you can play it. As players advance, they will discover the importance of making a quality first touch, to get the ball under control. They should move the ball into the direction where they intend to play. For example, if the ball comes from the left, they passed it to you because there was pressure from the opponents over there, so you'll want to move it to the right.

#### ➤ Inside of foot trap

Lock ankle at 90 degrees and raise foot about an inch above the ground, and "give" to cushion the ball as it rolls to you. Don't raise the foot too high, or the ball will roll under, and you'll do a "hole-in-the-foot-trick." This trap can be used for balls coming shin or even knee high by raising the foot to the height of the ball and cushioning the ball. This is the trap that should be used in receiving throw-ins.

#### ➤ Sole of foot trap

Heel low to the ground, toe pointed high, allow the ball to roll to the sole and wedge itself to a stop – ***then roll it right or left so that you can play it.*** Don't stomp on it, the timing will be off and you'll miss the ball.

#### ➤ Thigh trap

For balls coming about waist-high raise the knee slightly, cushion the ball with the quadriceps, and allow the ball to drop gently to feet.

#### ➤ Chest trap

For balls arriving high, cushion the ball in the fleshy area below the collarbone, where the pectoralis major muscle is located. "Give" with the ball and allow it to drop gently to feet.

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### **DRILLS --**

Juggling. There is no better drill for developing ball touch than "keepy-up." Hold the ball in the hands and drop it to thighs, or to feet, and play the ball in the air. See how many touches you can do before the ball hits the ground. Set your Personal Best, keep track of it, and improve it. Youth players in other countries can easily keep the ball up for fifty to eighty touches. Top recreational players around here can do their age (you can find a seven year old who can do seven touches, etc.). Travel players around here can do 1-2 times their age.

Half-Juggling. Get on a blacktop and kick the ball up, let it bounce once, then another kick, bounce, kick, bounce, etc.

Pairs Juggling. Get with a friend and hit it back and forth, maybe two or three touches and a pass. Perhaps start with heading back and forth (Keep it high!) and use your thighs and feet as it makes its way down.

Trap and Pass Get in pairs, with one ball, one player serving to the other. Server throws underhand with both hands to various body parts as follows. The receiver will first head it back, then trap it with the left part of the chest and volley it back; then the right side of the chest and volley back; then the left thigh and a volley, right thigh and a volley, then a left foot volley then finally a right foot volley.

Soccer Tennis. On a blacktop, mark a court with chalk, and mark a net with pylons. Bounce the ball and kick it over to the other team, who gets one bounce to kick it back. No service aces allowed, since the idea is to get long volleys going.

Punt and Trap. For the older kids, they will need to be able to win the ball from the air, for example when the goalkeeper punts the ball to roughly midfield. No better way to learn this than to have pairs of players punt it to each other and trap it (chest, thigh, etc.) and punt it back. In fact, if they have the confidence to head the ball as well, this will be a big advantage, so have them head a few back to the punter.

### **2.3.2.3 Dribbling**

For the youngest players, those in clinic, first grade, and second grade, dribbling will be one of the most important skills to master. They should learn to face an opponent to beat them, and to accelerate past them.

Tactically, they will need to learn *when* to dribble. In the defending third of the field, they should dribble only briefly to get open to pass the ball upfield. In the middle third of the field they should dribble the ball to advance the ball upfield, to make the defenders commit. In the attacking third of the field, they should ALWAYS attempt to beat the first defender on the dribble, because once he's beaten then the defense is in disarray and a teammate will be open somewhere, or else a shot will be open.

All players need to be able to dribble the ball under pressure. There are a number of different dribbling techniques. Try to incorporate them into your drills.



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- Dribbling in traffic – as in the penalty area. Keep ball close in front of you, use fakes, keep head up to pass the ball or shoot.
- Dribbling at speed – as on a fast break. Kick ball 2-3 yards ahead to keep running at top speed. Keep head up to pass or shoot. Often, using the *outside of the foot* will enable you to run faster while dribbling.
- Faking – shoulder fakes, foot fakes, stop-start, rolling the ball, etc. to get the defender moving the wrong way so that you can either dribble past them, or get an open pass or shot.
- Changing direction and speed – Cutbacks, cut across, stepovers, to sharply change the direction of the dribble. A one-pace player is easy to cover. A player who rapidly changes direction and speed is a real problem for the defense. When you get the opponent wrong-footed with a fake, *accelerate past him*.
- Shielding the ball – Keeping the ball within playing distance, but using your body to keep the defender off the ball until you can turn and either dribble past or pass or shoot.

### **DRILLS --**

Scramble (many variations) -- In a 20 by 20 yard grid, each player dribbling a ball. Initially, the coach will ask them to dribble around, use both feet, use the inside and outside of the feet, and change direction. After a minute or two of this warmup, stop, show them, say, a cut across move and ask them to try it. After another minute or two, stop and add additional coaching points or elements to add a little game-like pressure. One way to add more pressure is to add a couple players (without balls) who are trying to take the balls away. If you get your ball taken away, then you're looking to take someone else's ball. This makes the dribblers keep their heads up, change direction, and accelerate to get away from the defenders.

Cone to Cone -- Place two cones 10 yards apart, perhaps along a line. Station two players, one on each side of the line, one with a ball. Players stay on their side of the line. The player with the ball fakes and jukes and races to beat the defender to one of the cones. Go for about a minute then switch roles.

Speed Dribble Relay Race -- Multiple teams of two, or three, line up on one sideline. At the signal, one from each team dribbles at top speed to the far sideline, turns around, and dribbles back, whereupon his teammate dribbles to the far sideline and back. Run about five races with very short rest in between. You can spice this up. Make them go around the far cone three times before returning. Put some cones along the path and them stop the ball at the first cone, sprint to the end and back to the ball and dribble back. Mix it up -- if you did it one way last week, add a new twist this week.

Slalom Dribble Relay Race -- Set up parallel lines of cones several yards apart. Divide into teams, one in front of each line of cones. At the signal, the front player of each line dribbles the ball through the cones, left, right, left, right, etc, and around the last cone, and back slaloming through the cones. Again, you can spice it up by having them slalom one trip, and go straight the next. Or by stopping the ball and hopping to the end and back and dribbling from there.

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Grid Dribbling -- Set up a 10 x 30 area, dividing it into three adjacent 10 x 10 areas. At the edge of the first square, place an attacker with the ball. At a cone on the opposite edge (10 yards away), station a defender. Station another defender at a cone ten yards back, and another defender at a cone on the last line. At the signal, the attacker may dribble. Once he crosses into the first square, the first defender may leave his cone to challenge the attacker. At that point it's one on one, with the dribbler trying to make it into the second square, and the defender trying to take the ball away or kick it outside the square. If the dribbler makes it into the second square, the first defender cannot pursue, but once the ball crosses into the second square, the second defender may leave his cone to challenge. If the dribbler makes it through to the third and final square, the second defender may not pursue, but once the ball crosses into the third square the third defender may leave his cone and challenge. You may need to adjust the square size to the abilities of your players. You want most of your players to have the ability (and confidence in their own ability) to beat at least one defender on the dribble. They have the best chance of beating the defender when they face him. Adjust the game to the point where the attackers are getting through about half the time. For the defenders, they should be starting quickly, arriving slowly. (If they just rush the dribbler, he'll blow past them.) They should use the confined space of the square to advantage, by forcing the attacker in one direction and keeping them there. If the attacker is foolish enough to turn his back on the defender, the defender should press his advantage and keep backing him into a corner.

### 2.3.2.4 Defending

We're on defense when the other team has the ball, *wherever that is*. In other words, we're not just on defense in our defensive third of the field. We want to win the ball back whenever we lose it, wherever we lose it. All players, including forwards, must be able to apply pressure to the opponent, to either win the ball or to force a mistake. Forcing the other fullbacks into a mistake often leads to great scoring chances. Some techniques to work into your practices are listed below.

- Closing the distance – as the opponent dribbles toward you, **start quickly** (to close the distance), but **arrive slowly** (so that he/she cannot blow past you).
- Stance -- Take a stance about one pace away from the ball. This is a judgment thing that players can only learn by lots of practice. Stand with one foot forward and one back, as opposed to spread-legged in front of the attacker.
- Shepherding -- Confined spaces help the defense. Channel them one way and keep them going that way so that your teammates can help out. Sometimes you may want to force the player to go to his weak foot. To force him to go to his left foot, approach him from his right, stance with the left foot forward, effectively blocking his way to his right.
- Pressuring the ball -- as the ball arrives at the player in front of you, close the distance by starting quickly and arriving slowly. If he has his back to you (and the goal), keep him facing his own goal and force him to pass it back. Do not allow him room enough to turn and face you. If you allow him to turn and face you with the ball, he has a better chance of beating you on the dribble, or passing ahead to a teammate on the attack. If he passes backward, that's the way we want the ball to go.

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- Delaying for support -- Ideally, before you go in to challenge the opponent, you will have teammates in supporting defensive positions behind you. (If you were to challenge and lose without support players, the attacker would get a shot on goal!) If your teammates are not yet in position (other team has a fast break) you want to delay the attack until your teammates can recover. You do this by covering the passing lanes, keeping your eye on the dribbler, and not committing until you have support players behind you.
- Tackling – There are many types of tackles. Poke tackles are made with the front foot, to kick the ball away. Block tackles are when you and the opponent both put a foot on the ball, strike the ball solidly in the middle, **keep your balance** and force the ball over their foot. Balance is key. Slide tackles are not allowed in most age groups of our league, since they can be dangerous both for the attacker and the defender.
- Marking – as you cover the one attacker assigned to you, stay **between them and the goal**. This is not like basketball where you try to front the player. There is more room on the soccer field, which would allow your opponent to run past you for the ball and get a shot on goal. Do not allow them to run past you to stand facing the goal without you being in the way. As the ball is passed to them, beat them to it if you can, but if you can't, then keep between them and the goal.

### ***DRILLS--***

1v1 -- Get the players into various games where they can go one on one. In coaching the defensive role, practice closing the distance, judging the distance, and forcing the attacker one direction. In a 20x10 area, have two players inside and two players outside, one at each edge of the long rectangle. An outside player begins by playing it to the nearest of the inside players, while the other one starts in his half. Once the ball is played in the other player can challenge the one with the ball. The object is for the player with the ball to beat his defender and pass to the player on the opposite edge. Lots of moving, faking, changing direction and speed, tackling, and so on.

Grid Dribbling -- As in many offensive drills, there is a defensive side to it. Once the players get good at beating a defender, start teaching the players how to defend. Have them force a player to his weak foot, then gradually close the distance in on him.

#### ***2.3.2.5 Goalkeeping***

If there is one skill that is under-emphasized it is goalkeeping. Few plays are as demoralizing as when a goalkeeper makes a mistake and allows an easy goal to the other team. The keeper feels bad, the players feel bad, and the parents feel bad. Often even the opponents feel bad for you, though they're not going to relinquish the goal. Find a parent who loves baseball and make them your goalkeeping coach. Many of the skills have a lot of similarity to fielding.

For the young ones, getting them to remember that they should use their hands, and where, is success enough. Getting them to stand ***in front of*** the goal, getting them not to go back to the goal with the ball, getting them to punt the ball successfully – these are big plusses too.

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Another common mistake to avoid regards where the goalkeeper goes once he has the ball. Inexplicably, many kids *carry the ball back to the front of the goal* and release the ball from there. This is exactly the dangerous area where the opponents want the ball to be. Get it out of there! When you get the ball, start taking your steps from there, *away* from the goal, and punt or throw it to a teammate near the touch line (sideline).

This year, the National High School Federation, upon which Freedom Optimist Soccer rules are based, changed their goalkeeping rule regarding delay of the game. Previously a goalkeeper was limited to taking four steps once they gained possession of the ball. Now, the rule is the same as it is for international play (FIFA rules) -- the goalkeeper can take as many steps as he likes, but must get rid of the ball within five seconds. For the youngest players this means two things. First, you should train them to run all the way to the edge of the penalty area to punt or throw the ball. Second, they will need to do so quickly.

Goalkeeping skills to practice include the following.

- All you have behind the ball -- Get over to the ball and get as much of your body behind it as possible. This applies to low balls, high balls, all balls. Get both hands, your body, your legs, behind the ball in case it slips through the hands.
- Picking up the ball properly – Both hands, feet together! Please don't let a ball go between the legs for a goal, it would be too embarrassing for the player.
- Position – NOT on the goal line. Start out a few yards, maybe even at the edge of the goal box.
- Diving – It doesn't hurt. It's cool. Be sure to use BOTH HANDS to stop the ball.
- Throwing -- Practice a stiff-arm throw. Especially for younger kids, this will be the only way they can throw a heavy object like a ball. They may well have better distance and accuracy throwing than punting.
- Punting – ALL players should become coordinated enough to punt, even the 5 year olds. However, they sure don't start that way. Practice this first, and only let them punt it in a game if you've seen them do it in practice. Goals *have* been scored by the unfortunate goalie punting the ball over and behind them and into the goal. Don't let this happen to one of your players. Practice this when you practice the instep drive. Make sure they *drop* the ball and don't throw it up. Make sure they lock the ankle down, because if the toe is up the ball will go over and behind them.
- One on One – Teach them to rush the attacker (start quickly, arrive slowly) and smother the ball. Knowing when to start the rush is the trick.
- Calling – Especially for the older kids. A goalkeeper has the best vision of how the play is developing and which of the opponents are not marked. The goalkeeper should be vocal in leading the defense.

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The following is an excerpt from the team newsletter of the Washington Freedom, of the WUSA women's professional league, quoting Dave Vanole, the goalkeeper coach on training and warming up goalkeepers:

"Being from Southern California, a fairly dry and mild climate, I look for situations to train my keepers that will simulate different climates around the world. Many coaches don't realize how this type of training will improve their players. Whereas they might take the day off in inclement weather, I consider a steady rain the ideal training environment.

I use the elements to my advantage, preparing my players for whatever Mother Nature has to offer, because every drop of rain makes the ball do something different on the pitch.

Here's a typical training session on a damp pitch. After a proper warmup,

1. The Coach serves the ball by hand, forcing the GK to deal with the ball skipping on wet turf.
  - ◆ 10 balls directly to GK
  - ◆ 10 balls to right of GK
  - ◆ 10 balls to left
2. GK required to perform dive; forward, right or left
  - a. All service from coach's hand to ensure accuracy
3. Coach hits ball with feet from ground to give GK feeling for ball speed.
4. Coach requires GK to "HOLD ALL SHOTS"
5. If GK drops any shot she is required to get to her feet and cover any potential rebound.

It is important to note that the number of repetitions the GK endures is based on the accuracy of the coach's shooting, the fitness of the GK, and the success rate of the GK based on ability."

### 2.3.2.6 Heading

For younger players, start learning this skill with a beach ball, so that they can learn the proper technique without fear of having a firmer ball bash them in the nose.

- The player should **strike the ball** with the forehead, don't let the ball hit you, hit it first. **Strike Surface** is the forehead, above the eyebrows and below the hair line. Do NOT hit the ball with the top of the head, it will hurt. **Eyes OPEN, Mouth CLOSED.** You need to see the ball to hit it on the forehead and avoid hitting the top of the head. Keep your mouth closed to avoid biting your tongue. (Ouch!) Swing from the waist and follow through. Practice changing the direction of the ball, as for a pass. Shots on goal should be aimed to go low, bouncing a yard in front of the goal if possible. Clearing the ball away from the goal should be aimed high and wide.

DRILLS --

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Juggling with a partner -- head it back and forth with a partner. This will practice hitting the ball with the right part of the head, and can help practice directing the ball on passes.

Kneeling -- With a partner, who stands five yards away and serves underhand. Player practices swinging from the waist to power head the ball to the chest of the partner.

### **2.3.3 Team Drills**

Skill is the ability to use a technique under game-like conditions. Now that the players have tried the skills under low or medium pressure, it's time to step up the pressure and make things more game-like.

There are any number of books in the public library or in any book store loaded with games, but here are a couple classic games to give you a few ideas.

**5 vs 2** -- This is one of the most popular team tune-up games around, you'll find it in nearly every coaching book. Once the players are comfortable with it have some of the basics down, passing to feet, moving without the ball, this can be a great early practice warmup exercise. Mark off an area 20 x 15 yards. Five of the players are on offense, and two are on defense. The offensive players pass the ball among themselves, while the defensive players attempt to win the ball. Offensive players see how many passes in a row they can complete. For the offensive players, they need to learn to move when they don't have the ball. They need to show themselves to the ball so that the passer has a clear view of the player. They need to look at the field and decide what to do BEFORE they get the ball. For the defensive players, they need to work together in defense, with the defender closest to the ball applying pressure, forcing the ball one way (right or left), while the second defender covers the area into which the ball will be played. Whoever loses the ball to the defense becomes a defender, the defender who has been in longer goes out on offense. Before long, players should be able to string together ten passes. If they have trouble with this, you may want to increase the size of the area.

**Soccer Baseball**-- (Emphasizes passing skills) - Set up four bases with cones - the distance is subject to experimentation and change. Divide your players into two teams. Put one team in the field with the four standard infielders, and spread the rest across the outfield. The batter puts the ball into play by kicking a ball from home plate. The batter then attempts to run around the bases and cross home plate before the fielding team completes this scenario: retrieve the ball, pass to the third baseman, who passes to the shortstop, who passes to the second baseman, who passes to the first baseman who hits the first base cone with the ball. A run scores if the batter wins the race and an out is recorded if the fielding team wins the race. Move the fielders around every couple batters to involve everyone in the passing.

**Obstacle Courses** (Emphasizes whatever skills you want) -- It's a common practice to rotate the role of team captain from game to game, trying to get everyone to be a captain or co-captain at least once per season. One technique is to use a competition to determine who the team captain will be for a given week. A timed obstacle course can be used as this type of competition. You can set up "stations" spread across your practice area which the players get to by dribbling. Once there, they must perform the skill that the coach occupying the station will lead them through. As a simple example, if the theme of the practice is dribbling, you can have four slalom

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stations spread over your practice area. These emphasize dribbling under control because the players have to go through each opening to pass the station. Also, getting from station to station emphasizes dribbling with speed in an open field. You can let each player go through twice, either using their better time or their cumulative time. While one or two players are waiting their turn on the obstacle course, you or an assistant can lead the rest of the team in a practice game or drill.

**Numbers Game** – Set up a 30 x 20 yard field, with a 2 yard wide goal at each end. Divide the team into two lines, lined up next to each other. Give each pair a number, so that each team has a “1”, each team has a “2” and so forth. Send the teams to stand behind their own goal line, juggling the ball or something. Call out a number (e.g. “3”) and throw a ball into the middle of the field. The two players with that number (one from each team) will come out and play one on one until one of them scores. The game can be modified to 2v2 by calling two numbers. Keep players paying attention by varying the numbers often, and calling players in and out from time to time.

### **2.3.4 Bottom Bun – Team Exercises**

Most every practice should finish in a team game of some sort. Key elements to include are teams (as opposed to drills which had individual elements), goals, lack of restrictions, and full pressure.

Scrimmage -- Eventually, sometime before the season starts, you will want to scrimmage one of the other teams that practices the same nights you do. Don't be shy about halting the game as needed to make a coaching point -- either correcting a problem or praising a player who makes an excellent play. However you don't want to disrupt play either.

5v5 (or 8v8) -- The simplest thing to do is to divide your team evenly, set goals using cones going across your half of the field, and play. Be sure to make your coaching points from time to time, correcting in the areas you emphasized in today's practice theme.

Offense vs. Defense -- To help players learn the roles of the positions in your team's system of play, you'll want to scrimmage offense versus defense. Midfielders play both, so be sure that each side has midfielders. The offense is trying to score on the big goal. For the defense, set up two goals about three yards wide, one on each side of the field. This represents a successful pass to the wing in mounting an attack.

The Four Goal Game -- Divide up even sides and go cross ways. However instead of a single goal in the middle, each team will be going for two goals laid out in the corners. The coaching point here is to switch the point of attack. Eventually the teams will become jammed up attacking/defending one of the goals. Stop play and point out that the other goal is wide open, and if they were to have a player out there and pass it to him/her, they would have an easy shot.

## **2.4 Position Play and Lineups**

Unlike other sports, soccer has quite a bit of variation in how teams line up the players on their side. This section discusses the pros and cons of each system of play.

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Years ago, many youth soccer programs simply lined up young players as 11-a-side and played. What invariably results is a swarm of 20 kids bunched around the soccer ball in a frenzy. “Magnet ball” “Swarm soccer” “Forty legs, one ball, and a cloud of dust” This is no fun and doesn’t teach the players anything about the game. Thus our league organizes the younger age groups into smaller sided soccer games.

### **2.4.1 Dividing the field**

In describing the team play and tactics, it is important to distinguish what the objectives are relative to where the ball is. Most commonly, we divide the field into thirds. We refer to the defending third, the middle third, and the attacking third.

The **defending third** of the field is where our goal is located. Losing possession of the ball in this area will result in a shot on our goal, so we take no chances here. We want the ball to spend as little time here as possible. Passes in the middle of the field are too risky, we pass to the outside where it is safer. Fancy dribbling, trick passes and other risky plays are out. In the defending third of the field we pass the ball to the outside, and upfield. Having fullbacks who can kick the ball a good distance is fairly important, so teach instep kicking to your team.

The **attacking third** of the field is where the opponent’s goal is located. We want to bring the ball here and keep it here until we score. This area will be heavily defended, so we need to develop dribbling skills in tight spaces, combination passing plays, and the habit of taking shots when we have the chance. If we lose possession, we want to apply pressure immediately before the other team can get the ball out of this area. If we win the ball in the attacking third we can often get a shot on goal.

The **middle third** of the field is where both teams are vying to possess the ball and build an attack. Passing skills, trapping skills, tackling, and anticipation are key skills in the middle third of the field.

### **2.4.2 Positions**

Generally speaking, most systems of play have three lines of players – backs (fullbacks), midfielders (halfbacks), and forwards (wings and strikers). Simply put, backs defend our goal, forwards attack their goal, and midfielders play both offense and defense.

#### **2.4.2.1 Fullbacks**

Most goals are scored from the area in front of the goal, extending out to just beyond the penalty area. Fullbacks are responsible for keeping the ball out of this area, for taking the ball away from the other team forwards, and for passing the ball upfield to teammates to start our attack. Backs play in the defending third and the middle third of the field. When our team has the ball deep in the attacking third, the backs should not be hanging back around their own penalty area building dirt piles or watching the clouds. They should be positioned around the midfield line or even in front of it. If the other team kicks the ball upfield, the backs will then be in position to thwart the attack before it starts by kicking the ball up to our midfielders and forwards for a shot on goal.



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Fullback is not the position for the slow-footed player. Many teams are sure to put their speedsters at forward, so we need some speed at the back. Aside from the goalkeeper, the backs have the best view of the field, so having some intelligent and vocal players at the back can help keep the team organized.

### **2.4.2.2 Midfielders**

Midfielders, or halfbacks, play both offense and defense, ranging in the defensive, middle, and offensive thirds of the field. Generally you want them 5-15 yards behind the forwards and 5-15 yards ahead of the fullbacks.

They will be responsible for controlling the middle third of the field. They will build the attack by receiving passes from the fullbacks or goalkeeper, passing the ball ahead to the forwards, receiving back passes from the forwards, playing through balls for the forwards to run on to, and by taking occasional long shots on goal.

They will support the attack by preventing the other team from effectively clearing the ball, by intercepting the other teams' passes, by winning '50-50' balls in the middle third of the field, by forming walls in front of free kicks, and by marking the opposing halfbacks on defense.

### **2.4.2.3 Forwards**

If yours is like most teams, probably eight of your kids want to play center forward. Forwards are those attacking players who go for goal. They are often called wings on the outside and strikers in the middle. In most recreational soccer, the forwards do most of the goal scoring, but in higher levels of play this is not always the case. Often the forwards are called upon to *penetrate* the defense, and to *maintain possession* of the ball while the team moves forward to attack. In higher levels of play, the midfielders do as much goal-scoring as the forwards.

Forwards need to collect the ball as their teammates pass it forward, they need to penetrate the defense by dribbling and quick passing, and they need to be able to handle the ball under pressure to get a shot off. When the other fullbacks have the ball, the forwards will be the first line of defense, harassing the opposing fullbacks into making a mistake, perhaps getting a shot.

## **2.4.3 Lineups**

### **2.4.3.1 3v3 Micro-Soccer (Clinic)**

In the clinic league, the lineup will be three versus three. (Actually there will be two simultaneous games of 3v3, so assistant coaches are a necessity, rather than a luxury.) The philosophy at this age is to give every player the maximum opportunity to participate in the game, to kick the ball. With only six players on the field, two of which are goalkeepers, even the most timid youngster will be kicking the ball. Lineups really don't matter. What matters is to encourage the players to play both offense and defense, and to try to win the ball back if the other team has taken it away. There's nothing wrong with having the goalkeeper join in the attack, provided he/she gets back on defense and doesn't use hands outside their own penalty area.

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At this age, the important things to develop include:

- Competitiveness (Take the ball away? Mommy always taught me to share...)
  - Perseverance – if they take the ball away, keep after it and get it back
  - Conditioning – at the beginning of the season, few kids can last a full 6 min quarter.
  - Direction – we kick into that goal there, and keep them out of this goal here. Be sure to remind them of the direction change after each quarter.
  - Kicking Technique – When a kid can kick the ball 20 yards it changes the game!
  - Combination Passing – Five year olds can indeed perform give-and-go (wall) passes. It takes a lot of repetitions in practice before you see it on the field, but few sights are as rewarding.
  - Dribbling Technique – Keeping the ball close, accelerating, changing direction.
- Dominant dribblers will tend to dominate play at this age.

Few things are as exciting for parents as a wild 3v3 clinic game. To keep the games competitive, you may want to arrange with the opposite coach before the game as to how you want to line up the teams. Either mix them up, or divide the teams into a stronger side and a weaker side. What you want to avoid is having your three most timid players against their most fierce ones.

### 2.4.3.2 7v7 Younger Boys/Girls

Starting at the First grade level, we play Six versus Six plus goalkeepers. At this point you will find it necessary to divide the players into lineups of backs, midfielders (halfbacks), and forwards. Simply put, backs defend our goal, forwards attack their goal, and midfielders play both offense and defense.

Seven a side might suggest several kinds of lineups. Most common is a 2-2-2 lineup, with two backs, two midfielders and two forwards. This has the advantage of getting the kids used to having three lines of players, and used to playing on their side of the field. It has the disadvantage of not having center positions. This means that when the ball is in the center of the field, both players are likely to be there, and when it goes to one side, both players are tempted to follow, so that kids are often out of position.

Another possible lineup is 2-1-3, with two backs, one midfield, and three forwards (left wing, center, and right wing). This lineup has center positions, well suited for dominant players, and has some offensive punch. The downside is the risk that your forwards won't help out on defense in the middle third of the field, leaving the midfielder and the backs outnumbered.

A variation is a 2-3-1, with two backs, three midfield, and a single striker. The advantage of this lineup is that with three midfielders, your team can dominate the middle of the field. The disadvantage is that the outside midfielders may not be up to the conditioning challenge of playing attacking wing and also defending deep in your own end of the field.

Some teams field a 3-3 lineup (three backs and three forwards) without midfielders. This lineup suffers the disadvantage of having no midfielders to control the tempo of the game and move the ball upfield from defense to attack.

### A Word On The Two Players Up And Two Players Back Rule:

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For several years in the youngest age groups our league has had a rule where two players are supposed to stay on offense and two players are to stay on defense at all times. The intent of this rule is to limit bunching up, and to prevent teams from packing their own goal on defense. However, **if this rule is enforced too closely, it can teach bad habits** that must be unlearned later. For example, some coaches mistakenly use the midfield line to mark the difference between offense and defense, resulting in fullbacks who dare not cross it when their team is on offense, and forwards who dare not stray from it to collect the ball when their team is on defense. Soccer is a fluid game, and players must learn to play it as a fluid game. Treat this rule as a gentleman's agreement with the opposite coach. If you think this rule is being violated by the other team, the proper etiquette is to alert the other coach so that he can tell his players to get back into position. Whether they listen and obey instantly is another story....

### 2.4.3.3            8v8 (Some age groups)

The most common lineup for this number of players is to have 2-2-3 (two backs, two midfield, three forwards). It is easy to see how a 2-3-2 lineup might be advantageous if you have a strong player as your center midfielder, to defend and attack. Most teams find that having only four players to attack, in the case of a 3-2-2 formation, lacks sufficient scoring punch at these ages.

### 2.4.3.4            11v11 (Older players)

11v11 is full strength for soccer. Many systems of play have been employed over the years.

4-3-3 This is a very common lineup. The Dutch professional teams tend to use this arrangement.

In this lineup, the backs can play in either a diamond formation or a 'flat four' formation. The diamond formation is much easier for recreational players to master. In a diamond, the backs will have two outside (wing) backs (left and right), a stopper (or center back) in the middle and slightly in front of the wing backs, and a sweeper in the center behind them. The backs will have responsibility for marking (covering) the opposing forwards. The outside backs mark the wings, and the stopper marks the center forward. The idea of the marking assignments is to leave the sweeper free from a marking assignment, so that they can support all the other backs, and step in if their teammate gets beaten in the danger zone.

In front of the backs will be the three midfielders, left, center, and right. They will be responsible for controlling the middle third of the field as described above. You will want to have a dominant player for your center midfielder, someone who wins tackles, passes well, shoots well, and has boundless stamina.

In front of the midfielders will be the three forwards -- a center forward (striker) and a left and right wing. The wings will be crossing the ball to the center, where the striker and the other wing will bang it in. The halfbacks should be close enough to pass back to, either for a forward pass or a shot.

4-4-2 The US Men's National Team, and most British clubs use this lineup, with the four backs flat across the back. The four midfielders do quite a bit of attacking, sometimes overlapping (switching positions temporarily) with the forwards. There's very little scoring when both teams

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use this lineup, in that each team has eight on defense and six on attack. “If they can’t score on me, I can’t lose.” For recreational play, this system is rarely used. One reason is that most teams have about a zillion kids who want to play center forward, and few who want to run all day at midfield. Another reason is that in the recreational level, there are few if any players who can attack effectively as a two-person front line. Yes, the midfielders are supposed to run up and cross the ball like wings, but few coaches have found the time to study this one enough to teach it effectively

4-2-4 Brazil used to use this lineup. Basically it is the same as the 4-4-2, the only difference being what you call the wings -- midfielders who attack, or wings who defend. As above, if you can't get players to understand this dual role, this system will break down and you'll either be left with too few attackers or too few defenders.

3-3-4 In this lineup, there are three backs, three midfield, and four forwards. There are two outside backs to mark the wings, and one center back to cover the center forward. They had better be pretty good, because there's no sweeper behind them to save the day in case of mistakes. Up front there are two wings on the outside and two strikers in front of the goal. This is a fairly common lineup.

3-4-3 Interestingly, you rarely see this lineup, but it's not hard to figure out. As above, there are only three backs, and they had better have some speed because there's no sweeper to help out. And there are three forwards to attack. In this lineup there are four midfielders -- a left, left inside, right inside, and right. They will indeed need to play both offense and defense, because with only three to attack and three to defend, that won't be enough to score goals or prevent them.

3-5-2 The Dallas Burn of the MLS use this lineup. The idea is to give more firepower to the attack, and to have better control of midfield, but it can be confusing because instead of playing flat across the midfield (3-4-3), they will stagger. You will play more accurately a 3-2-3-2. The center midfielder and the two outside midfielders will be attacking midfielders, going right into the opposing penalty area to cross or shoot the ball. The two other inside midfielders (right and left inside) will still attack, but will do so from farther back. They will mark the opposing strikers on defense, leaving the center back to roam as a sweeper. The attacking midfielders will mark the opposing midfielders on defense.

## **2.6 Set Plays**

### **2.6.1 Throw ins**

Throw-ins are the most common set play. Whenever the ball goes out of bounds over the touch line (side line), play is restarted by a throw-in.

In soccer the out of bounds rule is different from some other sports. The whole ball must be out for the ball to be out of bounds. In other words, **on the line is in bounds**. Players may stand out of bounds and legally play a ball that is in bounds -- only the position of the ball matters.

Because of this, you should keep substitute players, parents, and other spectators 1-2 yards away from the touch lines to allow players to play balls that are in play along the sidelines.

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Young players make more mistakes throwing the ball in than in any other area of soccer. In the younger age groups in this league, the etiquette is to allow the player to redo an illegal throw-in, so that they learn the proper technique. Don't permit an illegal throw-in, that's teaching bad habits. Show them the right way and let them do it again until they get it right.

Technique Both hands must be used equally, starting all the way behind and following all the way through. Balls that spin excessively indicate one hand dominated the throw – do it over. Balls must be thrown, they cannot be dropped – do it over with the player following through. Both feet must be in contact with the ground - no jumping. Players cannot jump, but they can drag a toe. . Any daylight showing under a foot indicates the foot was up.

Plays -- There will be more throw-ins than any other set play. The safest and most reliable play is to have the player throw it down the line and have their teammate run on to it. If they throw it across the field it is too easy for the opponent to intercept and put your players out of the play, scrambling to get back on defense. Another option is to make a short throw to a teammate (instead of throwing to space). To do this, have them throw it about shin high. The receiving player should trap it by raising the foot and cushioning the ball with the inside of the foot, or else play it back to the thrower one-touch. This is not as easy as it sounds, so it's worthwhile to practice this prior to the first game. A third option is the long throw-in. By getting a short running start, arching the back, and following through forcefully, the throw-in can become an attacking set play near the attacking penalty area, if we have good heading skills. It can also become an effective way to clear the ball in our defending third of the field.

### **2.6.2 Corner kicks**

When a defending player was the last to touch the ball before it crosses the goal line (but not in the goal), play is restarted with a corner kick. The ball is placed in the corner arc, which marks one yard from the corner. The attacking player kicks the ball into play. Despite the fact that it appears to be courteous, it is in fact illegal for someone to hold the corner flag out of the way while the player takes the corner kick. Players just have to get used to kicking around it.

In the older age groups, a corner kick should become a scoring opportunity. It is worthwhile to practice corners, for attacking and defending them.

The long corner -- In older age groups, where many players can kick the ball from the corner arc to the penalty spot, and where most players have good heading skills, the corner kick is a scoring threat. Some players will develop the skill to hit an "inswinger" that curves into the upper corner of the goal. If you have (or develop) players with these skills, you should train your players to treat every corner kick as a goal-scoring opportunity. Make sure that the right players are taking the kicks and the right players are in position to be heading the balls, regardless of what position they're assigned to. See some of the coaching books available for ideas on effective corner kick set plays. Generally, you want to have the kick go far enough out that the goalkeeper won't intercept, yet near enough for a shot. In recreational play, the kicks will not come to the same spot reliably, so the goal-scorers will need to make their runs so that they can see the ball and adjust. Practicing corner kicks is a good drill for after the players have had their conditioning workouts for the day.

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The short corner -- If you're not sure of having the kicking and heading skills for a long corner, you may want to consider instead short corner plays. In a short corner kick, the closest player takes the kick quickly, passing to a nearby player, who then either dribbles or passes the ball into the danger zone. Getting off a kick quickly can really cause trouble for the defending team, so practice taking them quickly.

Positioning on defense -- Station one player, usually the outside fullback, on the near post. His job is to ensure that the corner kick cannot sneak past the near post into the mouth of the goal. Every player on the defending team should be marking an attacker. The goalkeeper should be **off the goal line** by a yard or two, and ready to jump for the ball. Every offensive player in the penalty area should be marked, and the goalkeeper **must be vocal** in telling teammates whom to mark if he sees an unmarked attacker. Forwards should come back far enough that they can collect the ball when it is cleared to start a fast counterattack. At least one or two should be within 10 yards of midfield to be a target for upfield passes on the counterattack.

Positioning on offense -- Except for the kicker, the forwards should be in the penalty area, preparing to run to the spot where it is kicked. Halfbacks should be in or around the penalty area in case of long kicks, or passes back from a forward for a long shot. Some fullbacks should be up far enough to intercept a clearing kick from the other team and kick it back into the penalty area for a forward. Some fullbacks should be back around midfield behind the opposing forwards to guard against counterattack. In no case should the fullbacks be back around their own penalty area picking daisies or watching the butterflies....

### **2.6.3 Goal kicks**

When an attacking player was the last one to touch the ball before it crosses the goal line, play is restarted with a goal kick. The ball is placed somewhere inside the goal area, on the side of the goal where the ball went out (it does not have to be on the corner of the goal area). When the ball is kicked, the ball is not considered in play until it goes outside the penalty area. Attacking players are not permitted inside the penalty area until the ball has exited the penalty area.

In the older age groups and in higher levels of play, the goal kick is used to start the offensive push. Teams typically have a player who can kick it to about midfield in the air, where a halfback collects it and dribbles or passes up the field. Either a fullback or the goalkeeper will typically take the kick. The target players are the outside halfbacks or the wings, who are positioned near or on the touch line. The rest of the fullbacks mark their forwards in case of a catastrophically bad kick. Halfbacks and forwards position themselves to win the ball and mount the attack.

In the younger age groups, it's a different story. A goal kick can be a dangerous thing for the **kicking team**. Many players may not be able to kick the ball very far yet, and the other team is waiting to collect the ball and fire off a shot. If your player has trouble kicking it far enough after a couple tries, have another stronger player take the kicks. Nobody needs the embarrassment of repeatedly serving the ball to the opponents while they whack shots on our goal.

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Have your team practice taking goal kicks, for attacking and defending. Be sure that attackers know that they may not enter the penalty area until the ball exits the area. Be sure the defenders know to kick the ball towards the sidelines and AWAY from the center of the field. Find out which players can chip the ball a good distance.

### **2.6.4 Kickoffs**

A kickoff is how your team will restart play after you've been scored upon. A poorly executed kickoff after allowing a goal can really become demoralizing. Practice a few plays from the kickoff. Kick to the wing. Have the two players pass to each other. Kick down the field. Those defenders will be charging hard, so have a plan to get the ball to open space right away.

### **2.6.5 Free kicks**

There are few free kicks in the younger leagues, but it is worth practicing at least a little, so that the players are not totally confused. Make sure the defenders know they must be 10 yards from the kick (5 yards in the younger age groups), and cannot come closer until the ball is kicked.

### **2.6.6 Penalty kicks**

In the case of a major offense in the penalty area by the defending team, the attacking team is awarded a penalty kick. One attacker is given a free kick from a spot 12 yards from the center of the goal, with only the goalkeeper defending. All other players must remain outside the penalty area and outside the "D" until the kick has been taken. The goalkeeper must stay on the line until the kick is taken. Once the kick is taken, the players may move, the game is live, just like any other free kick. The kicking player may not touch it until another player has touched it -- thus if the ball hits the goalpost and bounces straight back to the kicker, he may not bang it back in until another player has touched it. In the MLS, about 76% of penalty kicks are converted into goals, so the pressure is on the kicker and not really on the goalkeeper.

## **2.7 Laws of the Game**

The rules of soccer are established by FIFA, the international governing body for soccer. In the United States, the National Federation of High School Associations establishes rules for interscholastic play in many sports, including soccer. Federation rules vary only slightly from FIFA rules. Freedom Optimist Soccer bases its rules on Federation rules of soccer.

The rules of soccer have changed little over the years, and are based in the principles of fairness safety, and enjoyment. They are set out in 17 Laws of the game. A quick synopsis is offered below. You should check with your age group coordinator to make sure you understand any special rules of your league, and you should spend some time with your team discussing the rules.

**Law 1 - The field of play.** This law sets out the dimensions of the field, the markings and so forth. You will be practicing and playing on one or two different fields at the most, so there should be little need for examining the field for irregularities.

**Law 2 - The Ball.** This law sets the size, weight, and composition of the ball. For our

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play, there are different size balls used depending on age. Check with your age group coordinator if you are unsure.

**Law 3 - Number of Players** - This law also deals with substitution. Again, check with your age group coordinator

**Law 4 - Players' Equipment** - Shinguards are required. No exceptions. You should require shin guards for all practices also. Jewelry is not allowed - rings, earrings, bracelets, necklaces, etc. Certain kinds of cleats are prohibited -- baseball spikes, extra long football cleats, track spikes, etc. The referee has full authority to decide whether something is safe or not. For example, a referee will usually not allow someone to play wearing a plaster cast on their hand, unless it is wrapped in soft material (e.g. foam) to avoid injury. Even if wrapped, a referee has full discretion to allow the article or not.

**Law 5 - Referees.** - Referees in soccer have more discretion for use of judgment than in most other sports. It is also against the spirit of the game to argue with a referee. Freedom Optimist Soccer does not condone any dissention directed toward our referees.

**Law 6 - Linesmen** - In our league, we typically use two referees instead of a referee and two linesmen.

**Law 7 - Duration of the Game** - Check with your age group coordinator. Most leagues up to 4<sup>th</sup> grade have four quarters, 5<sup>th</sup> grade and older are two halves. Times depend on age level.

**Law 8 - Start of Play** - Start with a kickoff. Players must start in their own half. The player who played it first may not touch it until another player has touched it.

**Law 9 - Ball in and out of play** - The main thing to remember is that the ball is not out of play until the WHOLE BALL has crossed the line. On the line is in bounds. The referee is considered part of the field, thus if the ball hits the referee, you play on as if the ball had hit a rock.

**Law 10 - Method of scoring** - When the WHOLE BALL crosses the goal line inside the posts and under the crossbar, it's a goal. There are exceptions noted throughout the laws, for example you can't score directly on a throw in, and if the defensive team kicks it in from its own goal kick, it's not a goal but a corner kick.

**Law 11 - Offside** - Check with your age group coordinator as to whether offside is called in your league. Generally the older kids play offside, but the younger kids don't. Offside is generally when you are behind the last defender, and the ball is passed to you. You can't be offside if you're on your side of the field, if you're behind the ball, if the other team was last played by an opponent, or when he receives the ball directly from a throw-in, corner kick, or goal kick. If your league plays offside, you should read up on the rule and explain it to your team.

**Law 12 - Fouls and Misconduct** - This section is the meat of the rules. It deals with the nine "major offenses", the "minor offenses", and deals with "Misconduct." The nine major offenses are:

- Kicking, or attempting to kick,
- Tripping, or attempting to trip
- Jumping at an opponent
- Charging an opponent in a violent or dangerous manner
- Charging from behind
- Striking (punching) or attempting to strike
- Holding



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Pushing

Handling the ball.

Be sure to tell your players that "hands" applies to everything from the shoulder socket on down to the fingertip, it's not just the hands. The major offenses are punished with giving the opponent a **direct free kick**, meaning the ball can be scored directly from the kick.

The "minor" offenses include:

Dangerous play (high kicking, low heading, etc.)

Fair charge when the ball is not within playing distance

Obstructing an opponent

Charging the goalkeeper

Delaying the game as goalkeeper. This includes taking longer than five seconds to put the ball back in play. The minor offenses are penalized with an **indirect free kick**, meaning basically that to score you must pass the ball to a player who then can score.

Misconduct refers to the referee's ability to caution (yellow card) or eject (red card) players, coaches, or spectators for violent play, abusive conduct, or two cautions.

**Law 13 - Free Kick** - Opponents must be at least ten yards away from the free kick. The kicker can't kick the ball a second time.

**Law 14 - Penalty Kick** - For a major offense committed in a team's own penalty area, the other team gets a penalty kick. A kicker will take a free kick from a spot twelve yards from the center of the goal, with only the goalkeeper defending. Only the kicker and the goalkeeper may be in the penalty area. All other players must be outside the penalty area and outside the "D" until the ball has been kicked. The goalkeeper must stay on his line until the ball has been kicked. The referee whistles to take the kick, the kicker kicks, then the goalkeeper may dive for the kick, and the other players may move into the penalty area.

**Law 15 - Throw-In** - For balls going across the touch line, restart play with a throw-in. The thrower must deliver the ball using both hands from behind and over the head. The opponents may not distract or impede the thrower.

**Law 16 - Goal Kick** - For balls passing over the goal line, last touched by the attacking team, restart play with a goal kick. Place the ball inside the goal area on the side where the ball went out, and kick it into play. The attacking team may not enter the penalty area until the ball has exited the penalty area. The ball is not considered to be in play until it has exited the penalty area.

**Law 17 - Corner Kick** - For balls passing over the goal line, last touched by the defending team, the attacking team restarts play with a corner kick. Place the ball inside the one yard corner arc and kick it into play. Defending team must give 10 yards as any other free kick.

### **2.8.1 Coaching Courses, Licenses and Clinics**

Freedom Optimist Soccer hosts coaching training courses almost every year, sponsored by different groups. The Maryland State Youth Soccer Association (MSYSA, <http://www.msysa.org>) arranges training sessions for coaches under the curriculum established by the USSF (United States Soccer Federation). The USSF "F" and "E" licensing sessions, in particular, are well-suited for coaches of younger players. You will spend a day (F) or two (E) as a player, running a number of drills, learning how to teach the skills. The National Soccer

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Coaches Association of America (NSCAA, <http://www.nscaa.com>) also runs coaching sessions, with the "State Diploma" course lasting one day, and the "Regional Diploma" course lasting two days. Freedom Optimist hosts these from time to time, and has a standing policy to subsidize the cost of any league coach taking one of these courses.

### **2.8.4 Internet Websites**

<http://www.nscaa.com>  
<http://www.mlssnet.com>  
<http://www.washingtonfreedom.com>  
<http://www.dcunited.com>  
<http://www.msusa.org>  
<http://www.fifa.org>  
<http://www.soccer.com>  
<http://www.weteachsports.com>

### **2.8.5 Field Trips**

Baltimore Blast

D.C. United

Washington Freedom

World Cup on TV or in person

International Friendly on TV or in person

United States Soccer Hall of Fame, Oneonta, NY.

University of Maryland Soccer, College Park, MD.

## **2.9 Sample Practice Plan**

Just to give you an idea, here's a sample plan for a practice with a dribbling theme, for a relatively young team.

Warm-ups - 5 minutes

Introduce/review importance of dribbling. Demonstrate speed dribbling. - 5 minutes

- It's how we keep the ball under control. We don't kick and chase.
  - Speed dribbling (open field) vs control dribbling (when guarded more closely).
  - Speed dribbling:
    - Use when lots of open space in front of you.
    - Keep your head up and see the field.

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- Will usually use the outside of the foot. NO TOES.
- Demonstration.

Speed dribble drill - 10 minutes

Speed dribble relay races - 15 minutes

Water break - 5 minutes

Introduce/review control dribbling - 5 minutes

- Use when you don't have a lot of room.
- Keep your head up and see the field.
- Use any part of the foot except the toes.
- Demonstration.

Practice Game - Red light/Green light - 15 minutes

Slalom drill - 10 minutes

Slalom relay races - 10 minutes

Water break - 5 minutes

Split team-Move players from group to group as obstacle course group completes-25 min.

- One group of three - Obstacle course with four slalom stations spread out. Players speed dribble between stations, then control dribble through slalom stations. Time each player, if you want to.

- Second group of three - Players inside a 10-yard square, each with a ball. Coach encourages them to just dribble around the square, experimenting with "tricky" moves to change directions. If there is a coach, assistant or volunteer with dribbling skills, assign that person to this station. Have coach show players sample moves: the "hook" with instep, changing direction with outside of foot, "raking" ball back with bottom of foot to change direction. Encourage creativity, as long as players keep heads up, touch the ball softly and keep it close to their bodies.

- Rest of team - Red light/green light.

Water break - 5 minutes

Two small scrimmages - until end of practice

- Three players on a side
- Make two small fields with four cones, so the games don't get too spread out
- One cone at each end for a goal
- Substitute frequently, using all players
- Encourage creative dribbling, no kick and chase

### **3.0 Uniforms**

Uniforms are usually distributed in late August. Each coach is asked to show up at the meeting, and to check his/her team's uniforms for defects and adherence to the order placed for the team. The coach signs for the uniforms at that time, indicating what problems have been detected, so a careful check at that time is essential.

Our uniform vendor has a great track record, and the program has been very pleased with the vendor's performance. With around 2000 players to outfit, though, some problems are inevitable. Damaged or missing pieces have been replaced quickly in the past. Other uniform problems can be avoided or at least minimized by some planning and advance knowledge on your part.

Uniforms are ordered around mid-July so historically, about 85% of the kids we will have in the fall are registered by that time, so we sometimes have to estimate sizes on the other 15% of the uniforms. This means, almost certainly, that some of the kids that registered late will not get the exact uniform sizes ordered by the parents at late registration. This has the potential to upset parents and to become a big issue. However, there's no reason that the players who were registered on time can't get what they ordered - their sizes should be included among your team's set of uniforms.

We suggest that you find out from your division coordinator, which kids were registered on time, and which kids were registered late. If someone does have to live with an ill-fitting uniform, it seems fair that it be a late registrant.

## **4.0 Games**

After two practices per week for most of August, your players and you will no doubt be enthusiastically ready for your first game. Saturdays after Labor Day are an exciting time at Eldersburg Elementary and the other sites, as hundreds of kids, in a sea of brightly-colored uniforms, gather in one place. Part of your job is to see to it that those kids go home at least as happy as they were when they arrived. You set the standard for perspective and attitude on game day.

### **4.1 Perspective and Attitude**

In the heat of competition, it's possible to lose sight of the big picture. The fact that the program does not keep score of games or standings of teams for its recreational leagues should tell you that the emphasis is not on winning. The only reasons for our fielding teams are to develop an appreciation of the game and to have fun. The vast majority of kids, left to their own devices on game day, will accomplish those two goals with little difficulty.

If you're doing this for the first time, and especially if you're coaching in one of the younger divisions, you may be amazed at how totally unaware of the "score" your kids can be. The obsession with "success" is a learned behavior and consequently, your focus on keeping the right perspective has to be directed at least as much toward the parents as it does toward the kids.

### **4.2 Playing Time and Substitutions**

Always keep in mind the program's policy on player participation in games: every player must play at least half of each game. If you find a way to divide playing time equally, each player will play more than that, but half of a game for each player is an absolute minimum. You may find it helpful to prepare a substitution schedule based on the players that will be showing up that day, or to delegate that duty to an assistant.

Also, it's an informal custom in the recreational program to have players take turns being the captain for a game. The extent of being captain is usually just to go to the center of the field for the pre-game coin toss that determines who gets first possession of the ball and which goal each team will defend. You can be more creative, though, and come up with other duties (like leading warm-ups) to make it more special for the player selected.

During the games, it's a good idea to have the substitutes sit together somewhere that you can find them. If they are sitting with their parents, there's no telling whether they're there, ready to play when you may suddenly need a substitute, such as for injury. One idea for keeping the subs together is to have them sit together on a "team blanket" with enough room that they won't be pestering each other.

With the subs all together, you can help them pay attention to the game. "Johnny, you're going in at right halfback next quarter, that's where Nick is now. Watch him play and see

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what you need to be doing." "Ladies, did you see that move Laura just made? She faked left and made a beautiful pass to Amanda for a shot on goal." If you can get your charges to observe the game critically, you will find them learning things much more quickly. Concepts like marking an opponent can be abstract at first, but become obvious when someone misses a marking assignment. Point out the good plays as well as the "should have" plays.

Another widely-used practice is to have a different parent bring cut up fruit or other post-game snack for the team based on a schedule developed by the team parent.

After the game, it's expected to line the players up and shake hands with the opposition. Then you can gather the kids together for a few positive words on the day's events, remind them of the next practice and what you'll work on, and lead a team yell.

Also after the game, your team will need to fill out a game summary form, which will find its way to the Carroll County Times. Sharing the substitution schedule before the game with a parent who is willing to fill out these sheets makes the job go smoothly. Make sure that each player is mentioned at least once every couple weeks.

### **4.3 Managing Your Cheering Section**

As noted in the section on practices, after a month of being together, the atmosphere around your group has already been established. If your practices are organized, fun and supportive, games should be a blast for everyone. The more official nature of game day calls for special awareness to changes in attitude. You should be attentive to anyone taking games more seriously than necessary.

While trying not to reduce this section to a pop psychology treatment of the value of positive reinforcement, it is unquestionably important to emphasize here that criticism directed toward the players from the "adults" in the crowd is not tolerated. A hyper-critical parent can ruin the recreational experience for everyone within earshot. Fortunately, examples of this type of spectator are very rare, but if you have one associated with your team, you must do something about it. If you're not comfortable dealing with the situation directly, talk to your division coordinator about it.

### **4.4 Respect for the Referees**

In addition to guarding against criticism directed toward your players, you should ensure that your team and parents are respectful and not abusive toward the referees. It is worthwhile to note the **many diverse reasons not to disrespect the referees**.

1. IT'S OUT OF LINE -- The traditions of soccer have no tolerance for such behavior. In contrast to baseball and football, the continual flow of the soccer game does not allow time for arguments with the officials. The referees make their calls, the players, the coaches and the fans get on with it. In addition, remember that in soccer the referee has wide latitude for making judgment calls. Such calls as hands (did the player intend to use the arm?), offside (was the player involved in the play?), pushing

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(did the player gain an advantage?), the advantage rule (where the ref is allowed to not call something if the resulting play is more favorable than a free kick), and even timekeeping (when to stop the clock) are all matters that the referee alone has full authority.

2. **IT'S A BAD EXAMPLE** -- As a coach in our program, we expect model behavior from you. You are a role model for the kids on your team, and you're highly visible in the community. The way you react to calls you don't agree with serves as an example to your players and parents. If you conduct yourself with class and respect, the atmosphere is much more likely to stay calm and fun.
3. **THE REFEREES ARE KIDS -- DON'T BERATE KIDS** -- In our recreational program, the referees are middle school or high school students. Most of them are earning community service hours credit toward their high school graduation requirement, and indeed they are providing a valuable volunteer service to our community -- we should be appreciative. In many cases this will be one of their first experiences acting as an authority figure. They need and deserve the support of all the adults present.
4. **YOU COULD BE EJECTED** -- Defiant, irreverent, disrespectful behavior or words directed at a referee can earn a yellow or red card from the referee. A yellow card is a warning. Any further misbehavior will earn a second yellow card, which is elevated to a red card. A red card is ejection from the game. Extremely flagrant behavior can spur a red card right away without warning. Any coach shown a yellow or red card will certainly have to answer to their age group coordinator for a discussion of the situation. In addition, you can bet the referee's mom or dad is there watching them, just as the parents of the players are there.
5. **MISTAKES ARE RARE** -- The referees we have are pretty good, overall. Your typical referee knows the game well because they've been a player for several years. When they become a referee they go through a training program. Every person makes mistakes, and some referees are better than others. Our program has a feedback system in place which continually improves the quality of officiating. If you've had no objections during the match, by all means compliment the referees for their good work.

So even if you're correct on a call, it's still wrong to yell at the referees.

So what **SHOULD** you do if you feel that you should say something to a referee? Stay calm and wait until a break, preferably a quarter or halftime. If you feel there is a safety issue, find a way to have the discussion immediately, preferably with the other coach present also. Then, discuss your issue calmly, without any demonstrative behavior. Stick to your observations and recommendations, while avoiding judgmental language. The official is somebody's kid, too, and he or she is entitled to the same honest mistakes we make as coaches, players and parents. Make use of the feedback system established by the referee coordinators to provide your opinion on the performance of the referees. After a well-officiated game, remember to tell the referee personally afterwards.

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Remember, too, that you are responsible for the respectful cheering of your team and parents. Be sure to not only set a good example, but to hold your cheering section to the highest standards, too. Remind them that Freedom Optimist Soccer does not tolerate abusive behavior toward referees. You, as a coach in this league and thus one of our leaders, have a duty to curb this behavior. If you don't feel comfortable confronting someone yourself, report it to your coordinator.



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### APPENDIX A - Substitution Schedules

#### **Substitution Schedules: 7v7, 7 positions x 4 qtrs = 28 slots**

**If 11 players show up:** 28/11 players = 2 qtrs each, 6 will play 3, 5 will play 2

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G OUT: H, I, J, K

Q2: IN: E, F, G, H, I, J, K OUT: A, B, C, D

Q3 IN: A, B, C, D, H, I, J OUT: E, F, G, K

Q4 IN: C, D, E, F, G, J, K OUT: A, B, H, I

Playing 3 quarters: C, D, E, F, G, K; Playing 2 quarters: A, B, H, I, K

**If 10 Players show up:** 28/10 = 2 will play 2 quarters, 8 will play 3

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G OUT: H, I, J

Q2: IN: D, E, F, G, H, I, J OUT: A, B, C

Q3 IN: A, B, C, D, H, I, J OUT: E, F, G

Q4 IN: A, B, C, E, F, G, H OUT: D, I, J

Playing 3 quarters: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H; Playing 2 quarters: I, J

**If 9 Players show up:** 28/9 = 9 will play 3, 1 will play 4 quarters

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G OUT: H, I

Q2: IN: C, D, E, F, G, H, I OUT: A, B

Q3 IN: A, B, E, F, G, H, I OUT: C, D

Q4 IN: A, B, C, D, G, H, I OUT: E, F

Playing 3 quarters: A, B, C, D, E, F, H, I; Playing 4 quarters: G

**If 8 players show up:** 28/8 = 4 will play 3, 4 will play 4

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G OUT: H

Q2: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, H OUT: G

Q3 IN: A, B, C, D, E, G, H OUT: F

Q4 IN: A, B, C, D, F, G, H OUT: E

Playing 4 quarters: A, B, C, D; Playing 3 quarters: E, F, G, H

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#### **Substitution Schedules: 8v8, 8 positions x 4 qtrs = 32 slots**

**If 12 players show up:** 32/12 players = 2 qtrs each - 8 will play 3, 4 will play 2.

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H OUT: I, J, K, L

Q2: IN: A, B, C, D, I, J, K, L OUT: E, F, G, H

Q3 IN: E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L OUT: A, B, C, D

Q4: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H OUT: I, J, K, L

Playing 3 quarters: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H; Playing 2 quarters: I, J, K, L

**If 11 players show up:** 32/11 players = 2 qtrs each, 10 will play 3, 1 will play 2

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H OUT: I, J, K

Q2: IN: D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K OUT: A, B, C

Q3 IN: A, B, C, G, H, I, J, K OUT: D, E, F

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Q4 IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, J, K OUT: G, H, I  
Playing 3 quarters: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K; Playing 2 quarters: I

**If 10 Players show up:**  $32/10 = 3$  qtrs each - 8 will play 3 qtrs, 2 will play 4.

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H OUT: I, J  
Q2: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, I, J OUT: G, H  
Q3: IN: A, B, C, D, G, H, I, J OUT: E, F  
Q4: IN: A, B, E, F, G, H, I, J OUT: C, D  
Playing 4 quarters: A, B; Playing 3 quarters: C, D, E, F, G, H, J

**If 9 Players show up:**  $32/9 = 3$  qtrs each - 4 will play 3 qtrs, 5 will play 4.

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H OUT: I  
Q2: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, I OUT: H  
Q3: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, H, I OUT: G  
Q4: IN: A, B, C, D, E, G, H, I OUT: F  
Playing 4 quarters: A, B, C, D, E; Playing 3 quarters: F, G, H, I

### **Substitution Schedules: 11v11, 2 halves x 24 min => 528 total minutes**

**Be aware: At this age, substitutions can only be made on goal kicks, kickoffs, your throw-ins and your corner kicks. Games can possibly go for many minutes without an opportunity to substitute. Allow for some flexibility in the substitutions.**

**If 15 PLAYERS SHOW UP:** => >35 min per player, 13 min rest

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K OUT: L, M, N, O  
Q2: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, L, M, N, O OUT: H, I, J, K  
Q3: IN: A, B, C, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O OUT: D, E, F, G  
Q4: IN: D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N OUT: A, B, C, O  
Playing 3 quarters: A thru N; Playing 2 quarters: O

**If 14 Players Show Up:** >37 minutes per player, 11 min rest

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K OUT: L, M, N  
Q2: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, L, M, N OUT: I, J, K  
Q3: IN: A, B, C, D, E, I, J, K, L, M, N OUT: F, G, H  
Q4: IN: A, B, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N OUT: C, D, E  
4quarters: A, B; 3 quarters: C through N

**If 13 Players Show Up:** >40 minutes per player, 8 min rest

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K OUT: L, M  
Q2: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, L, M OUT: J, K  
Q3: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, J, K, L, M OUT: H, I  
Q4: IN: A, B, C, D, E, H, I, J, K, L, M OUT: F, G  
4 quarters: A, B, C, D, E; 3 quarters: F through M

**If 12 Players Show Up:** 44 minutes per player, 4 min rest

Q1: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K OUT: L

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Q2: IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, L OUT: K

Q3 IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L OUT: J

Q4 IN: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, L OUT: I

4 quarters: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H; 3 quarters: I, J, K, L