



***Player Development
Program
For the U12 Soccer Coach***

By John Dingle

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As I enter the 25th year of working in youth soccer, I have looked back on the growth of the game in the United States and see we have made great progress. More players are playing the game, the level of youth soccer has improved tremendously, the Women's and Men's National team is playing at a higher level, and soccer is entering the main stream of our culture.

Looking forward, I see four areas that youth coaches need to take to continue the games growth. This coaching manual attempts to address these areas. US Soccer needs more and better game changers, we need to create a culture of possession in youth soccer, move to proactive coaching with seasonal plans, and teach tactics the appropriate way through the use of visual signs to our youth players.

The manual is broken down into four main sections:

- Improvisation
- Technical lesson plans
- Formations
- Tactical Lesson Plans

Developing the Game Changer Attitude



The first is predictable to students of the international game. We need more creative soccer players. This is a huge challenge. I believe the small section on improvisation is the most important section in this manual. Players will enjoy their soccer experience more if they are set free to use their imagination, creativity, and problem solving abilities in the game. These players are not robots and coaches can't expect to control every move the player make. Remote control coaching needs to end. Challenge yourself to allow players to be free to take chances, free to make mistakes, free to be special, and free to be game changers.

In 1998, US Soccer started project 2010. Project 2010's goal was to ensure the US Men's national team could become a legitimate threat to win the 2010 world cup. At the time president of US Soccer, Alan Rothenberg, stated "Somewhere out there we've got a 9 year old Ronaldo, and we got to find him." I know the 7, 8, and 9 year old players with the ability to develop into players that could change the game with one unpredictable possession were there in 1998. What happened to these players? They more than likely were trained to share the ball, become team players, play safe, and win games. In doing this, we made the next Ronaldo the next role player. What are we going to do with the next Messi?



Read the section on Improvisation intently. Attempt to facilitate creative play. Follow the suggestions and come up with your own ideas on how you can inspire players to become game changers. But also notice that in all the activities in the technical and tactical sections, allow for players to make decisions. When coaching the wall pass, allow the player with the ball to use the supporting player as a decoy and dribble the opponent. When introducing speed of play, do not discourage dribbling. Always allow players to express themselves.

As a rule a player should:

- Shoot if possible
- If not possible, dribble or run with the ball to gain territory
- If not possible, pass the ball
- If not possible, dribble for possession(shield the ball)

Creating a Culture of Possession

Most youth teams have players that kick the ball up the field with no other intention than to gain territory. When a long kick is completed, it usually is applauded with loud cheers from the sideline, even when the kick goes out of bounds or directly to the opponent.

When I was watching my daughter play a 7th grade basketball game, I witnessed a girl on her team rebound the ball and throw the ball the length of the court. Her team had no players on this side of the court. The ball bounced out of bounds to dismay of everyone playing and observing. Loud crows came from the parent's side showing their frustration. As I witnessed the play and the reaction, I turned to the parents and stated, "If this was a soccer game, you would be cheering".

Basketball has a culture of possession. Youth soccer in America does not. I recommend the following team rules to change this culture.

- **Do not allow your goal keeper to punt the ball.** The punt is conceding possession by giving a free ball to the field. The punt is inevitably a ball that each team has a chance to win. In fact, the opponent has a better chance, since they are more than likely numbers up in the area the ball is punted to. Have your keeper roll or throw the ball to team mates.
- **Take all free kicks short.** As an alternative to taking a long kick down the field or across the field, make a short pass as quickly as possible. The long kick does not yield possession, the majority of the time. A short pass does.
- **Do not allow your players to kick the ball out of play intentionally.** By kicking the ball out of play, your team is conceding possession and your player loses an opportunity to

learn how to get out of trouble. Players that kick the ball out of play at an early age will develop this habit as they have never learned how to deal with trouble.

- **Demand your players look to throw the ball into the middle of the field first.** When this is not going to yield possession they should look to throw the ball back for possession. If both of these options are not productive, the player can then look to throw the ball down the sideline. Taking this action will yield more possession off of throw ins.

I know these team rules will make it more difficult to win games at an early age, but it will develop better players who value possession. It will also force the opponent to defend the entire field and yield wins at a later stage in the player's soccer experience.

Be a proactive coach, not a reactive coach

Every school system has a curriculum. Teachers know the schedule of the curriculum and do not make changes to their yearly teaching plan. Teacher may vary the methods and lesson plans they use to reach the students, but they do not move away from the subject matter in the curriculum. This allows the student to be prepared for the next grade level.

Coaches need to have a curriculum and create a seasonal plan on how and when this subject matter will be presented to the players. Reactive coaches jump around from topic to topic in an effort to react to problems in the last game. Reactive coaches are chasing short term outcomes at the expense of long term development. This manual provides coaches with the curriculum that can be used to develop a seasonal plan for developing players for the next soccer year.

Do not be afraid to teach tactics

The importance of players developing good technique can't be overstated. Technically competent players will always have a huge advantage in soccer. Players at all levels need to work on becoming more technically proficient. Technical competence allows players to be able to make decisions. Decisions in youth soccer equal tactics.

Combine technical teaching with decisions so we are developing players for the demands of the game. Both the technical and tactical section in this manual uses lesson plans that progress from simple to complex. Small group activities are used that combine the two components. Technical lesson plans progress to allow for tactics. When teaching a technical topic, make sure the players are aware of the visual sign players should look for to help them make the decision on using the technique. Provide the players with the when, where, and why a technique is

used. Likewise, the tactical lesson plans are presented to allow for plenty or repetition of soccer techniques. Here are some examples of visual signs your players should be able to read:

- Space in front of player with the ball = Run with the ball
- Space behind the opponent = Opportunity to take player on
- Opponent with the ball has their head down = Close space quickly as the attacker will not see you.
- Player with the ball has their head up = Support in advance of the ball
- Player on your team is shielding = needs support quickly

Thank you for coaching. You are making a commitment of time, talent, and energy. You are helping to build a better community.



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Section I: Improvisation

U12 Improvisation

If you do not know what improvisation in soccer is watch this video: [Improvisation 1](#).

US soccer has made great strides catching up to the world in soccer. We now produce some of the best goalkeepers and role players in the world. We are limited to future growth by our inability to develop world class play makers and goal scorers. World class play makers and goal scorers all have the ability to improvise. It all starts with the development of youth soccer players. If our young players can't improvise in creative ways, they will not develop into creative players.

Creativity is needed in soccer games to break down organized defenses. Sharp accurate passing combinations are not enough at times to beat a team that is committed to getting numbers behind the ball and staying organized. No team can stay organized when unpredictable creative play has defenders beaten. Improvising play unbalances defenses and open up space and frees team mates of marking.

Improvisation is not a tactic; it is not a technique. Improvisation is an attitude. Coaches of the American player and to a degree American culture work to stifle this attitude in players for the following reason:

- Focus on winning games/tournaments/leagues
- National Rankings
- Team building through acquisition instead of player development
- Focus on structure and organization in training
- Focus on sharing the ball/passing
- Use of extrinsic motivation
- Lack of pickup games
- Emphasis in youth soccer on the team instead of the individual

Coaches and youth organizations are now challenged to cultivate the attitude of improvisation. When most people think of improvisation, it is limited to dribbling, but players that truly improvise use this spirit to pass the ball, use deception in receiving the ball, and shoot the ball in unpredictable fashion and positions.

I do not believe improvisation can be taught. I do believe that coaches can enhance the player's ability to improvise by teaching spatial awareness and by inspiring players to be unpredictable. Here are some ideas to use with players to begin to lay the groundwork for players to improvise:

- In your parent's meeting share the importance of creativity in the game and ask for your parent's support. Make sure they are aware the most unselfish thing a player can do for the team is score a goal. Make them aware of the methods you will be using to develop the attitude of improvisation.
- Use the principles of attack when coaching your players through the following hierarchy: shoot if you can shoot, dribble to gain territory if you can not shoot, pass if you can not dribble to gain territory, dribble for possession if you can not pass.


- Inspire your players to become students of creative players. Have a video contest. Tell your players to find videos on the internet of creative players or plays and email you the link. No prize is needed just praise. Share all of the videos with each player on your team.
- Create a no fear of failure atmosphere in training and games. Praise the attitude not the result.
- Have one practice per week that has the players play pick up soccer. No coaching; just praise for players that are attempting to be creative.

Below are some videos to share with your players:

[Improvisation 2](#)

[Improvisation 3](#)

[Improvisation 4](#)

Pick up Soccer	<p>Have your players set up the field, form teams, and play soccer. Players will learn to set up games and will not be depended on the coach to play soccer.</p> <p>They are then more likely to play soccer on their own.</p>	
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Section II: Technical Topics

Soccer Source 360's U12 Curriculum has eleven technical topics that need to be introduced to all SAC players to lay a foundation for the future. These topics include:

- Running with the ball
- Front foot passing
- Attacking dribbling moves
- Shielding
- Finishing
- 1st touch for ground balls
- Attacking heading
- Defensive heading
- Long Passing
- Volleying
- Crossing

As a team participating in the fall and spring season your team will practice between 20-90 times. Teams practice from 10-15 weeks each season and once, twice or three times a week. It is not enough to simply run the sessions included in this document. Map out a seasonal play to allow for coverage of the entire u12 curriculum: technical, tactical, improvisation, and formations. Lay a strong foundation so the players will be ready for the U13 curriculum.

Coaches need to connect.

- Connect with the player
- Connect the technique to the game of soccer
- Connect the player with a passion for the game

In fact, the lesson plans are sample sessions and you can modify. Changes may be needed to adjust to your team and players needs.

- Adjust numbers to fit with your team
- Adjust space to fit your player's needs
- Change activities to fit your player's needs
- Vary practice plan when going over topic for the 2nd and 3rd time

When making changes be sure to follow a simple to complex progression and have all sessions end with a game. The game is the test for the players and the coach. Have the players connected the lesson to the game.

Coaches also need to recognize and capitalize on coaching/teaching moments. Know the execution of the technique. We do not recommend lecturing the players on the execution of the technique, but your knowledge base will help spot the flaws. We recommend breaking the technique down into the preparation, contact with the ball, and finishing position.



When capitalizing on a coaching moment it is recommended you vary teaching methods and not only coach flaws but use positive experiences to highlight success.




Teaching Methods

- Coaching the individual – Most players are not disturbed and the player receives feedback for themselves.
- Coaching over the top – Provide needed information while the activity is taking place.
- Coaching at a natural stoppage – Using the coaching moment when the game was stopped on its own. Ex. Ball played out of bounds.
- Coaching with a stop/freeze – Stopping the activity and demanding all of the players remain in the position they held when the stop command was given. This allows you to show players the picture, move players, and then rehearse the situation. Rehearsing is necessary to insure the players received the information.

U12 Running with the ball



- What:** The player takes space with the ball quickly.
- Where:** Opportunities present themselves in all part of the field.
- When:** Any time open space is present for the player with the ball.
- Why:** When a player takes the ball forward themselves, the opposition not only has to deal with the ball in a forward position but must also handle an additional player. The opponent that is forced to stop the forward progression of the ball, often leaves a player or vital space open.
- How:**
- Step 1: Recognize open space
- Step 2: Step through the ball with the instep of the foot. The toe should be pointed down. The touch should be large enough to take two to three steps between touches. Each touch should be made in natural running motion.
- Step 3: Keep the head up to see when space is closed and be aware of options.




Ball Chaser	<p>One player starts and runs with the ball across the space. When the turnover of possession occurs the player who just had the ball chases the player who just received the ball.</p> <p>Each player has a turn as the player with the ball and the chaser.</p>	
Rapid Training Switch	<p>Groups of four are formed then subdivided into groups of two. Groups of two stand 20 yards apart from each other.</p> <p>One player from each group of two starts to run with the ball across the space. They attempt to take just three even length touches. When they make it to the other side the next player takes their turn and the activity continues to repeat.</p>	

4v4	<p>Can the players make the transition into a small game?</p> <p>Do they recognize opportunities to run with the ball?</p>	
6v6 1/3's game	<p>Transitioning to a bigger field we segment the field into thirds and play 2v1 in the defensive third 2v2 in the middle third and then 1v2 in the attacking third.</p> <p>The ball can only move from one third to another by a player running with the ball into this new third. This player can stay in this part of the field until it progresses into the next third, the ball is lost, or a goal is scored.</p>	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Attacking Moves

- What:** The player with the ball attempts to dribble past an opponent while moving the ball forward.
- Where:** Opportunities present themselves in all part of the field, but mostly in the attacking third.
- When:** When the player is moving forward with the ball and has space behind the opponent.
- Why:** To get by the opponent and unbalance the defense.
- How:**
- Step 1: Keep control of the ball while dribbling forward.
 - Step 2: Recognize a confronting opponent that has space behind them.
 - Step 3: At the point the opponent is around 1 yard away, fake to take the ball in one direction.
 - Step 4: Quickly move the ball by the opponent in the direction away from the fake.
 - Step 5: Accelerate away

Mirror game	<p>Groups of two are formed with one ball. Players are positioned facing each other between two cones. An imaginary line is used to separate the cones. The players can not cross this line.</p> <p>The player who starts with the ball attempts to use deception to unbalance the opponent so that they can dribble the ball to touch a cone.</p>	
1v1 to gates	<p>The same groups from above are now placed in a field with gates(two cones separated by 1 yard). One ball per group.</p> <p>The player with the ball attempts to dribble through as many gates as possible while their partner attempts to stop them and gain possession. When transition occurs the game continues. Have players keep score. Change opponents when necessary to</p>	

	make activity competitive.	
1v1 directional	<p>Groups of two are formed and placed on opposite sides of a 10 yard by 15 yard grid. Each player has a ball.</p> <p>The player with the ball passes the ball to their partner who then attempts to dribble the ball by the opponent and across the end line under control.</p>	
3v3 game	<p>Encourage dribbling when players have the visual sign to dribble.</p> <p>Space behind the opponent.</p>	
6v6 game	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Front Foot Passing

What: The player passes the ball in natural running motion with either the outside of the foot, the instep, or the top of the inside of the foot.



Where: Opportunities present themselves in all part of the field.




When: When the players are moving forward.

Why: By passing the ball in natural running motion the pass is unpredictable.

How: Step 1: As player is moving forward and has support at an angle they step through the side of the ball in natural running motion.

Step 2: Continue run to support the ball.

Pass and Move to open cone	<p>Groups of three are formed and placed in a 5 yard by 5 yard grid with each player standing at one of the cones.</p> <p>Each player passes the ball with their front foot to one of the players and then runs to the open cone. The activity continues.</p>	
3v1	<p>Groups of four are formed and placed in a 7 yard by 7 yard grid.</p> <p>Three players attempt to keep possession from one defender. When the defender wins the ball they attempt to dribble the ball out of the grid.</p> <p>Rotate defender every two minutes.</p>	

<p>1v1 reset</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and placed in a 5 yard by 5 yard grid.</p> <p>Two players stand on the sideline and serves as neutral players. The remaining two players start at the end lines with one player having a ball.</p> <p>The player with the ball attempts to dribble by the opponent. When he can not dribble by the opponent a front foot pass can be given to one of the neutral players. This signals the defender to back up to their end line and the neutral player passes the ball back to the player they received the ball from.</p>	
<p>3v3 game</p>	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	
<p>6v6 game</p>	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Long Passing

What: A pass over long distance (20 yards or more)

Where: All parts of the field

Why: Change the point of attack, play out of pressure, take available space quickly

When: Defense is defending ball with numbers, space is available,

How: Step 1: Approach the ball from an angle



Step 2: Place non kicking foot even with the ball about 6 inches from the ball with the toe pointed to the target. (for low pass) Place non kicking foot slightly behind ball about 6 inches from the ball with the toe pointed to the target. (for lofted pass)




Step 3: Lock the ankle of the kicking foot with the toes pointed down.

Step 4: Draw the kicking foot back.

Step 5: Strike through the midline center of the ball


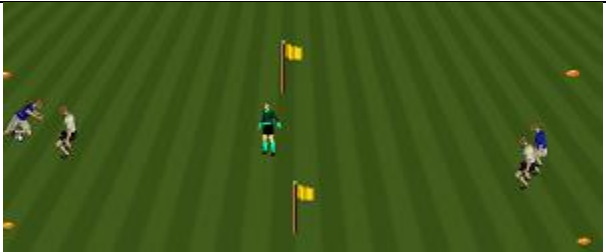
Step 6: Follow through in the direction of the ball while landing on the kicking foot



Rapid training long passing	<p>Groups of four are formed and subdivided into groups of two. Pairs pass the ball back and forth and are separated from the other pair in the group by 25 yards.</p> <p>On the coaches command of switch the player with the ball in both pairs gets their head up and plays a long pass to the player in the other pair that does not have the ball. Pairs then go back to short passing waiting for the switch command.</p>	
3v1:3v1	<p>Two groups of 3v1 are placed in 10 yard by 7 yard grids separated by 20 yards.</p> <p>The ball starts in one grid and the group of four plays 3v1. Once three passes are connected they attempt to play a ball into the opposite grid to the numbers up team that then plays 3v1</p>	


	<p>and is free to play a long pass after connecting three passes.</p> <p>Coaches can allow the team receiving the long pass to receive it under no pressure at first. Move to no restrictions before proceeding to the next activity.</p>	
3v3+2	<p>A group of eight is divided into three, three, and two.</p> <p>Players play 3v3+2 in the 20 yard by 30 yard grid.</p>	
Four square game	<p>Four groups of four are formed. Four squares are placed in the corner of a 50 yard by 40 yard grid. One team places a player in each square.</p> <p>The two remaining groups play 4v4. The first team to play a ball into each square while maintaining possession wins the game.</p>	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Finishing

- What: Shooting to score goals.
- Where: The attacking third of the field.
- When: The player has an opportunity to shoot.
- Why: To convert scoring opportunities into goals.


<p>Rapid training ball moving across player</p>	<p>The team is divided into two groups and each team puts a goalkeeper in goal. The remaining players line up facing each other 13 yards away at the midpoint of the goals that are 30 yards apart.</p> <p>The first player in each line passes the ball to the other line at the same time. Each of these players shoots at the goal that is not defended with their keeper.</p> <p>Passes need to be slightly off center so they do not collide. You can put a field marking cone down for a target for the players to pass to for convenience.</p>	
<p>Rapid training 1v1 to goal</p>	<p>Groups of five are formed with one of these players, taking the position of goal keeper. Groups of two start on opposite sides of the goal.</p> <p>One group starts playing 1v1. The players on the opposite side attempt to get the best position by predicting where the ball will be played. This group becomes active, when the ball enters their side of the activity.</p> <p>Coaches need to recognize shooting opportunities that are</p>	





	not taken as well as technical breakdowns.	
Attack/defend	<p>Divide the team in half and have each team place a keeper in goal. The goals should be separated by 25 yards. Each team forms a line at one of the goal post.</p> <p>One team sends a defender out and the other team's first player attempts to score a goal. When a goal is scored or the player is dispossessed this 1v1 stops and the team that started off defending sends a player onto the field with a ball attempting to score. The player that started off the game attacking, becomes the defender.</p> <p>Each player takes a turn first as the attacker and then as the defender.</p>	
You're Out of Here	<p>The team is divided into two groups and each group places a keeper in goal. The two groups line up at midfield next to each other. The coach stands in the middle with all of the soccer balls.</p> <p>The coach calls a number 1, 2, or 3 and each team sends out this number to play. When the ball goes out of bounds, these players are off and a new ball is played and a new group goes out as the coach calls the number of players that are involved. When a goal is scored the team that scored stays on and the opponent sends on a new group.</p>	

6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	
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U12 Attacking Heading

- What:** Heading the ball down for a shot or to maintain possession with the feet.
- Where:** All parts of the field but primarily in the attacking half.
- Why:** The game is played primarily with the feet. When shooting, we need to consider the goalkeeper raises their hands when the ball is in the air and has difficulty in getting low balls from this position.
- When:** Shooting or when support is close by.
- How:**
- Step 1: Get in line of the ball
 - Step 2: Get the forehead above the ball. Jumping may be required for high ball and bending knees may be required for lower balls.
 - Step 3: Arch the back
 - Step 4: Tighten the neck muscles
 - Step 5: Swing the upper body through the midline center of the ball making contact with the forehead.

Cone Knock Down Race	<p>Place three nine inch cones opposite a line marker in three places. Send three players to each line marker and one player with all of the spare soccer balls to be a server behind the nine inch cones.</p> <p>The activity begins with one player from each line running towards the server. The server throws a ball at about neck height. The player attempts to head the ball down to knock down a cone. Once the ball is headed the next player runs in. The team that knocks all of their cones down first wins. Repeat as needed.</p> <p>Coach the players to get above the ball to head it down.</p>	
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<p>Twist and Head</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed. Players form a diamond, with two of the three designated servers starting with a ball.</p> <p>One server throws the ball to the player on task. This player heads the ball on a bounce to the server that started without a ball. Once the player has headed the ball the next server throws a ball and the on task player heads the ball down to the new player who did not have a ball.</p>	
<p>Modified World Cup</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and placed in a 5 yard by 12 yard grid so that each team has a goal line to defend.</p> <p>One player stands with his back to goal near the goal they are attacking. The server throws the ball to this player who can attempt to flick a shot with his/her head or can set the ball for his team mate to run onto and head at goal.</p>	
<p>4v4</p>	<p>Place condition that all restarts are throws to the head.</p>	
<p>6v6</p>	<p>Place condition that all restarts are throws to the head.</p> <p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Crossing

What: A long pass across the field in an attempt to create a scoring opportunity

Where: Attacking third

Why: When the ball is wide the defense is often spread out leaving space in the middle of the field

When: There is space between the back four and the goalkeeper (low cross into this space) and when the ball is near the end your team has players in the box.


How: Step 1: Approach the ball from an angle




Step 2: Place non-kicking foot even with the ball for a low cross or slightly behind the ball for an aerial cross with the toes of the non kicking foot pointed at the target


Step 3: Lock the ankle of the kicking foot with the toes down

Step 4: Draw the kicking foot back

Step 5: Striker through the midline center of the ball for a driven cross. Strike through the side closest to the end line for a cross the bends away from the goalkeeper.


<p>Rapid training crossing</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and placed on a field 18 yards long and 60 yards wide. The group is split in two and one player on each team is assigned the role of crosser. This player takes a surplus of soccer balls out to a wide position. The remaining player on each team takes the role of keeper/attacker.</p> <p>The activity starts with the player in white in goal and the blue wide player crossing a ball to the blue attacker. The players in the middle then change roles as the wide white player crosses.</p> <p>The 1st principle of crossing is to eliminate the keeper with the service. A cross to the keeper often starts a counterattack.</p>	
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<p>Modified World Cup</p>	<p>Players are divided into groups of two. A goalkeeper is placed in the goal. Two players go to wide positions with a surplus of soccer balls. Each other pair starts at a cone.</p> <p>The activity starts on the wide player's first touch. One player from each cone now enters the box anticipating where the cross will come to. These players compete against each other in an attempt to score. When a player scores their team can pick another team to make a penalty run. Whenever a goal is scored, the ball is played out of bounds, or the keeper maintains possession of the ball the players who were active run back to their cone and tag their team mate's hand. This tag allows the team mate to enter the box for the next cross that could be on the way.</p> <p>Player's need to understand the visual sign the cross is coming is the player's head who is crossing. When the head goes down, the cross is coming.</p>	
<p>3v2 to goal off a cross</p>	<p>With a keeper in goal and two to four players in wide positions, player rotate through 3v2 opportunities at goal off of crosses.</p> <p>Make sure the crosser has pressure on them. This makes it more realistic for the crosser and forces the player making attacking runs to have a more difficult time predicting when the cross will come.</p>	
<p>8v8 lane game</p>	<p>The team is divided into two groups and each group puts a keeper in goal. The field is set up with an arched crossing lane.</p> <p>You can start the activity by allowing the crossing lane to be a free channel. (no defending). You will need to</p>	

	progress to defending in the crossing lane.	
8v8	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 1st Touch Aerial Ball

- What:** The player gets a ball out of the air under control by taking a cushion or wedge touch with their foot.
- Where:** Opportunities present themselves in all part of the field.
- When:** As the player is receiving a pass, clear, or miss kick.
- Why:** To get control of the ball in order to successfully dribble, pass, or shoot.
- How:**
- Step 1: Get in the path of the ball.
 - Step 2: Decide the surface of the body to receive the ball with.
 - Step 2: Decide if a cushion or wedge touch is needed.
 - Step 3: Place the body surface in the path of ball.
 - Step 4: In case of cushion: withdraw body surface on impact. In case of wedge: direct body surface toward ball in direction of open space.
 - Step 5: Immediate chase to be the first one to ball.

Box 2 box	<p>Groups of two are divided with each player placed in a five yard by five yard grid.</p> <p>One player plays a ball to their partner who attempts to keep the touch inside the grid. Roles reverse. Require aerial service.</p> <p>Variation: The player attempts to play the first touch outside the grid but under control.</p>	
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<p>Rapid Training Circle</p>	<p>Team is divided into two groups. One group spreads out in a circle with a ball. The other group starts in the middle of the circle.</p> <p>Players check to a player on the outside who throw a bouncing ball at them. The player receives the ball with the correct body part and plays a pass back before proceeding to a new server.</p>	
<p>2v2 sweatbox with outside neutrals</p>	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into groups of two. Two players start as neutral players and are placed on the narrow sides of a 7 yard by 10 yard grid.</p> <p>The players play possession in the grid with a two touch minimum. When a neutral player is played a ball, they pick the ball up and play an aerial service to the team that passed the ball out.</p>	
<p>4v4</p>	<p>Mandatory two touch minimum with throw ins used for all restarts.</p>	
<p>6v6</p>	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Volleying

Full Volley

What: A pass, shot, or clear taken from an aerial ball that is below knee height and directly in front of the player.

Where: All areas of the field.

Why: Player does not have time to control the ball with a receiving touch

When: The ball is below knee height

How: Step 1: Recognize a ball that is or will be below knee height and straight on

Step 2: Step into the path of the ball with the non kicking foot pointing at the target

Step 3: Raise the shooting foot up to the height contact with the ball will be made

Step 4: Lock the ankle of the kicking foot with the toe down.

Step 5: Move the foot through the midline center of the ball with an extension of the knee.
Since the knee is a hinge joint the approach does not come from an angle.

Step 6: Follow through in the direction of the ball while landing on the kicking foot

Half Volley

What: A pass, shot, or clearance taken from a ball shortly after it bounces

Where: All areas of the field

Why: Player does not have time to control the ball with a receiving touch

When: The ball is very close to the ground and on its way up from a bounce

How: Step 1: Track the flight of the ball

Step 2: Step into the path of the ball with the non kicking foot pointing at the target

Step 3: Raise the shooting foot up to the height contact with the ball will be made

Step 4: Lock the ankle of the kicking foot with the toe down.

Step 5: Move the foot through the midline center of the ball with an extension of the knee.
Since the knee is a hinge joint the approach does not come from an angle.

Step 6: Follow through in the direction of the ball while landing on the kicking foot

Side Volley

What: A pass, shot, or clearance with an aerial ball from a side on position

Where: All areas of the field

Why: Player does not have time to control the ball with a receiving touch

When: The ball is played to the side of the player and the player is side on to the direction they wish to strike the ball to



How: Step 1: Track the flight of the ball while in, or getting in a side on position to the target




Step 2: Turn the non kicking foot to point to the target

Step 3: Lean back to balance the leg coming up

Step 4: Bring the leg up to the height the ball will be met with the ankle locked

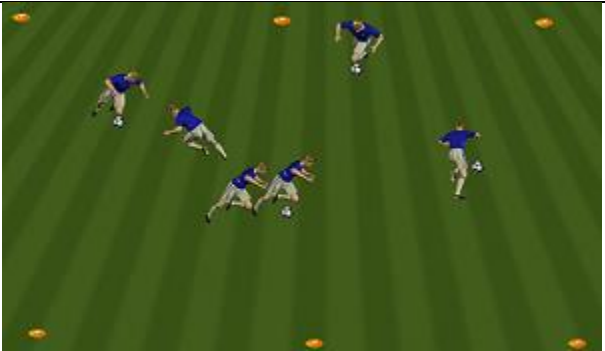

Step 5: Strike through the midline center of the ball with a movement that has the upper leg coming through and the knee joint snapping towards the ball




Sit and volley	<p>Each player sits with a soccer ball in their hands. They drop the ball down to their foot. As the ball is dropping the foot comes up to meet the ball.</p> <p>The coach can see and hear quality strikes. When the ball is met in the midline center with a locked foot there will be no spin and one thumping sound.</p>	
Partner volley	<p>Groups of two are formed with one player being the server. The server is instructed to serve the ball below knee height.</p> <p>The group stays the same distance apart. The server throws the ball and backs up. The player volleying the ball steps up and volleys the ball back to the server. The activity continues until the players have gone up and back the width of the field. Players then switch roles.</p>	

<p>Rapid Training Volleys</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed. Players form a diamond with two of the three designated servers starting with a ball.</p> <p>One server throws the ball to the player on task. This player volleys the ball to the server that started without a ball. Once the player has volleyed the ball the next server throws a ball and the on task player volleys the ball to the new player who did not have a ball.</p>	
<p>2v2 sweatbox with neutrals</p>	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into groups of two. Two players start as neutral players and are placed on the narrow sides of a 7 yard by 10 yard grid.</p> <p>The players play possession in the grid; every time the ball is played to a neutral player the ball is played back in with a throw and the ball must be volleyed to a team mate for possession to occur.</p>	
<p>6v6</p>	<p>Place condition that all restarts are throws below the head.</p> <p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Shielding

- What:** The player with the ball keeps their body between the ball and opponent.
- Where:** Opportunities present themselves in all part of the field.
- When:** When forward progress is not probable or possible.
- Why:** To keep possession of the ball while waiting for a passing option.
- How:**
- Step 1: Recognize forward progress in not possible or unlikely.
 - Step 2: Move your body between the ball and the opponent in a side on position.
 - Step 3: Bend knees to keep balance from pressure applied from opponent.
 - Step 4: Use arm to hold player off being sure not to push the opponent.
 - Step 5: Keep head up to see supporting players that the ball can be passed to.

Find a ball	<p>The team is placed in a grid with 2/3 of the group having possession of a soccer ball.</p> <p>The players without a ball attempt to win a ball. On the coaches command of stop, the players with a ball win and a penalty can be given to the players without a soccer ball.</p> <p>The coach can reduce the number of soccer balls to make the activity more competitive as it progresses.</p>	
Team find a ball	<p>In same grid from above the team is split in half with an odd number of soccer balls in the grid.</p> <p>Players attempt to keep or gain possession of a soccer ball. The winning team has the most soccer balls when the coach calls stop.</p> <p>Passing is allowed.</p> <p>Reduce the number of balls in the activity to increase competition and the need for shielding.</p>	

<p>3v3 possession</p>	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into groups of three and play possession in a seven by ten yard grid.</p>	
<p>3v3 game</p>	<p>Can the players transition the activity into a small sided game?</p> <p>Do they shield the ball instead of turning into pressure or forcing a pass?</p>	
<p>6v6 game</p>	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	



***Player Development
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Section III: Formations




U11 Formations/Positional Responsibilities



Formations are used to place players on the field by positions. Formations are simple the allocation of players throughout the field by designating a number of defenders, midfield players, and forwards. When talking about formations, we start with the number of defenders, then midfield player, and then forwards. This means a 2-3-1 formation has 2 defenders, 3 midfield players, and 1 forward.





At the U11 age groups formations should be used to enhance the player development of the team members; formations should not be used to win games. Over the course of the player's progress through long term player development plan winning will occur.


At the U11 age group players play 9 a side. We recommend choosing between a 3-3-2 and 3-2-3 formation. Both of these formations promote the principles of play through the allocation of players.

Positional Responsibilities are listed below for each formation.

3-3-2	Qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong defensively• Allows for defensive shape to cover width of field• Outside midfield needs to recover• Provides width in attack• Midfield players must support attack and find opportunities to go in advance of forward• Forward must learn to make diagonal runs to cover field• Center midfield connects the two diamonds as long as the center forward makes diagonal run to ball side.	
Defenders	Positional Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1v1 defending• Cover• Ball side high, weak side deep• Playing possession out of back• Connecting with midfield players at supporting angles in attack	
Center Midfield	Positional Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connecting diamonds• Change point of attack• Recover defensively• Maintaining possession	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create scoring opportunities • Get in advance of forward when forward has ball and head up, and when forward has made wide runs and team is in possession of the ball • 1v1 attacking and defending 	
Outside Midfield	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide width in attack • Crossing • Recovery runs • Protect weak side in defending third • Maintaining possession • Get in advance of forward when forward has ball and head up in a central position, and when forward has made check runs into midfield and team is in possession of the ball • 1v1 attacking and defending 	
Forwards	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create scoring opportunities • Finish scoring opportunities • Make check runs to ball • Make diagonal runs • Be first line of defense • Maintain possession • Work with each other to unbalance the defense by using the “one run for the defense and one run for the ball” concept. 	

3-2-3	<p>Qualities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong defensively in center of field • Organized approach is easy to implement • Provides width in attack • Demands mobility from forward • Allows for building up in attack • Allows for defenders to come forward to unbalance the opponent 	
Defender	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1v1 defending • Cover • Balance • Communicate with midfield players on recovery, tracking, and marking. • Playing possession out of back • Connecting with midfield players at supporting angles in attack • Adding to attack by coming out of the back as third attacker 	
Center Midfield	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change point of attack • Recover defensively • Usually played with one holding (#6) and one attacking (#10) • 1v1 attacking and defending • When to possess: When to penetrate • Maintain possession • Delay counterattacks 	
Outside Forwards	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide width in attack • Crossing • Recovery runs • Maintaining possession • Create space for wide defenders to come forward by 	

	<p>moving into central positions during the build up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get in advance of forward when forward has ball and head up in a central position, and when forward has made check runs into midfield and team is in possession of the ball • 1v1 attacking and defending 	
Forward	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create scoring opportunities • Finish scoring opportunities • Make check runs to ball • Make diagonal runs • Be first line of defense • Maintain possession 	



***Player Development
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Section IV: Tactics

Soccer Source 360's U12 Curriculum has fourteen tactical topics that need to be introduced to all U12 players to lay a foundation for the future. These topics include:

- Connecting
- Counter Attacking
- Cover
- Immediate Pressure
- Numbers +/-
- Over lap
- Pressing
- Quick Restarts
- Small Group Defending
- Spatial Awareness
- Speed of Play
- Transition
- Wall Pass
- When to dribble? When to Pass?

As a team participating in the fall and spring season your team will practice between 20-90 times. Teams practice from 10-15 weeks each season once, twice or three times a week. It is not enough to simply run the sessions included in this document. Map out a seasonal plan to allow for coverage of the entire u12 curriculum that includes improvisation, technique, formations, and tactics. Lay a strong foundation so the players will be ready for the U13 curriculum.

Coaches need to connect.

- Connect with the player
- Connect the technique to the game of soccer
- Connect the player with a passion for the game

In fact, the lesson plans are sample sessions and you can modify. Changes may be needed to adjust to your team and players needs.

- Adjust numbers to fit with your team
- Adjust space to fit your player's needs
- Change activities to fit your player's needs
- Vary practice plan when going over topic for the 2nd and 3rd time

When making changes be sure to follow a simple to complex progression and have all sessions end with a game. The game is the test for the players and the coach. Have the players connected the lesson to the game.

Coaches also need to recognize and capitalize on coaching/teaching moments. Know the execution of the technique. We do not recommend lecturing the players on the execution of the technique, but your

knowledge base will help spot the flaws. We recommend breaking the technique down into the preparation, contact with the ball, and finishing position.

When capitalizing on a coaching moment it is recommended you vary teaching methods and not only coach flaws but use positive experiences to highlight success.

Teaching Methods



- Coaching the individual – Most players are not disturbed and the player receives feedback for themselves.
- Coaching over the top – Provide needed information while the activity is taking place.
- Coaching at a natural stoppage – Using the coaching moment when the game was stopped on its own. Ex. Ball played out of bounds.
- Coaching with a stop/freeze – Stopping the activity and demanding all of the players remain in the position they held when the stop command was given. This allows you to show players the picture, move players, and then rehearse the situation. Rehearsing is necessary to insure the players received the information.

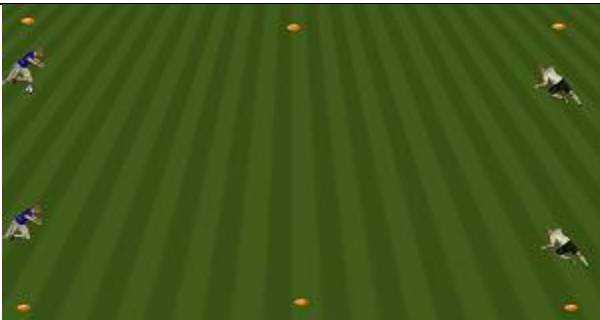


U12 When to dribble? When to Pass?

Players should dribble or run with the ball, when they have open space before confronting an opponent. By passing the ball forward in these situations, the attack has one less player with the ball. When a player takes the ball with them to cover this space, an additional attacker is brought forward.

A player also can dribble when there is space behind the opponent that is confronting the ball as the defender does not have cover.

The session below can be used to have players recognize when to dribble and when to pass.


1v1 with ball out	<p>Groups of four are formed and subdivided into groups of two. Players are placed on opposite sides of a eight yard by 15 yard grid.</p> <p>The first player attempts to dribble by an opponent. If they are successful they pass the ball back to their team mate who attempts to dribble by the other opponent. If a player attempting to dribble by an opponent gets in a bad situation or does not have a good chance to be successful they shield the ball and pass it back to their team mate. This ends the activity for the two that were on task and starts the activity for the player who received the pass and the defender who was inactive.</p>	
2v1 ladder	<p>Groups of four are formed and subdivided into groups of two. Two players begin on the end line with a ball of a 8 yard wide and 20 yard long grid that is separated with a mid line. One opponent starts on the mid line and the other starts on the opposite end line.</p> <p>The player on the midline applies high pressure to the player with the ball. As high pressure is the visual sign to make a wall pass, the supporting player supports in a side on position for a wall pass. The player with the ball has the option to make a wall pass or dribble the defender.</p>	

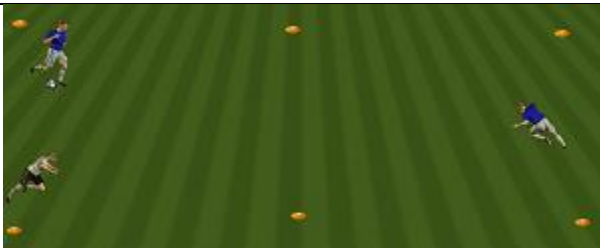

	Once they make it past the first defender, they enter the 2 nd half of the grid and the new defender applies high pressure to the players with the ball.	
2v2	<p>Groups of four are subdivided into groups of two and placed in a grid 10 yards wide by 15 yards long.</p> <p>Pairs begin on opposite end lines. One group passes the ball to the other team. This team then attempts to get the ball under possession past the opposite end line.</p> <p>Coach the players to recognize the visual sign to dribble? If they do not see open space behind the opponent they should make a pass.</p>	
5v5 to four goals	<p>Groups of five play 5v5 on a 40 yard wide by 20 yard long field.</p> <p>By using a wider field the defense is stretched out allowing for more dribbling opportunities.</p>	
5v5	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	



U12 Wall Pass

- What:** A give and go passing combination
- When:** A supporting player is close to a team mate that is under high pressure
- Why:** The player with the ball is in need of help and the supporting player can help to beat this defender by supporting for a wall pass
- Where:** Anywhere on the field but most often in the middle and attacking third
- How:**
- Step 1: The supporting player recognizes the player with the ball is under high pressure while moving forward.
- Step 2: The supporting player moves to a tight distance and angle in a side on position to the player with the ball. This angle is most often parallel to the defender.
- Step 3: The player with the ball plays a front foot pass to the supporting player's far foot or uses the supporting player as a decoy while dribbling past the opponent. If they make the pass, they must continue to run move past the defender on the opposite side of the defender that the ball was passed to.
- Step 4: As the supporting player receives the pass to their far foot they turn their foot so to pass the ball back in the path of the player who made the pass to them.
- Step 5: The player who made the pass back moves on to continue to support the player they just passed the ball back to.

Important details: The player with the ball that starts the wall pass using the front foot for disguise and to be able to not have to slow down. This pass is made on the move. They pass the ball to their team mates far foot so that this player does not have to make a difficult pass back and is able to continue to move forward to support the ball.

2v1 wall pass walk through Unrestricted space	<p>Groups of three are formed with two players standing opposite one player with 20 yards separation.</p> <p>The two players pass the ball back and forth a couple of times until one of the players passes the ball to the single player. When this pass is made the player receives the ball and begins to dribble while the player who passed the ball supports for a wall pass. The</p>	
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	<p>player who did not pass the ball applies high pressure but is not allowed to tackle. The player with the ball plays a front foot pass to the supporting player's far foot and moves to get the wall pass back.</p>	
<p>2v1 wall pass walk through Unrestricted space</p>	<p>Same as above but place the players in a 20 yard by 7 yard grid and allow tackling.</p>	
<p>Rotating 2v2v2</p>	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into three groups of two and placed on a 12 yard wide by 18 yard long field with a target goal on each end line.</p> <p>One group starts with the ball in the middle of the field. The other two groups each place a player as a target in the goal and one player out to defend. The team in the middle starts the activity by attacking one of the defenders who must defend with high pressure. Since high pressure is the visual sign to support the ball with wall pass support, the supporting player gets in position to receive a wall pass. Once the defender is beaten with wall pass support, with either a wall pass or being beaten on the dribble the players pass the ball to the target player in the goal.</p> <p>This attacking team then takes the place of the team they just defended and the team who was just defending and acting as a target attacks the team at the other end that was inactive.</p> <p>The activity continues to rotate.</p>	

2v2 to goal	Groups of four play 2v2 to goal on a field 12 yards wide by 18 yards long.	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Overlap

What: A supporting run that starts behind or goes around the ball into a position in advance of the ball.

When: A supporting player is close to a team mate that is under low pressure

Why: The low pressure on the ball allows the supporting player time to get in advance of the ball while creating space for the player with the ball.

Where: Anywhere on the field but most often in the middle third and attacking third, and most often close to a sideline.


How: Step 1: The supporting player recognizes the player with the ball is under low pressure while moving forward.

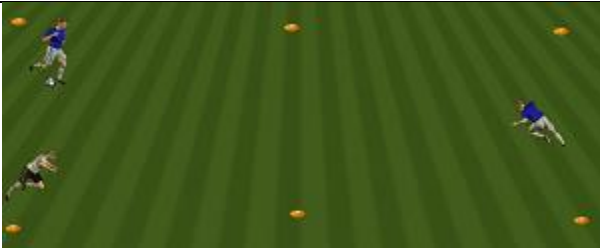

Step 2: The supporting player begins to move in advance of the ball. If the player begins from behind the ball they make the run between the player and the sideline. If the player is square or in advance of the ball, they run behind the player before moving in advance of the ball. This player must make a loud verbal call to alert the player with the ball that an overlap run is coming for support.



Step 3: When the player with the ball hears the overlap call, they begin to dribble at a forward angle away from the space the supporting overlapping run is going to.

Step 4: The player with the ball either makes a forward pass behind the opponent or uses the overlapping run as a decoy and continues to dribble.

Step 5: The player without the ball continues their forward run to support the ball.

Overlap walk through	<p>Groups of three are formed with two players standing opposite one player with 20 yards separation.</p> <p>The two players pass the ball back and forth a couple of times until one of the players passes the ball to the single player. When this pass is made the player receives the ball and begins to dribble while the player who passed the ball begins to run around the player with the ball. The player who did not pass the ball applies low pressure but is not allowed to tackle.</p> <p>The player with the ball plays a front</p>	
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	<p>foot pass into the supporting player's path and passed the low pressuring defender or uses the supporting run as a decoy and dribbles past the opponent.</p>	
Restricted space overlap	<p>Same as above but inside a 12 yard by 18 yard grid and tackling is aloud.</p>	
Rotating 2v2v2	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into three groups of two and placed on a 12 yard wide by 18 yard long field with a target goal on each end line.</p> <p>One group starts with the ball in the middle of the field. The other two groups each place a player as a target in the goal and one player out to defend. The team in the middle starts the activity by attacking one of the defenders who must defend with low pressure. Since low pressure is the visual sign to support the ball with an overlap supporting run the supporting player does an overlapping run. Once the defender is beaten with the overlapping run with either a pass or being beaten on the dribble the players pass the ball to the target player in the goal.</p> <p>This team then takes the place of the team they just attacked and the team who was just defending and acting as a target attacks the team at the other end that was inactive.</p> <p>The activity continues to rotate.</p>	



2v2	<p>Groups of four play 2v2 to goal on a field 12 yards wide by 18 yards long.</p>	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Transition

Your team can only be in one of three states of the game: attack, defense, or transition between the two. Improving your team's ability to react mentally and physically between defense to attack when the ball is won and attack to defense when the ball is lost will give your team an advantage over the opponent. Since the principles of play of defense and attack are opposites, the team that transitions mentally and physically faster has the early advantage to apply the principles before the opponent is ready to respond. When we develop players with good transition skills, the concept of counter attacking and countering the counter can later be taught with great effectiveness.

Below is a transition session, but good coaches add transition to every activity that has opposition. Whenever you run an activity that has opposition, give the defenders something to do once they win the ball. By doing this, the defense transitions into an attacking role, and team that was attacking must react by transitioning to defensive principles.

1v1	<p>Groups of two are formed and placed on opposite sides of a 10 yard by 15 yard grid. Each player has a ball.</p> <p>The player with the ball passes the ball to their partner who then attempts to dribble the ball by the opponent and across the end line under control.</p>	
2v2	<p>Groups of four play 2v2 to goal on a field 12 yards wide by 18 yards long.</p>	
3v3	<p>Groups of six play 3v3 to goal on a field 18 yards wide by 30 yards long.</p>	

7v5	<p>On a half of a soccer field set up two goals on midline with each one close to the sideline.</p> <p>Have seven players attack the big goal that has a keeper in goal. They play against five players plus the keeper and this group attempts to score in one of the small goals.</p>	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	


U12 Speed of Play





Speed of play is not a tactic but an ability to combine technique and decisions quickly. When players increase their ability to play fast, the principles of attack can be applied faster than the opponent can react.

The technical aspects that lead to a faster speed of play include the pace of the pass, the ability of players to receive hard paced passes, a quality first touch that allows the player to play quickly, accuracy in passing that does not slow the receiver down, and running with the ball touches that can be taken in natural running motion. In short, the players need to be technically proficient so the ball does not slow the player down.

The tactical parts of the game that increase player's ability to play quickly are spatial awareness. If the player knows where team mates and opponents are they can make a quicker decision as they process new information and recognize visual signs earlier.



Speed of play is a concept that youth players will be working on through the course of the playing career. Later curriculum will introduce rhythm play. This will show players how to unbalance teams by changing the speed of play.




Sequence passing with ball chaser	<p>The group is divided into two groups and placed in a grid about 15 yards by 15 yards. Players in each grid are given a number in sequence.</p> <p>Players pass the ball in sequence while moving throughout the grid. Use two soccer balls so that there is pressure to play quickly. The players need to support thinking ahead, as they need to get in a supporting position so that they can receive the pass and then play it quickly.</p>	
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<p>4v4 possession</p>	<p>Groups of eight are divided into two groups who play 4v4 possession in a 15 yard by 20 yard grid.</p> <p>Even numbers and limited space, force the players to play fast or lose possession.</p>	
<p>3v5 to targets</p>	<p>Ten players form two groups of four and one group of two and are placed in a 20 yard by 25 yard grid.</p> <p>Each team places a player on an end line to serve as a target. The group of two are always defending against the team of three in possession of the ball who are attempting to play the ball to a target. If they are successful they get the ball back from the target and attempt to play to the other target.</p>	
<p>5v7 to goal</p>	<p>One team of five plays against a team of seven.</p> <p>Make sure all players are rotated so they get the chance to play numbers down.</p>	
<p>6v6</p>	<p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p> <p>Have they connected the lesson plan to the game?</p>	

U12 Spatial Awareness

What:	A player's ability to see opponents, team mates, open space, and field markings.
When:	At all times with and without the ball.
Where:	All over the field.
Why:	The game of soccer is a visual game. Visual signs help the player make decisions. The more a player sees the higher the quality of the decisions.

Sequence Passing	<p>Divide the group into two groups and place each group in a 10 yard by 15 yard grid. Number each player in the group in sequence.</p> <p>Players move throughout their grid and pass the ball in sequence. As number one passes the ball to number two, three should be in a position that they can receive a pass and see number four.</p> <p>Demand players move while keeping the head on a swivel to see the dynamic changes to the activity and have the ability to react.</p>	
4v4 to targets Point to space and talk out loud	<p>Groups of five are formed and play 4v4 towards a target at each end.</p> <p>Players must point to the open space they have throughout the game. When a player receives the ball they must call out little, some, a lot to indicate the amount of space they have.</p> <p>When a player knows the amount of space they have they are able to make better decisions. By having the players announce what they see, the coach can get inside the player head and know what they are thinking.</p>	

5v5 to target Point to 'space' and talk out loud	Same as above but larger numbers.	
6v6 Point to space and talk out loud	Go to goal with the same conditions.	
6v6	It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game? Has your session had an impact on the players?	



U12 Numbers up and Numbers Down




Players need to understand the numbers game in soccer. When a team is in attack and they are numbers up they need to take more risks and attack with speed. When they are numbers down, the attacking team needs to delay the attack and wait for help. The opposite applies to the defending team.

When a defending team has more players around the ball, they need to take apply high pressure and possibly double team the ball. When a defending team is numbers down around the ball they need to delay the attack in an effort to give team mates time to recover.

In the attacking third, players should consider even numbers as an advantage or numbers up and defenders should consider this situation as numbers down.

The session below puts players in situations that they are numbers up or numbers down. Can they recognize the situation and then apply the correct tactic.

<p>1v1 with add on player</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and place two players on each end line of a 10 yard by 15 yard grid.</p> <p>One player passes the ball to a player on the other team and closes the space while the ball is moving. These two players play 1v1. The attacking player attempts to beat the defender. If they are unbalanced or slowed down, the attacking player can pass the ball back and bring an additional player into the game. This makes the game 2v1.</p>	
<p>Revolving 3v2 with time activated add on</p>	<p>Groups of six are placed on a 20 yard by 30 yard field that has a goal on each end line.</p> <p>The attacking team plays with three players and the defending team plays with two. When transition occurs the team that won possession adds a player and the team that lost possession loses a player.</p>	

	<p>The defensive team adds the idle player if they can delay the attack by 15 seconds.</p>	
3v3/3v4/4v4	<p>Groups of eight begin playing 3v3 on a 25 yard by 40 yard field that has a goal on each end line.</p> <p>The attacking team can add the player if they recognize they have been delayed by passing the ball back to this player. In the event they have not scored or are disposed in 10 seconds the defending team adds a player.</p>	
4v4 + keepers/4v5/5v5	<p>Same as previous activity but larger numbers and keepers added.</p>	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Counter Attacking

Players that have developed good transition habits can be introduced to the topic of counter attacking. Counter attacking in soccer can reap great rewards as your team can take advantage of an opponent that does not balance the back when attacking and is not ready to transition to defense when the ball is lost.


Players must also understand the difference between attacking out of a build up and counter attacking before a team can maximize the benefits of counter attacking in soccer.


Counter attacking can create good scoring opportunities due to the space the team that just lost the ball leaves open and their inability to quickly put pressure on the ball. When your team wins the ball, the defending team is usually spread out leaving space that forward balls can be played through. They usually lack depth in defending leaving large amounts of space between the back line and the keeper.



Below are three counter attacking combinations that you can introduce to your players in shadow play or pattern play. Shadow play is used to have your team use patterns against no opposition. Opposition can be introduced gradually to see if the players can connect the pattern into more game like situations.




Be sure to know, the counter attacking patterns contained in this lesson plan are not the only ones and can never be a substitute for thinking players who recognize situations and make the best tactical decision. It is also important to know that the patterns below are all for a team that leaves at least one forward high on the field. If your team gets all of the players behind the ball, they will be less successful counter attacking with these patterns and more than likely need a different approach to attacking out of a counter situation.

Note: In the diagrams below the red arrows indicate the direction the ball is played and the green arrows indicate the direction of the player's runs.

Up-Back-Behind	<p>This pattern starts with a forward that recognizes a long pass can be made to their feet.</p> <p>They check to a player that just won the ball at an angle that the ball can be played through. As counter attacking is a team concept, it is important that midfield players anticipate this pass and begin to make forward runs.</p> <p>When the player receives this pass, they play a one touch pass to a midfield player. They want to</p>	
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	<p>make a pass to the midfield player's strong foot and into their path so that a one long pass can be played with one touch.</p> <p>Once the forward player passes the ball, they spin off and head towards the goal they are attacking.</p> <p>The midfield player then recognizes the space behind the defense that has a team mate running towards and plays a pass into this space.</p> <p>All attacking players continue their runs as they may be needed for a pass in front of the goal.</p>	
Diagonal Run in behind opposition	<p>In this pattern the forward recognizes an angle the ball can be played that goes behind the defense. This usually occurs on the flanks.</p> <p>The defender checks away from the space and then into the space the ball is to be played. Making sure to stay on side until the ball is passed.</p> <p>The player makes a long pass into the space behind the opponent as the forward runs onto the ball.</p> <p>The forward then has the option to go to goal or pass the ball to other players that have followed the play.</p>	

<p>Double check-No look Clip Pass</p>	<p>This pattern can be used when building from the back or when counter attacking from a position with two forwards staying high.</p> <p>The first forward checks early with a loud call for a pass. The player then spins off and slows down.</p> <p>The 2nd forward then checks into the same space vacated by the first forward.</p> <p>As the forward is checking the ball is played.</p> <p>This forward plays a no look pass into the path of the first forward behind the back line and into space between the keeper and the back line.</p> <p>The rationale for slowing the run down was to stay on side and disinterest the defender that tracked the player on the checking run.</p>	
<p>8v4</p>	<p>Have eight players play against four on the eight player's defensive half. Give the ball to the team with four each time the activity needs to be restarted.</p> <p>When the team of eight wins the ball they are to counter attack and get the ball behind the back line within three passes.</p> <p>Demand players recognize the correct pattern for the situation.</p>	

7v5 Counter	<p>Have seven players play against five on the eight player's defensive half. Give the ball to the team with five each time the activity needs to be restarted.</p> <p>When the team of seven wins the ball they are to counter attack and get the ball behind the back line within three passes.</p> <p>Demand players recognize the correct pattern for the situation.</p>	
6v6 Counter	<p>Play 6v6 and time each time a team wins the ball from the time they are able to get in behind the opponent.</p>	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	



U12 Quick Restarts


Soccer is different than most sports played in America in how the game is started after the referee stops play to enforce the laws. The referee permission to restart play is only needed for a penalty kick, when the attacking team asks for the referee to enforce the ten yard rule for free kicks, and when substitutions are used.

Attacking teams need to take advantage of this rule/law by getting the ball into play as quickly as possible most of the time. By utilizing this approach the attacking team can get the ball in before the defense is organized and in position.

Using quick restarts is a tactic and an attitude. Your team needs to be ready to get the ball into play right away. This includes throw ins, goal kicks, direct kicks, indirect kicks, and corner kicks. It is also recommended that all free kicks for youth soccer should be short passes that keep possession. By utilizing short passes from free kicks you are instilling a culture of possession over a culture of gaining territory.



For this session we are using a whole-part-whole teaching progression.




6v6	<p>Divide the team into two teams and have them play soccer.</p> <p>Referee the game and after ten minutes begin to count out loud how long it takes to get the ball back into play after each call. Call all fouls.</p> <p>Stop the game and tell the players they need to learn how to get the ball into play quicker.</p>	
6v6 Quick Restarts	<p>Same as above but soccer balls are placed all around the field so that whenever a ball is played out the closest player on the team with possession can pick a ball up and get it back into play.</p> <p>Continue to referee and coach the players that are restarting play.</p>	

6v6	<p>Go back to the game without soccer balls surrounding the field.</p> <p>Continue to referee.</p> <p>Have your session had an impact on your players?</p> <p>Follow up with this concept during the season.</p>	
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U12 Connection

What:	Connection is a term used to describe the distance players are from each other vertically on the field. In soccer, spacing around the ball is very important.
Why:	Correct space between players allows for quality attacking and defensive play, and most importantly transition between the two. Many youth teams leave too much space between the forward, midfield, and defensive lines. This space affects support in attack, compactness in defense, and the ability to pressure and cover in transition.
Where:	All over the field
When:	All Times

Center goal everyone over	<p>The team is divided into two groups and play on a field 40 yards by 40 yards with the goal in the middle.</p> <p>Each team is given a side of the goal they can score through.</p> <p>Use restrictions to insure the players move relative to the ball. Restrictions such as a goal can not be scored until all players are on the attacking side demand all attacking players stay connected. A condition that punishes the defensive team, if a goal is scored when all the defensive team is not on the defensive side will place recovery as a team a priority.</p>	
3v3 ¼ game	<p>Groups of six are formed and play 3v3 on a field that is divided into quarters laterally.</p> <p>The condition is that all players must be no farther than one quarter away from the ball.</p>	

<p>4v4 ¼ game</p>	<p>Groups of eight are formed and play 4v4 on a field that coned off in quarters laterally.</p> <p>The condition is that all players must be no farther than one quarter away from the ball.</p>	
<p>6v6 ¼ game</p>	<p>Groups of six are formed and play 6v6 on a field that coned off in quarters laterally.</p> <p>The condition is that all players must be no farther than one quarter away from the ball.</p>	
<p>6v6</p>	<p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p> <p>Is their connection between the forward, midfield, and defensive lines.</p>	

U12 Immediate Pressure

What: Closing down space quickly to put the player with the ball under stress. The visual sign for the coach to read to see if the player is under pressure is the player with the ball's head. If the head is down the player is under pressure and not thinking about going forward. This is the correct distance. No over committing.

Who: The closest player to the ball or to where the ball is headed.

When: As quickly as possible, players should close down as much space as possible before the ball is under control.

Where: All over the field

How: Step 1: Cover space quickly with big fast steps to start in an angle that denies penetration.

Step 2: Once the space is closed to 7 yards begin to make quick short steps being sure not to over commit.


Step 3: Take an angle that denies penetration and forces the player in one direction.




Step 4: Set feet so that they can be moved quickly. Standing on balls of feet with knees bent.


Step 5: React to visual signs to stay at the same distance

Step 6: Be patient and wait for a mistake. Contain the play and give team mates time to recover.

Step 7: Tackle when a mistake is made.



Close Space Knee Tag	<p>Each player finds a partner and begins from a starting position 15 yards from their partner.</p> <p>On the coaches command, each player runs at each other closing down the space as quickly as possible. When the distance is narrowed each player begins to get low and take small quick steps. When the players get in striking distance they begin to play knee tag by attempting to hit their partner below the knee.</p>	
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	Make sure players do not over commit.	
1v1	<p>Groups of two are formed and placed on opposite sides of a 5 yard by 10 yard grid. Each player has a ball.</p> <p>The player with the ball passes the ball to their partner who then attempts to dribble the ball by the opponent and across the end line under control. Once the pass is made the defender attempts to close down as much space as possible before the ball arrives to the opponent.</p>	
4v2:4v2	<p>Groups of eight are subdivided into group of four and play in two eight yard by six yard grids that are separated by six yards.</p> <p>One groups starts to play 4v2 in one of the end grids. The remaining two players on the team that is defending stand in the opposite end grid. When a defender wins the ball they play to a team mate in the opposite grid, join this player and attempt to possess the ball from the two defenders from the opposite team that come over to defend.</p> <p>Recognize when players do not pressure the ball immediately.</p>	
3v3	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into groups of three and placed on an 18 yard by 15 yard field with a small sided goal on each end line.</p> <p>Teams of three play a game and concentrate on pressuring the ball.</p>	

6v6	<p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p> <p>Have they connected the lesson plan to the game?</p>	 An aerial photograph of a soccer game in progress on a lush green field. The field is marked with white lines, including the center circle and the 18-yard box. Approximately 12 players are visible, wearing blue and white kits, spread across the field. A few yellow cones are placed on the grass. The goalposts are visible at the top and bottom edges of the frame.
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U12 Cover

Cover is a principle of defense. It is the role of players near the ball that are not pressuring the ball. Cover is used to support the pressuring defender so that if the player with the ball is beaten, the supporting defender is in position to apply pressure. The angle and distance of cover are important and depend on the ability of the attacking player, place on the field, and amount of support the attacking player has.

1v2	<p>In a 12 yard by 18 yard grid one player starts on an end line opposite two players.</p> <p>One of the two players passes the ball across the field to the player on the opposite end line. As the ball is moving both defenders close down the space. One player applies pressure while the other takes a cover angle cover in an attempt to prevent the opponent from gaining possession of the ball over the end line.</p> <p>Coach the angle and distance the covering player takes. They need to be far enough that one touch from the attacker can not beat both players and close enough that in the event the first defender is beaten, immediate pressure can be applied to the ball.</p>	
2v2	<p>In a 12 yard by 18 yard grid two players start on an end line, opposite two players.</p> <p>One group passes the ball to the other group and applies pressure and cover in an attempt to prevent the opponent from gaining possession of the ball over the end line.</p> <p>Coach the angle and distance the covering player takes. They need to be far enough that one touch from the attacker can not beat both players, and close enough that in the event the first defender is beaten or passes the ball to the other attacking player immediate pressure can be applied to the ball.</p>	

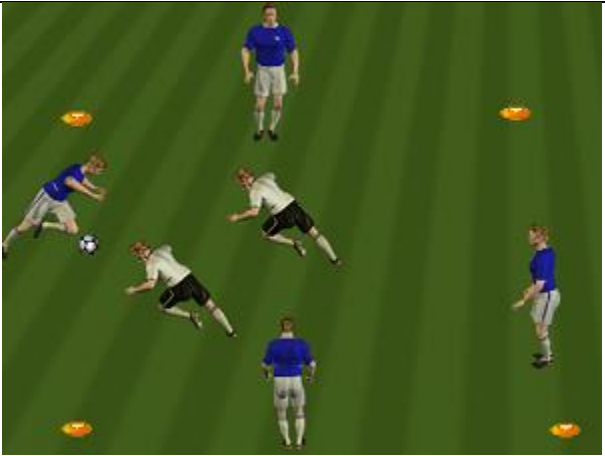

3v2	<p>Groups of five are subdivided into a group of three and a group of two. Both groups start on opposite end lines of a 15 yard by 22 yard grid.</p> <p>One group passes the ball to the other group and applies pressure and cover in an attempt to prevent the opponent from gaining possession of the ball over the end line.</p> <p>Coach the angle and distance the covering player takes. They need to be far enough that one touch from the attacker can not beat both players and close enough that in the event the first defender is beaten or passes the ball to the other attacking player immediate pressure can be applied to the ball.</p>	
3v3 three goal game	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into two groups of three and placed on a field that is 35 yards wide and 20 yards long with three goals on each end line.</p> <p>Teams play 3v3 with the defense tested to apply cover on wide field.</p>	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	




U12 Small Group Defending

The topic of small group defending addresses the need for defenders close to the ball to work together to win the ball back. Players work together through applying the principles of play, team strategy, and communication.

Defending always starts with pressure on the ball. The pressuring defender needs to give visual communication to their team mates on the angle they are taking when they approach the ball. This is a signal for the covering defenders, and possibly the players balancing the field.


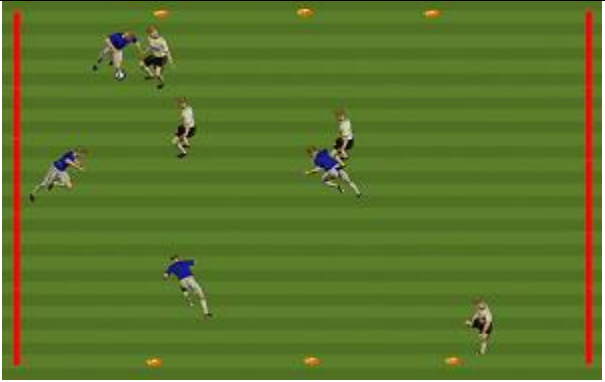
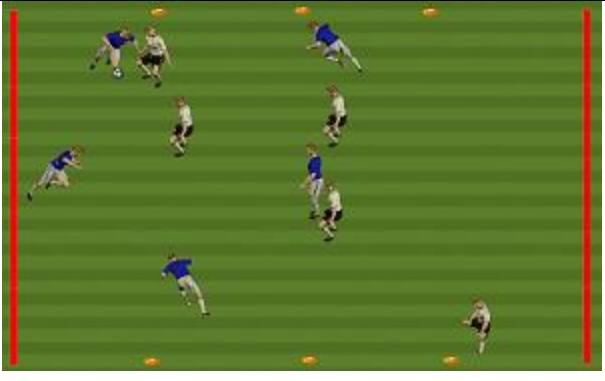
The covering defender then chooses the distance and angle, cuts off passes lanes, and communicates with the pressuring defender. The balancing defender can then see passing lanes that are open and assume a position to deny or limit this option. The balancing defender can also provide communication to both the pressuring and covering defenders as they are in a position to see much more.


4v2	<p>Groups of six play 4v4 possession in an 8 yard by 8 yard grid.</p> <p>The defenders are instructed to work together to make the opponent play predictable. Pressure and cover is demanded and players can not ball chase.</p>	
Can you play through?	<p>Groups of seven are divided into a group of three and two groups of two. Each group of two starts on the outside of opposite sides of a 15 yard by 15 yard grid. The group of three starts inside the grid.</p> <p>One group of two pass the ball back and forth attempting to pass the ball through the grid to the one of the players in the pair on the other side of the grid. The group of three applies pressure, cover, and balance attempting to deny the opportunity for the ball to be played through the grid.</p>	

3v3 to three small goals	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into two groups of three and placed on a field that is 35 yards wide and 20 yards long with three goals on each end line.</p> <p>Teams play 3v3 with the defense tested to apply cover and balance on wide field.</p>	
3v3	Groups of six play 3v3 on a 20 yard by 30 yard grid.	
6v6	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

U12 Pressing

Pressing is a defensive tactic. When pressing a team applies high pressure to the ball and squeezes space towards the ball. This is a team tactic and needs to be treated as such. The entire team must all be on the same page and understand individual responsibilities, when the team is pressing on as all players are involved. A team can not be expected to press the entire game.

1v1 to corner goals	<p>Groups of two play 1v1 in a 10 yard by 15 yard grid with a small goal on the corner of each end line.</p> <p>Demand high pressure from an angle that denies access to the goal.</p>	 A diagram of a 10x15 yard grid on a green field. Two players, one in a blue jersey and one in a white jersey, are positioned in the center. A small goal is located at the corner of the grid. Orange cones mark the boundaries of the grid.
4v3 to end line	<p>Groups of four play 4v3 defending and end line that the opponent must stop the ball on to score.</p> <p>The defending team always has a player sitting down.</p> <p>The group of three must press the ball and stay connected. If they make the opponent play predictable, they can overcome the numerical disadvantage.</p>	 A diagram of a 4v3 pressing drill on a green field. Four blue players are positioned in a defensive line, and three white players are positioned in an attacking line. Two vertical red lines mark the end lines. Orange cones are placed on the field.
5v4 to end line	<p>Same as previous with larger numbers.</p>	 A diagram of a 5v4 pressing drill on a green field. Five blue players are positioned in a defensive line, and four white players are positioned in an attacking line. Two vertical red lines mark the end lines. Orange cones are placed on the field.

<p>6v6 midfield restriction</p>	<p>Play 6v6 with the condition that the defending team must defend on their defensive half with high pressure staying connected.</p> <p>When the ball is on their defensive half they still apply high pressure and stay connected.</p>	
<p>6v6</p>	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?</p> <p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	