



***Player Development  
Program  
For the U9 Soccer Coach***

***By John Dingle***

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As I enter the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 use 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**

## U9 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](#)

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<p>Pick up Soccer</p>	<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 U9 Curriculum has seven technical topics that need to be introduced to all U9 players to lay a foundation for the future. These topics include:

- Running with the ball
- Front foot passing
- Attacking dribbling moves
- Shielding
- Finishing
- Instep passing
- 1<sup>st</sup> touch for ground balls

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 u9 curriculum that includes improvisation, technique, tactics, and formations. Lay a strong foundation so the players will be ready for the U10 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

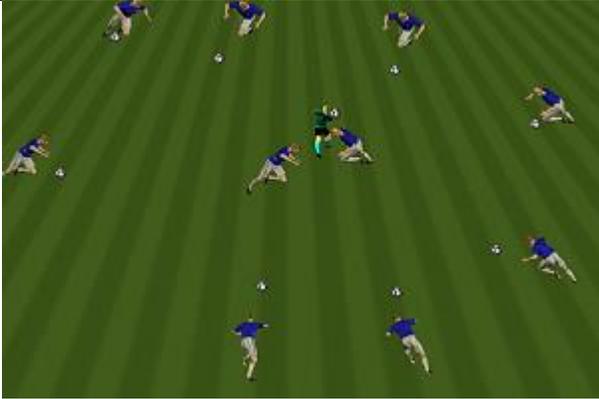
When capitalizing on a coaching moment it is recommended you vary teaching methods and not only coach flaws but use positive experiences to highlight success.

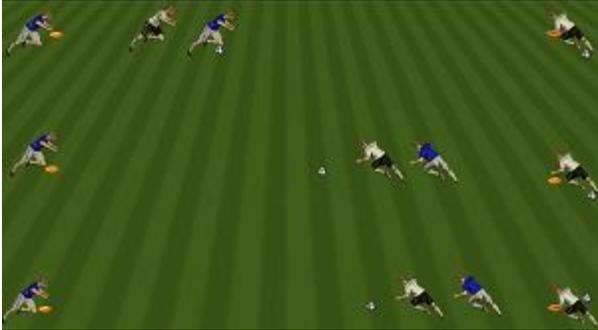
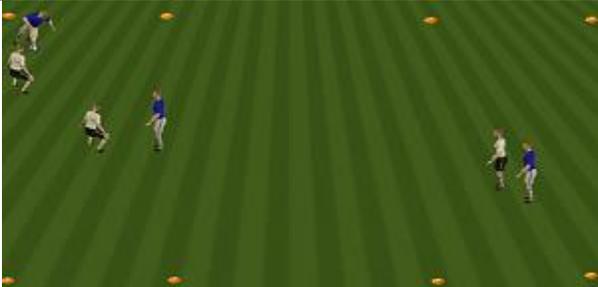
Teaching Methods

- 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.

## U9 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, 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 leaving 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.

<p>Ball Retrieval</p>	<p>Each player has a ball and brings it to the coach.</p> <p>Players hand the ball to the coach who then throws the ball. Each player runs after their ball and brings it back using long touches with their instep.</p>	
<p>3 touch Rapid Training</p>	<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</p>	

	<p>next player takes their turn and the activity continues to repeat.</p>	
<p>Ball Chaser</p>	<p>Same set up as previous activity but only one ball is needed.</p> <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>	
<p>2v2 Breakout</p>	<p>Groups of six start with four players playing 2v2 in a 10 yard by 5 yard grid. The other two players are in a similar grid 15 yards away.</p> <p>When possession changes, the player that won the ball attempts to run with the ball across to the other group. One defender chases this player. 2v2 continues on this side of the activity.</p>	
<p>4v4 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>	

**U9 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.

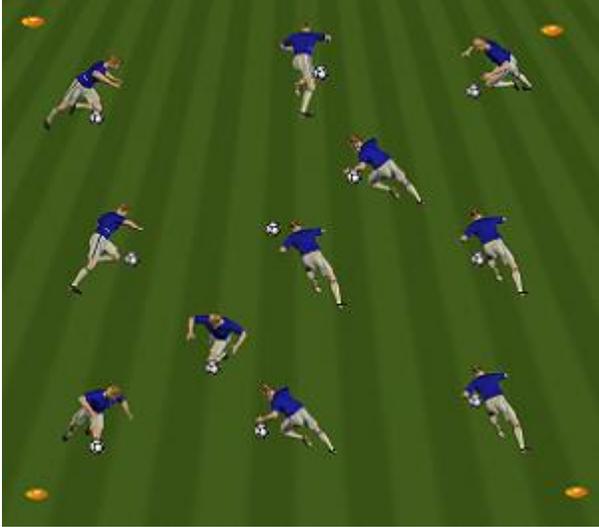
Where: Opportunities present themselves in all part of the field.

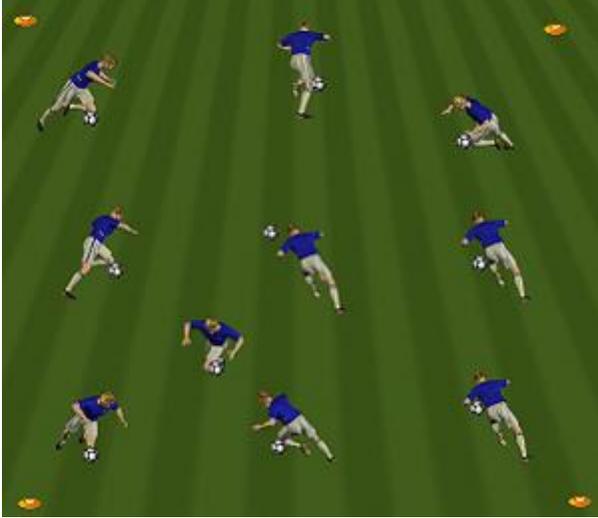
When: When the players are moving forward.

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.

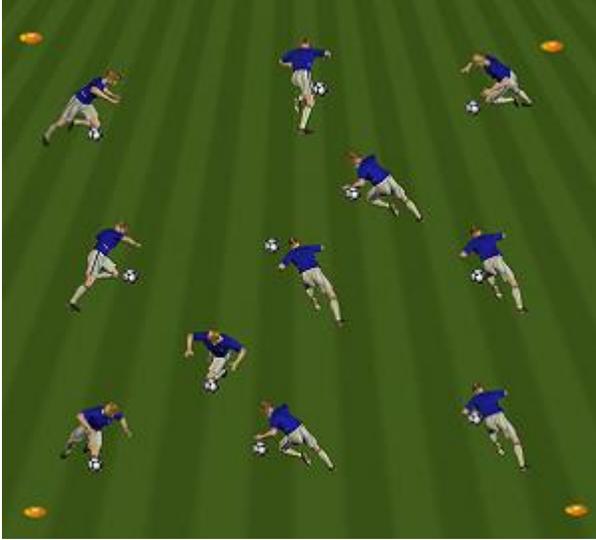
<p>Outside of the foot dribbling</p>	<p>Each player dribbles the ball with the outside of their foot in a 15 yard by 15 yard grid. They can also use the front of the foot as a variation. They should also strike the ball while it is in front of them.</p> <p>Make sure the players are touching the ball in natural running motion. The side of the foot should be hitting the side of the ball. This will force the ball to go off in an angle.</p>	
<p>Frost Tag</p>	<p>Divide the team into two groups.</p> <p>One group has each player start with a ball. They attempt to hit players on the other team, who are running through the grid, below the knee with a outside of the foot pass. When a player is hit they are frozen. Frozen players stand with their legs apart. They can be unfrozen by having a team mate crawl through their legs. A player can not be hit with a pass when they have any part of their body between a player while</p>	

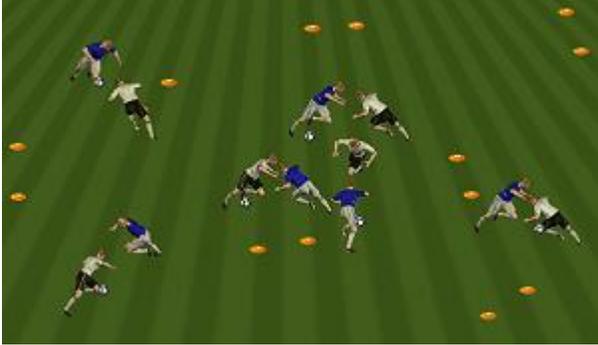
	<p>attempting to unfreeze the player.</p>	
<p>Knock balls out with front foot pass</p>	<p>Each player has a ball and dribbles through the 15 yard by 15 yard grid.</p> <p>They attempt to hit other players in the grid with their soccer ball using a front foot pass.</p>	
<p>2v1 directional</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and then subdivided. Each team of two takes up a position on opposite sides of a 10 yard by 7 yard grid.</p> <p>The activity starts with two players bringing the ball in and one opponent coming out to defend.</p> <p>Demand the players to take on the opponent and decide to pass with the front foot or dribble by the opponent.</p>	
<p>4v4 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>	



## U9 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

<p>Pattern dribbling</p>	<p>Each player starts with a ball in a 15 yard by 15 yard grid.</p> <p>Players are instructed to touch the ball in the following patters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inside of foot/outside of foot</li><li>• Small touch/bigger touch</li><li>• Stop/go</li><li>• Forward/back</li><li>• Chop touch/get away touch</li><li>• Roll/go</li></ul>	
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<p>Passive opposition</p>	<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>Each player dribbles the ball at their opponent and uses a pattern to avoid a collision.</p>	
<p>1v1 gate game</p>	<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 make activity competitive.</p>	
<p>1v1 directional</p>	<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>	

4v4 game

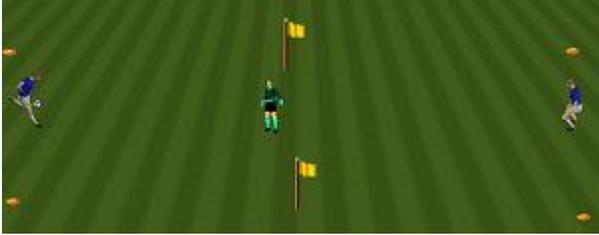
It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?

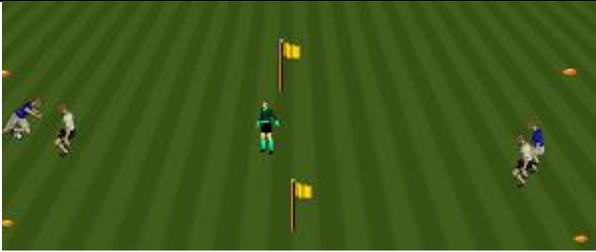
Has your session had an impact on the players?



## U9 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 shooting</p>	<p>Groups of three are formed with one player filling the role of the goal keeper. The field is set up with the goal in the middle. The two remaining players are placed on opposite sides of the goal.</p> <p>A player starts the activity by taking a shot. If the keeper makes the save, the ball is then rolled to the player on the opposite side who takes a shot after receiving the ball.</p> <p>Make sure the players always shoot a moving ball.</p> <p>Shots should be low, early, and on target.</p>	
<p>2 shooting at 2</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and subdivided into groups of two. Each group of two defends a goal that is separated by 18 yards.</p> <p>One player passes the ball to their team mate who takes a shot in an attempt to beat both goalkeepers at the opposite side. This group either makes a save and takes a shot or recovers a spare ball and takes a shot. Make sure the players alternate shooting opportunities.</p> <p>Have the players take a look for space in the goal before shooting without compromising time.</p>	

<p>Rapid Training 1v1 to goal</p>	<p>Same field set up a first activity with groups of five. One goalkeeper and two players on each side 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. When the ball enters the opposite side, the group on this side of the goal play 1v1.</p> <p>Coaches need to recognize shooting opportunities that are not taken as well as technical breakdowns.</p>	
<p>2v2 revolving game</p>	<p>The team is divided in halve. Each group places a player in goal and the remaining players start from either side of their defensive goal.</p> <p>The game starts with two players coming out for each team.</p> <p>When a goal is scored the team that was scored on leaves the field and is replaced with two new players from their team who enter with a ball.</p> <p>Keep score.</p>	
<p>4v4 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>	

## U9 1<sup>st</sup> Touch

**What:** The player gets a ground ball 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 if a cushion or wedge touch is needed.

Step 3: Place foot in path of ball.

Step 4: In case of cushion: withdraw foot on impact. In case of wedge: direct foot toward ball in direction of open space.

Step 5: Immediate chase to be the first one to ball.

<p>1st Touch Away From Pressure</p>	<p>Groups of two are formed and stand behind opposite cones that are ten yards apart.</p> <p>The player with the ball plays a pass to their partner to either side of the cone. The player receiving the ball must make their first touch to the opposite side of the cone before playing the ball back to one side of their partner's cone. Activity continues</p>	
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<p>Rapid Training Circle</p>	<p>Team is divided into two groups. Once group spreads out in a circle with a ball. The other group starts in the middle of the circle.</p> <p>Each player in the middle checks to an open ball and receives a hard pass. They take their first touch across their body and pass it back with the opposite foot.</p> <p>Variation is to receive the ball with the outside of the foot and play it back with the same foot.</p>	
<p>2v1 possession</p>	<p>Groups of three are placed in a 5 yard by 5 yard grid. One player starts as the defender.</p> <p>The group of two plays a mandatory minimum of two touch possession.</p> <p>Rotate the defender.</p>	
<p>2v2 possession</p>	<p>Groups of four are placed in a 7 yard by 7 yard grid. Two players start as the defenders.</p> <p>A mandatory minimum of two touch possession is use as a condition. Transition occurs naturally as the ball is won/lossed.</p>	

4v4 game

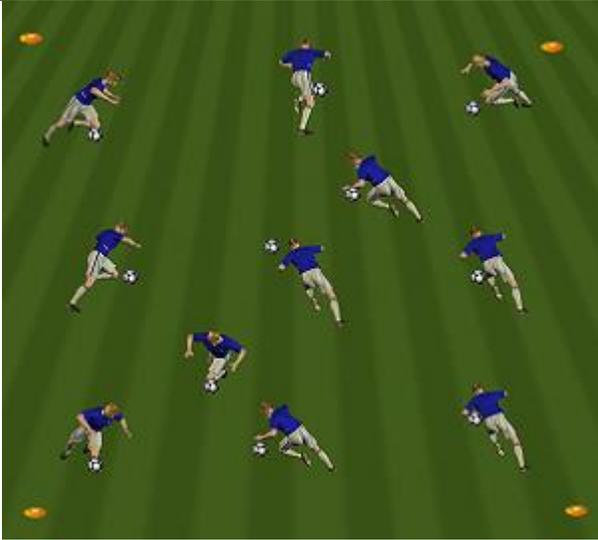
It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?

Has your session had an impact on the players?



## U9 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.

<p>Knock Out</p>	<p>Each player starts with a ball in a ten yard by ten yard grid.</p> <p>Players attempt to maintain possession while kicking other player's soccer balls out of the grid.</p> <p>When a player has their ball dispossessed, they run after it. If the player catches the ball before it stops rolling they can come right back into the activity. If the ball stops rolling they are required to do a small penalty before re-entering the activity.</p>	
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<p>1v1 Possession</p>	<p>Groups of two are formed and placed in a 5 yard by 5 yard grid.</p> <p>Each player attempts to have the ball when the coach stops the game.</p> <p>The ball changes possession when the ball is won by the opponent or when the player with the ball plays it off the field.</p>	
<p>2v2 possession</p>	<p>Groups of four are placed in a 7 yard by 7 yard grid. Two players start as the defenders.</p> <p>A mandatory minimum of two touch possession is use as a condition. Transition occurs naturally as the ball is won/lossed.</p>	

<p>2v2 game</p>	<p>Groups of four are subdivided into groups of two and play on a field 15 yards by 7 yards.</p> <p>Recognize when players force passes or turn into pressure.</p>	
<p>4v4 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>	

## U9 Instep Passing

**What:** Passing the ball with the top of the foot (shoelaces). Instep passes can be short, long, driven, or lofted.

**Where:** All parts of the field.

**When:** The player has time to plant their non kicking foot near the ball before making the pass.

**Why:** The most powerful way of accurately striking the ball.

**How:** Step 1: Approach the ball from an angle.

Step 2: Place the non kicking foot pointing in the direction of the target either slightly behind the ball for a flighted ball or even with the ball for a pass on the ground.

Step 3: In natural running motion point the toe down to offer the instep to the ball while building leg speed.

Step 4: Strike through the midline center of the ball.

Step 5: Continue stepping through the ball so to land on the kicking foot.

<p>Group of 3 Rapid Training</p>	<p>Groups of three are formed with two players starting opposite one player.</p> <p>One player passes the ball with the instep and follows the pass. Players play one touch passes back and forth.</p>	
<p>Rapid Training Circle</p>	<p>Team is divided into two groups. Once group spreads out in a circle with a ball. The other group starts in the middle of the circle.</p> <p>Each player in the middle checks to an open ball and receives a pass and passes the ball back with the instep. They then find a new player on the outside of the circle to check to.</p>	

<p>Rapid Training Pairs</p>	<p>Groups of four are subdivided into groups of two and placed 15 yards across each other. The players pass the ball back and forth with their partner.</p> <p>Once the switch command is called by the coach, the player on each side with the ball gets their head up and finds the player on the opposite side who does not have the ball. They then make an instep pass to this player.</p>	
<p>2v2+2</p>	<p>Three groups of two are formed and placed in a 8 yard by 10 yard grid. One group starts off as the defending team.</p> <p>The remaining four players keep possession. When the ball is lost the team responsible for losing the ball becomes the defending team.</p>	
<p>4v4 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>	



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**Section III: Formations**

## U9 Formations/Positional Responsibilities

Formations are used to place players on the field by positions. Formations are simply, 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 U9 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 a long term player development plan winning will occur.

At the U9 age group, teams play 7 a side. We recommend choosing between a 2-3-1 and 1-3-2 formation. Both of these formations promote the principles of play through the allocation of players.

Positional Responsibilities are listed below for each formation.

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

<p>Center Midfield</p>	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting diamonds</li> <li>• Change point of attack</li> <li>• Recover defensively</li> <li>• Maintaining possession</li> <li>• Create scoring opportunities</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• 1v1 attacking and defending</li> </ul>	
<p>Outside Midfield</p>	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide width in attack</li> <li>• Crossing</li> <li>• Recovery runs</li> <li>• Protect weak side in defending third</li> <li>• Maintaining possession</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• 1v1 attacking and defending</li> </ul>	
<p>Forward</p>	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create scoring opportunities</li> <li>• Finish scoring opportunities</li> <li>• Make check runs to ball</li> <li>• Make diagonal runs</li> <li>• Be first line of defense</li> <li>• Maintain possession</li> </ul>	

<p>1-3-2</p>	<p>Qualities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong offensively</li> <li>• Allows for defender to become a communicator and organizer</li> <li>• Outside midfield needs to recover</li> <li>• Provides width in attack</li> <li>• Midfield players must support attack and maintain possession.</li> <li>• Midfield players must have commitment to defending and recovery</li> <li>• Forward begin to learn to work with another player to unbalance the defense</li> <li>• Center midfield connects the two diamonds as long as the defender support the ball from the ball side of the field</li> </ul>	
<p>Defender</p>	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1v1 defending</li> <li>• Cover</li> <li>• Communicate with midfield players on recovery, tracking, and marking.</li> <li>• Playing possession out of back</li> <li>• Connecting with midfield players at supporting angles in attack</li> </ul>	
<p>Center Midfield</p>	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting diamonds</li> <li>• Change point of attack</li> <li>• Recover defensively</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• 1v1 attacking and defending</li> </ul>	

<p>Outside Midfield</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide width in attack</li><li>• Crossing</li><li>• Recovery runs</li><li>• Protect weak side in defending third</li><li>• Maintaining possession</li><li>• 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</li><li>• 1v1 attacking and defending</li></ul>	
<p>Forwards</p>	<p>Positional Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create scoring opportunities</li><li>• Finish scoring opportunities</li><li>• Make check runs to ball</li><li>• Make diagonal runs</li><li>• Be first line of defense</li><li>• Maintain possession</li><li>• Work with other forward to unbalance defense</li></ul>	



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**Section IV: Tactics**

Soccer Source 360's U9 Curriculum has eight tactical topics that need to be introduced to all U9 players to lay a foundation for the future. These topics include:

- Connecting
- Immediate Pressure
- Quick Restarts
- Spatial Awareness
- Splitting
- 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 u9 curriculum that includes improvisation, technique, and tactics. Lay a strong foundation so the players will be ready for the U10 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

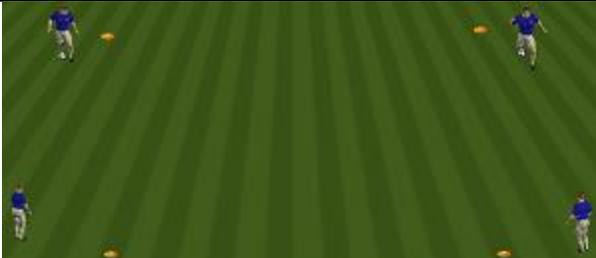
#### Teaching Methods

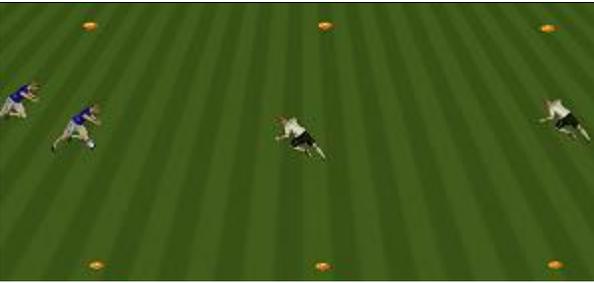
- Coaching the individual – Most players are not disturbed and the player receives feedback for themselves.
- Coaching over the top – Provide needed information while the activity is taking place.
- Coaching at a natural stoppage – Using the coaching moment when the game was stopped on its own. Ex. Ball 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.

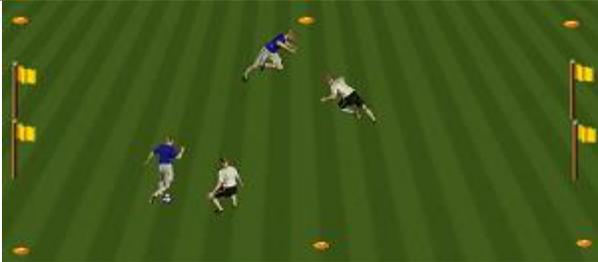
## U9 Wall Pass

- 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.

<p>Rapid Training wall pass</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and subdivided into groups of two.</p> <p>Each pair is separated by 20 yards from the other pair and begin to pass the ball back and forth with their partner. On the coaches command of switch the player with the ball in each group dribbles across the open space and completes a wall pass with the</p>	
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	<p>remaining player on their new side of the activity.</p> <p>Make sure the first pass is made with the front foot to the supporting player's far foot. The supporting player needs to get in a side on position to make the second pass back.</p>	
<p>2v1 wall pass walk through</p>	<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 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 ladder</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and subdivided into groups of two. Two players begin on the end line with a ball on an 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>	

	<p>Once they make it past the first defender they enter the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the grid and the new defender applies high pressure and the players with the ball attempt to beat this player with wall pass support.</p>	
2v2 to goal	<p>Groups of four play 2v2 to goal on a field 12 yards wide by 18 yards long.</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>	

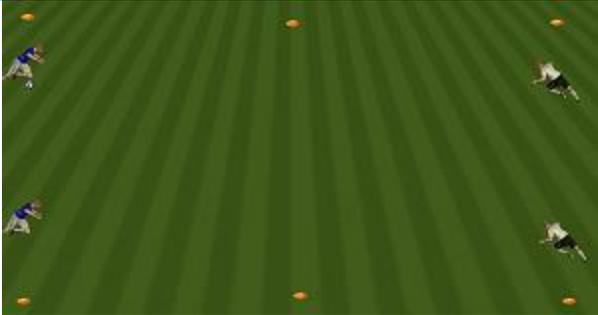
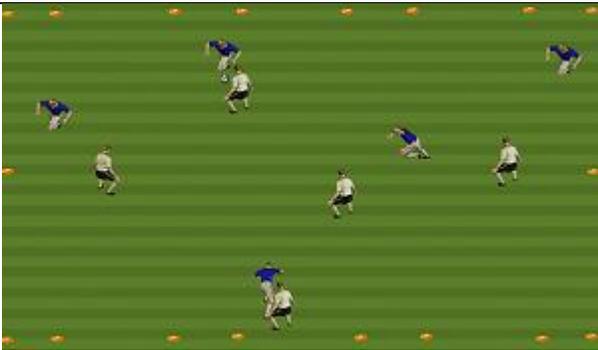
## U9 When to dribble? When to Pass?

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.

<p>1v1 with bail out</p>	<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>	
<p>2v1 ladder</p>	<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</p>	

	<p>option to make a wall pass or dribble the defender.</p> <p>Once they make it past the first defender, they enter the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the grid and the new defender applies high pressure to the players with the ball.</p>	
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>	

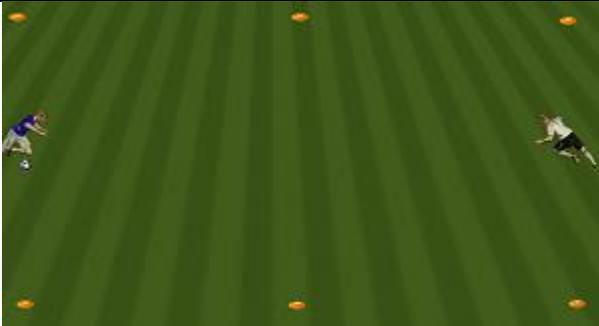
## U9 Connection

**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

<p>1v1</p>	<p>Groups of two are formed and placed in a 7 yard by 12 yard grid. One player starts in each end line and play 1v1 with the attacker attempting to dribble over the end line.</p> <p>Use this activity to have the players realize their position is relative to the ball.</p>	
<p>2v2</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and play 2v2 to goal.</p> <p>Make sure each player assumes a position relative to the ball. All the players should be within a 10 yard radius with few exceptions.</p> <p>When a long pass is made the player making the pass needs to move to support the ball.</p>	

<p>3v3</p>	<p>Groups of six are formed and play 3v3 to goal.</p> <p>Make sure each player assumes a position relative to the ball. All the players should be within a 15 yard radius with few exceptions.</p> <p>When a long pass is made the player making the pass needs to move to support the ball.</p>	
<p>4v4</p>	<p>Groups of eight are formed and the players play 4v4 on a field 25 yards by 40 yards</p> <p>Make sure each player assumes a position relative to the ball. All the players should be within a 25 yard radius with few exceptions.</p> <p>When a long pass is made the player making the pass needs to move to support the ball.</p>	
<p>5v5</p>	<p>Has your session had an impact on the players?</p> <p>Is their connection between the forward, midfield, and defensive lines.</p>	

## U9 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.

<p>Sequence Passing</p>	<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>	
<p>3v1 Point to 'D'</p>	<p>Form groups of four and have the players play a 3v1 possession game.</p> <p>Each player must point to the defender. This will help the player keep their vision focused on the ball and the opponent.</p> <p>You can now see if they recognize the space by the player's first touch and passing decisions.</p>	

<p>3v2 Point to 'D'</p>	<p>Same as above with an additional defender.</p>	
<p>5v5 Point to 'D'</p>	<p>Divide the team in half and have the players play 5v5 with the condition of pointing to the closest defender.</p>	
<p>5v5</p>	<p>It is all about connection. Can the players connect the lesson plan into the game?  Has your session had an impact on the players?</p>	

## U9 Splitting

Splitting is a term used to describe the role a defender takes when they are alone against two attackers, one of which has the ball. The defender takes a distance and angle that allows them to split their attention between the player with the ball and the other opponent. The distance and angle allows the player to keep both attackers in front of the defender and able to stop the dribbling player from getting behind them, and also apply low pressure to the other attacker if the ball is passed.

We teach splitting at the U9 age group for the following reasons:

- Patience- the concept of splitting teaches players to be patient in defending and not rush the ball. This helps players from over committing in 1v1 situations.
- Cover- the concept of cover will be introduced at the U11 age level. If players understand splitting they will already be exposed to some of the principles of cover.
- Number up in attack- the players with the ball get quality age appropriate repetition to develop attacking abilities in a numbers up situation.

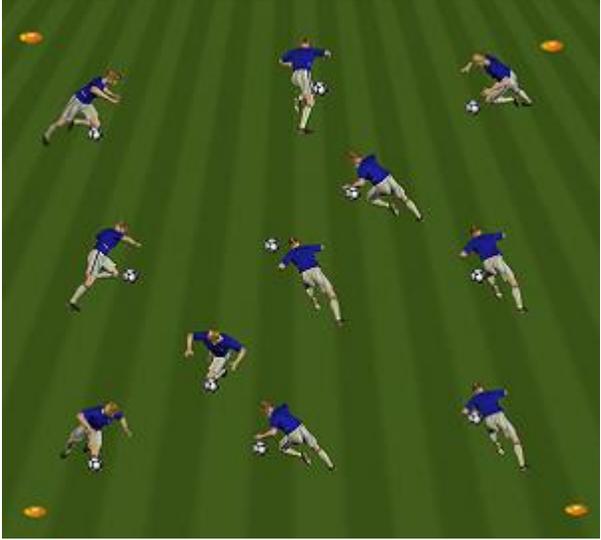
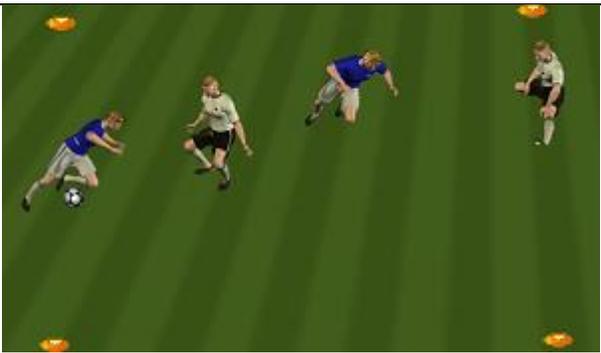
<p>1v1 Directional</p>	<p>Groups of two are formed and placed on opposite sides of a 5 yard by 10 yard grid. Each player has a ball.</p> <p>The player with the ball passes the ball to their partner who then attempts to dribble the ball by the opponent and across the end line under control.</p>	
<p>2v1 Directional</p>	<p>Groups of three are formed with two attackers starting on one end line of a 15 yard by 10 yard grid. The defender begins at the opposite end line.</p> <p>The play starts with the defender passing the ball to one of the attackers. The defender then closes down space and picks the right distance and angle to split the attackers.</p> <p>The attackers attempt to beat the opponent and stop the ball on the end line.</p>	

<p>3v2 to goals</p>	<p>Groups of five formed and play a soccer game 3v2.</p> <p>Rotate the groups that play numbers down often.</p>	 An aerial view of a soccer field showing a 3v2 drill. Three players in blue jerseys are positioned on the left side of the field, and two players in white jerseys are on the right. Orange cones are placed around the field to define the drill area.
<p>4v2 to goals</p>	<p>Groups of six are formed and placed on a soccer field with 35 yard by 18 yard dimensions.</p> <p>The players play 4v2 to goal. Rotate the groups that play numbers down often.</p>	 An aerial view of a soccer field showing a 4v2 drill. Four players in blue jerseys are on the left, and two players in white jerseys are on the right. Two yellow flags are placed on the right side of the field to mark the goal area. Orange cones are also visible.
<p>5v5</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>	 An aerial view of a soccer field showing a 5v5 drill. Five players in blue jerseys and five players in white jerseys are scattered across the field. A goal is visible on the right side of the field, and orange cones are placed around the perimeter.

## U9 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.

<p>Knock Out</p>	<p>Each player starts with a ball in a ten yard by ten yard grid.</p> <p>Players attempt to maintain possession while kicking other player's soccer balls out of the grid.</p> <p>When a player has their ball dispossessed, they run after it. If the player catches the ball before it stops rolling they can come right back into the activity. If the ball stops rolling they are required to do a small penalty before re-entering the activity.</p> <p>This activity simulates the best reaction when disposed: immediate chase.</p>	
<p>2v1 groups of four</p>	<p>Groups of four are formed and subdivided into groups of two and placed in a 8 yard by 8 yard grid. The attacking team always plays with two players and the defending team always plays with one player by having one player sit down on the field.</p> <p>When the defender wins the ball their team mate stands up and one of the</p>	

	players on the opposite team sits down.	
2v2v2	<p>Groups of six are subdivided into three groups of two and placed in a 8 yard by 12 yard grid.</p> <p>They play 4v2. When the defensive team wins the ball, the team of two that lost possession switches to the defensive team and the team that won the ball joins the other two attacking players in attempting to keep possession.</p>	
2v2	Groups of four play 2v2 to goal on a field 12 yards wide by 18 yards long.	
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>	

## U9 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.

5v5	<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>	
5v5 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>	

5v5	<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>	 An aerial photograph of a soccer field during a training session. The field is green with visible mowed stripes. Several players are scattered across the field, some wearing blue jerseys and others in white. Numerous orange cones are placed on the grass, likely for drills. The goalposts are visible at the top and bottom edges of the field.
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## U9 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.

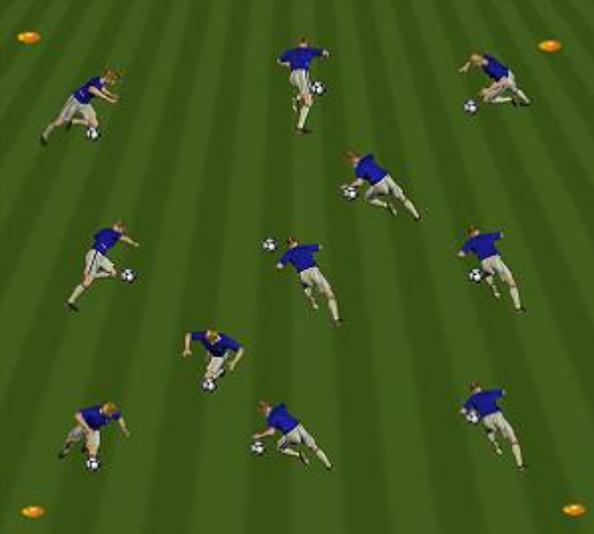
Step 3: Take an angle that denies penetration and forces the player in one direction.

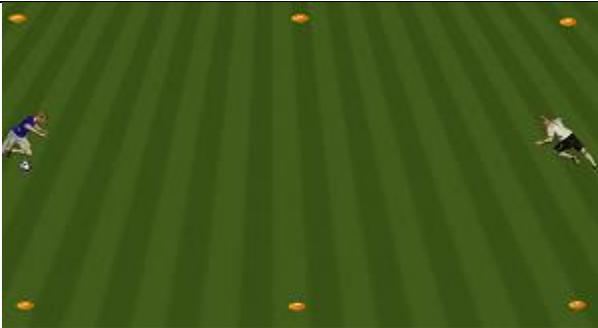
Step 4: Set feet so that they can be moved quickly. Standing on balls of feet with knees bent.

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.

<p>Knock Out Used to work on immediate chase</p>	<p>Each player starts with a ball in a ten yard by ten yard grid.</p> <p>Players attempt to maintain possession while kicking other player's soccer balls out of the grid.</p> <p>When a player has their ball dispossessed, they run after it. If the player catches the ball before it stops rolling they can come right back into the activity. If the ball stops rolling they are required to do a small penalty before re-entering the activity.</p>	
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<p>3v1 with Transition</p>	<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>Make sure the defender closes space as the ball is moving from a pass and they do not over commit. Can they make play predictable?</p>	
<p>1v1</p>	<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>	
<p>2v2 to goal</p>	<p>Groups of four are subdivided into groups of two and placed on a 20 yard by 12 yard field with a small sided goal on each end line.</p> <p>Teams of two play a game and concentrate on pressuring the ball.</p>	

5v5

Has your session had an impact on the players?

Have they connected the lesson plan to the game?

