

Soccer through Soccer Letter

By Diana Groth, Assistant Technical Director

Did you plan your next season yet?

Age appropriated season plans



Age group: 5-12

The new season is almost here, did you plan for next season already? A good preparation and a structured season plan will help to guide a team safely through a season and allows us to develop the players' and teams' skills equally. If we coaches follow a structured season and an idea through the season, it will make it easier to plan the practice sessions, and to develop and challenge the players systematically and equally. However, the content for structuring a season requires an age-appropriate approach. The way girls and boys learn depends on the age and the level of their skills. In this newsletter we will give you an idea how to structure a season plan for different age groups.

Age group recommendation: 6-8

Principle of blocks.

At this age kids most of the kids have some playing experience at the club level or through other kids' soccer programs. A great versatility of different movements in playing form is still crucial at this age, but now it is a good time to add some more soccer specific content. Especially, if the kids now practice twice a week. We recommend non-complex exercises that are easy to set up and do not require much explanation. The tasks should be packed into fun games and competitions. The block principle consists of 6 blocks that are connected to the basic skills in soccer:

Running games: such as tag, team relays or competitions, etc. These games are an easy and fun way to develop speed, agility, quick reaction, and quick movement skills. These are the skills we want to foster for this age group.

Dribbling: The kids will learn to control the ball. Activities such as running with the ball, changing the directions, different objectives, and small competitions will help the kids to get a feeling for the

ball and to control the ball while running with the ball. For this they simply need to run with the ball, change directions, with different objectives, and with small competitions. This block can be packed into many fun small-sided games.

1v1: Here the kids will learn the very basics of attacking with the ball and defending. In most of the games we see some kids that dominate and some other kids that don't have a chance to get on the ball. With the 1v1 block we want to create an environment where the kids have a high number of repetitions and learning moments to foster the individual development.

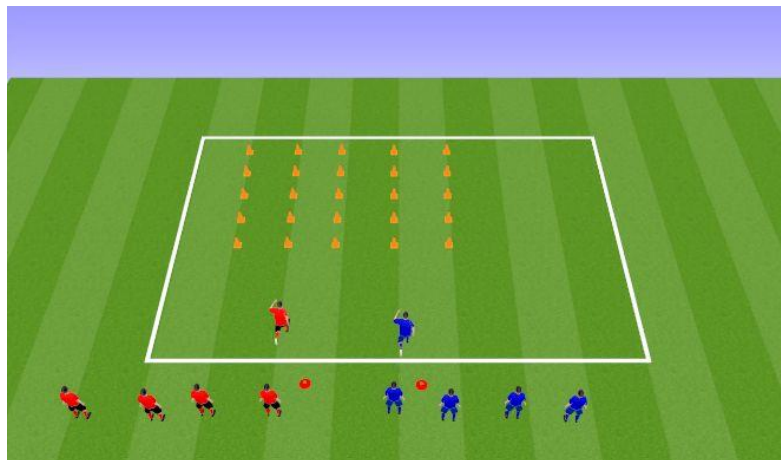
Playing together: in games and superiority number (for instance: 3v1, 4v2, etc.) the players learn to pick up their heads, they learn to move off the ball to get open, they will learn to see a better opportunity, etc. The main objective is not to improve the passing quality (which happens simultaneously), the main objective for the kids is to develop the ability to read and see the game.

Shooting/finishing: Again, at this age we want the kids learn the very basics of shooting and finishing. Small competitions and small tricks such as shooting the ball out of the hand will force the player to use the laces, or a rolling ball will facilitate the shot on the goal.

Free play: Here we want all kids to participate, the shy kid, the dominant kid, the quiet kid, etc. All should be motivated to play and to be creative in small sided-games, not bigger than 3v3. It is important here that we want to praise every kid. It is also crucial that they can play free without being overcoached with too many instructions. This is their game!

Recommendation: we recommend running a block for 2-3 consecutive weeks depending on the number of sessions they have during the week. You can also repeat your exercises in the next same block. The kids will develop quicker if they know the exercise and can focus on the performance rather than on understanding a new exercise. The blocks should not be longer than 3 weeks as the kids want to have and want to try new things! Below you will find practice examples for each block.

Block: Running Games



Set up:

- 25 cones (as shown in the picture)
- two starting cones 12yds away from the cones.
- two teams of 4-5 players, lining up on the starting cone. (if you have more players, set up another field).
- the first 4 players have a pinnie in their hand (different color for each team)

Execution:

- on the coach's command the first player of each team run and put the pinnie on the cone, then he runs back high-fives the next player.
- a team wins if they have all their pinnies in connected in one line (horizontal, vertical, or diagonal)
- once all 4 pinnies are in the field, the players need to replace them until a team wins.

Blob Tag

Set up:

- a field of 15x15yds or bigger if you have a bigger group.

Execution:

A simple and incredibly fun variation of tag begins with two people as "It." The goal is to run around with hands held and tag the other players. Whenever someone is tagged, they join hands as well. The only people able to tag others are the players at each end with free hands. The tagged group becomes larger and larger and able to surround the other players. The game ends when every player is part of the blob.

Variation:

For large group of players or players that may get carried away and make the game too crazy, try splitting the blob into groups of four or six players as it grows. All the blobs chase the other players' blobs until every player is tagged and the game is over.

Soccer Tag

Set up:

- a field of 15x15yds or bigger if you have a bigger group.

Execution:

This extremely active and exciting game combines soccer and tag. Two players have a soccer ball and are thus "It." A person is tagged if the soccer ball hits their foot when kicked by "It." Make sure your players know they must hit the feet of the other players, not their bodies. The winner of this fun game is the player left un-tagged.

Animal Tag

Set up:

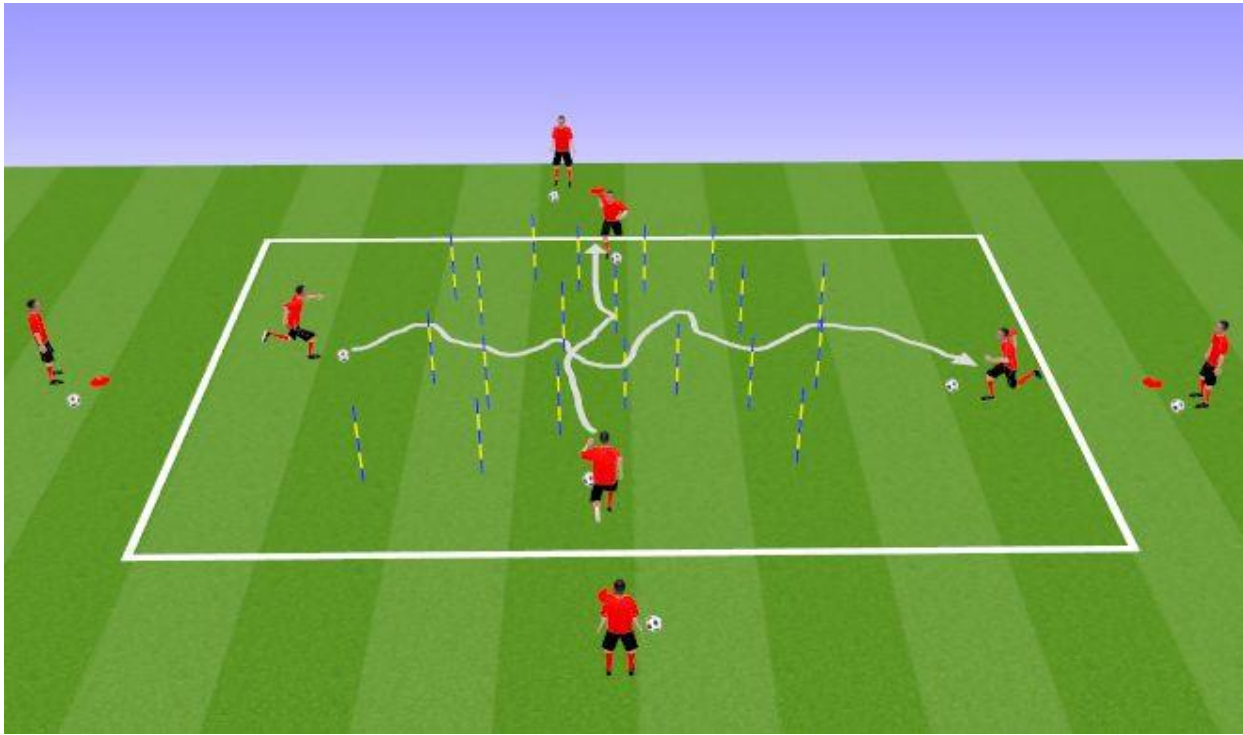
- a field of 15x15yds or bigger if you have a bigger group.

Execution:

At the start of this chaotic and crazy tag game, the players are divided into four groups of animals, a zookeeper, and a monkey. The zookeeper must put all the animals in one of four cages by type, but the monkey can release them by tagging them. Each group of animals must move as if they are the animal designated, i.e. horses prance, kangaroos hop, lions walk on all fours and roar. If the zookeeper manages to lock up all the animals in a group before the monkey releases any, those animals must stay in the designated cage. The game ends when all the animals are caged, a difficult outcome with the monkey constantly releasing everyone.

The tag games above are just examples. Basically, all tag games for kids are perfect to develop speed, agility, different movements, balance, etc. Also, tag games are great as ice-breaker games when you start a new season with a new team and new players.

Block: Dribbling



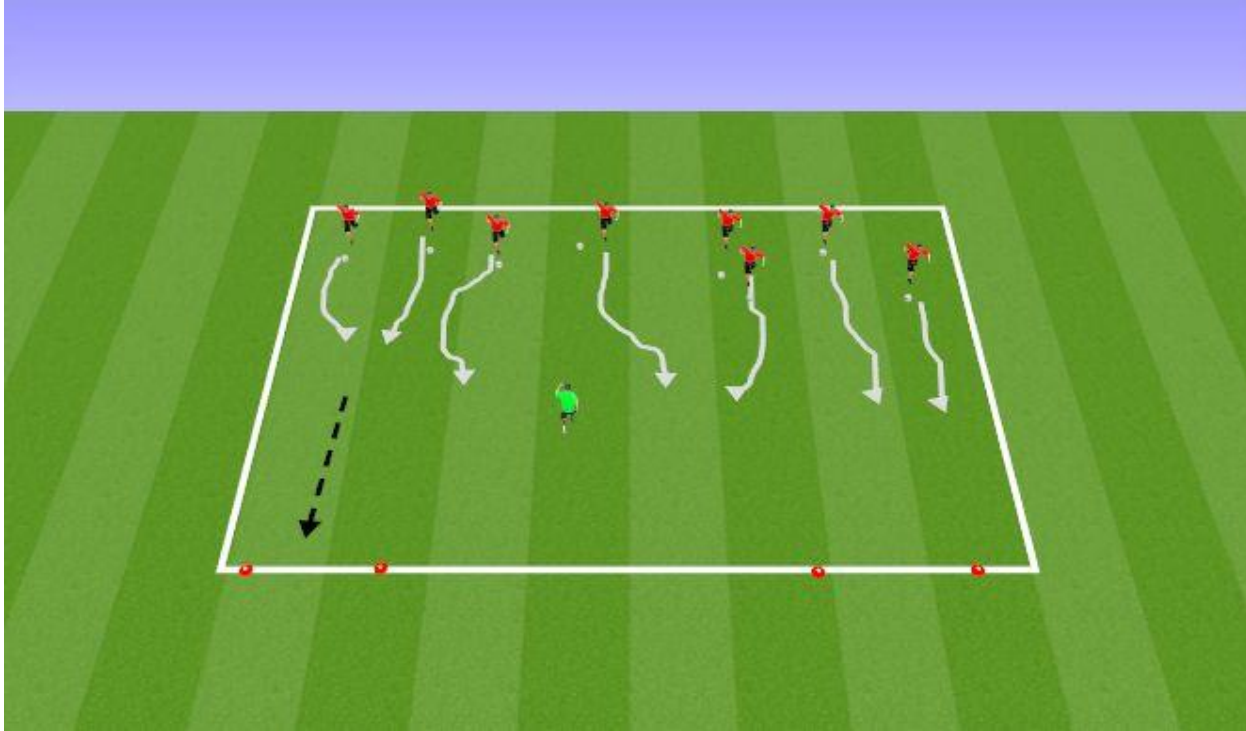
Dribbling Jungle

Set up:

- a field of 20x20 yds with several poles.
- 4 starting points with cones.
- at each 2-3 players.

Execution:

- At coach's command, the first player of each group starts to dribble to the other side. Then the next player starts to dribble.
- implement different dribbling variation: inside, outside, left foot/right foot only, rollover, etc.
- implement time limit or competition, etc. to vary the speed and situation.



Shark and Minnows

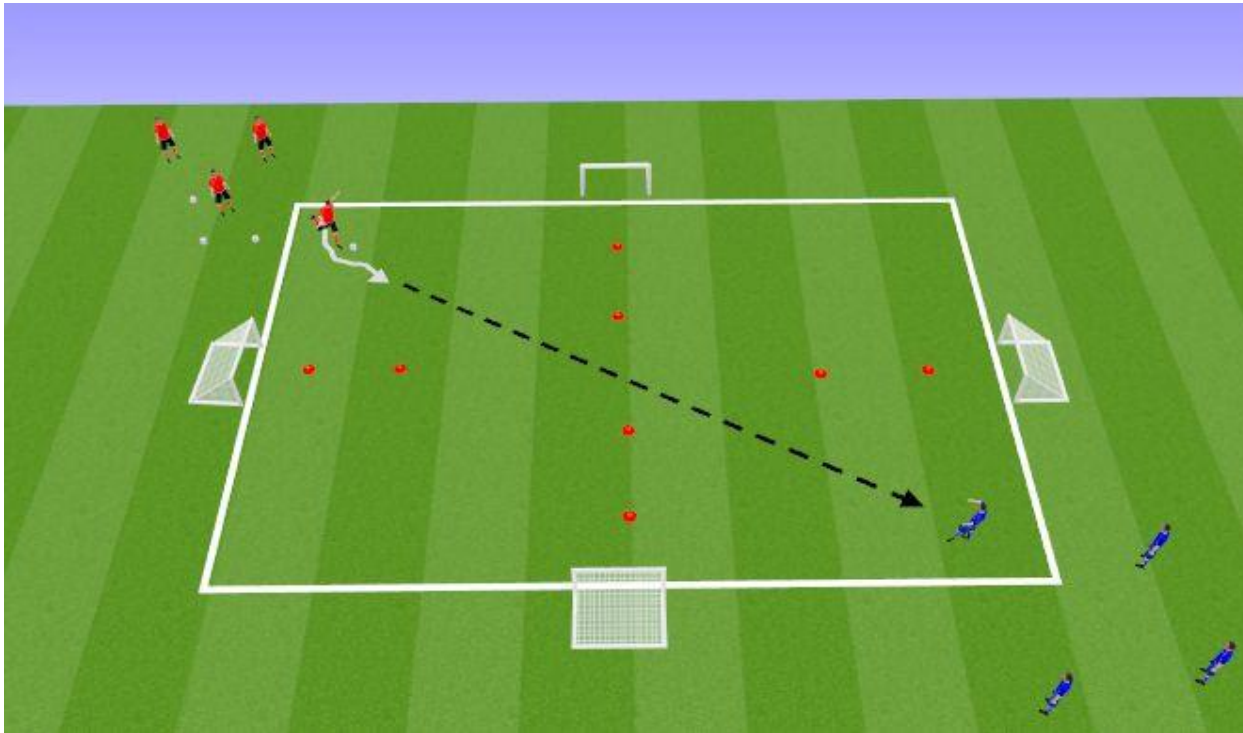
Set up:

- a field of 20x20yds
- 2 gates at the end of the field.
- every player has a ball.

Execution:

- on coach's command the players start to dribble.
- their goal is to dribble to other side through the gate.
- the coach tries to steal the ball.
- If a player loses the ball, he or she becomes a shark.

Block: 1v1



Set up:

- a field of 15x15yds with mini one goal on each side.
- set up a gate in front of every mini goal.
- 2 groups of 3-4 players

Execution:

- red group starts with the ball. The first starts to dribble and then passes diagonally to the first player of the blue group. The passer becomes a defender, the receiver tries to score on any mini goal. The player must unlock the mini goals by dribbling through a gate first. If the defender wins the ball, he or she can score, but must unlock the mini goals first also.
- if the ball is out of bounds or if a player scored, the game is over and the next players starts a new round.
- The players change roles after every turn.

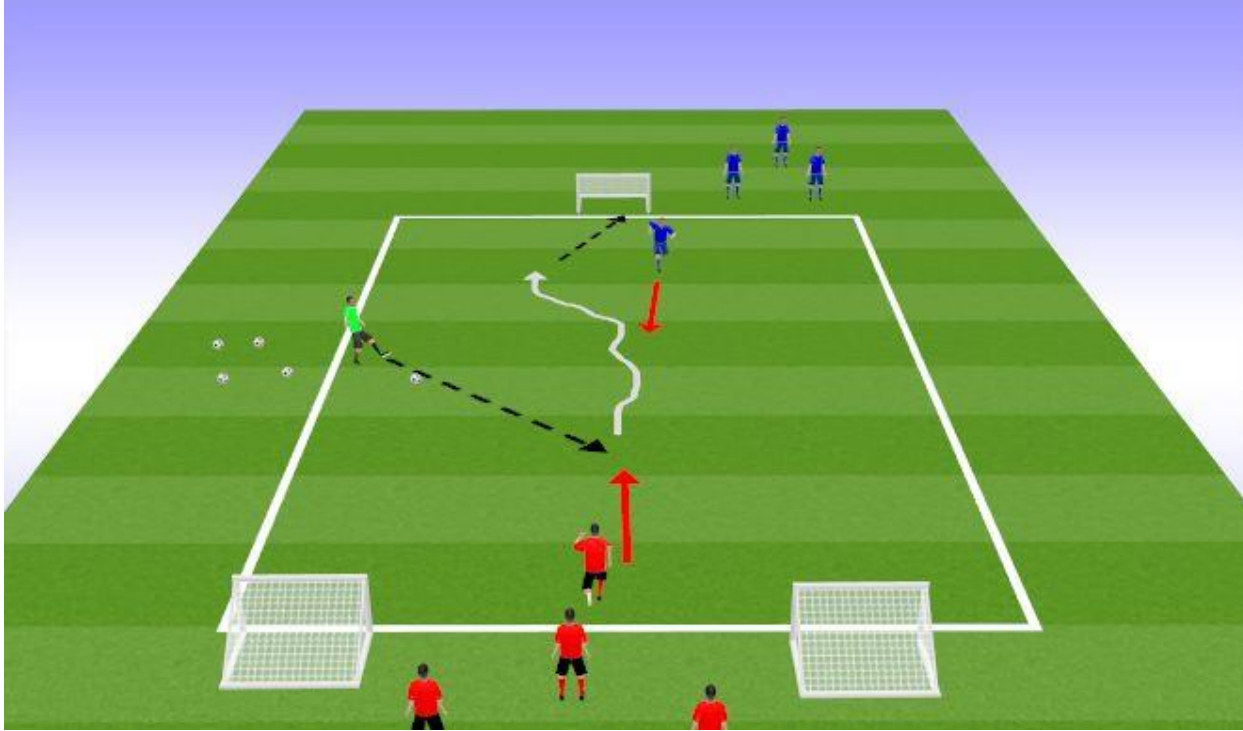


Set up:

- a field of 20x15yds with one goal and a goalie.
- mark a halfway line with cones.
- 2 groups of 3-4 players

Execution:

- red group starts as the defending team next to the goal.
- blue group starts as the attacking team, the first player starts at the halfway line.
- The coach passes the ball to the attacker who tries to score on the goal (1 point). With the pass the defender enters the field and tries to win the ball. If the defender wins the ball and passes back to the coach, he or she gets a point.
- The players change roles after every turn.

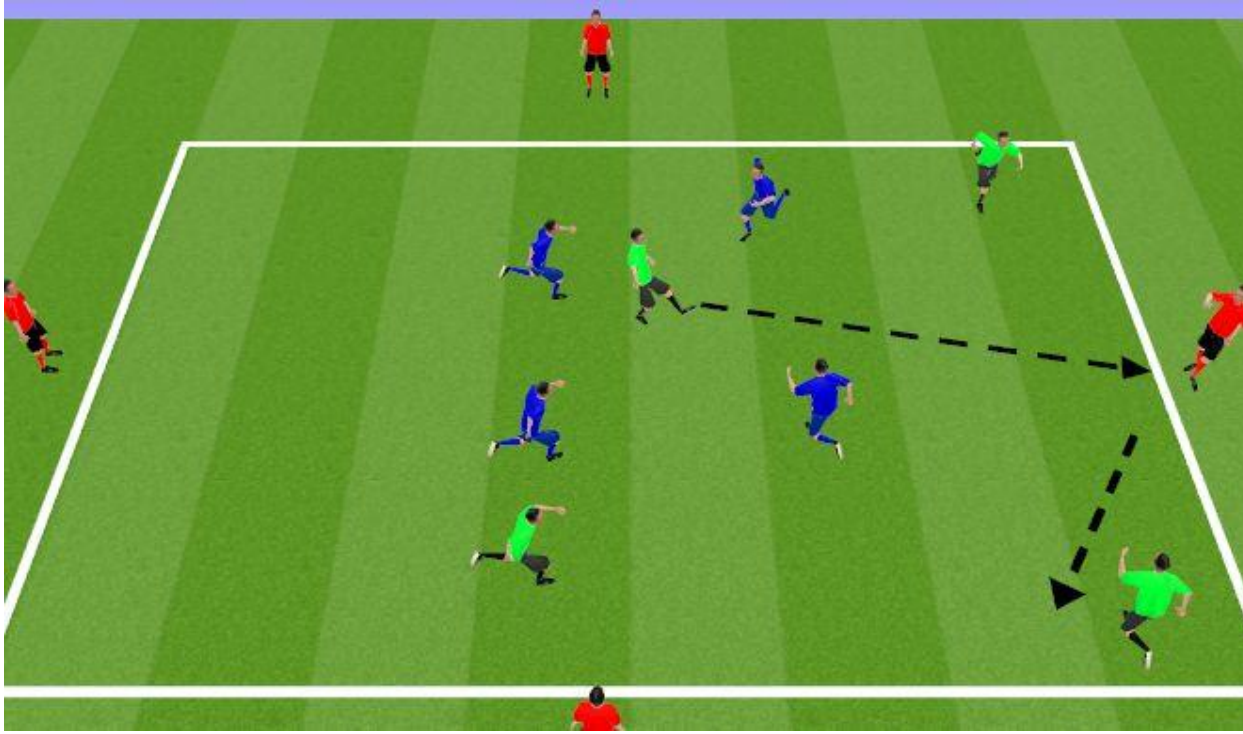
**Set up:**

- a field of 20x15yds with one mini goal on one side, and 2 mini goals on the other side.
- 2 groups of 3-4 players.

Execution:

- red team starts to attack, and the blue team starts as the defending team.
- the coach passes to the first player of the red who then tries to score on the mini goal. With the pass the defender enters the field and tries to win the ball. If the defender wins the ball, he or she can score on either mini goal on the other side.
- The players change roles after every turn.

Block: Playing together

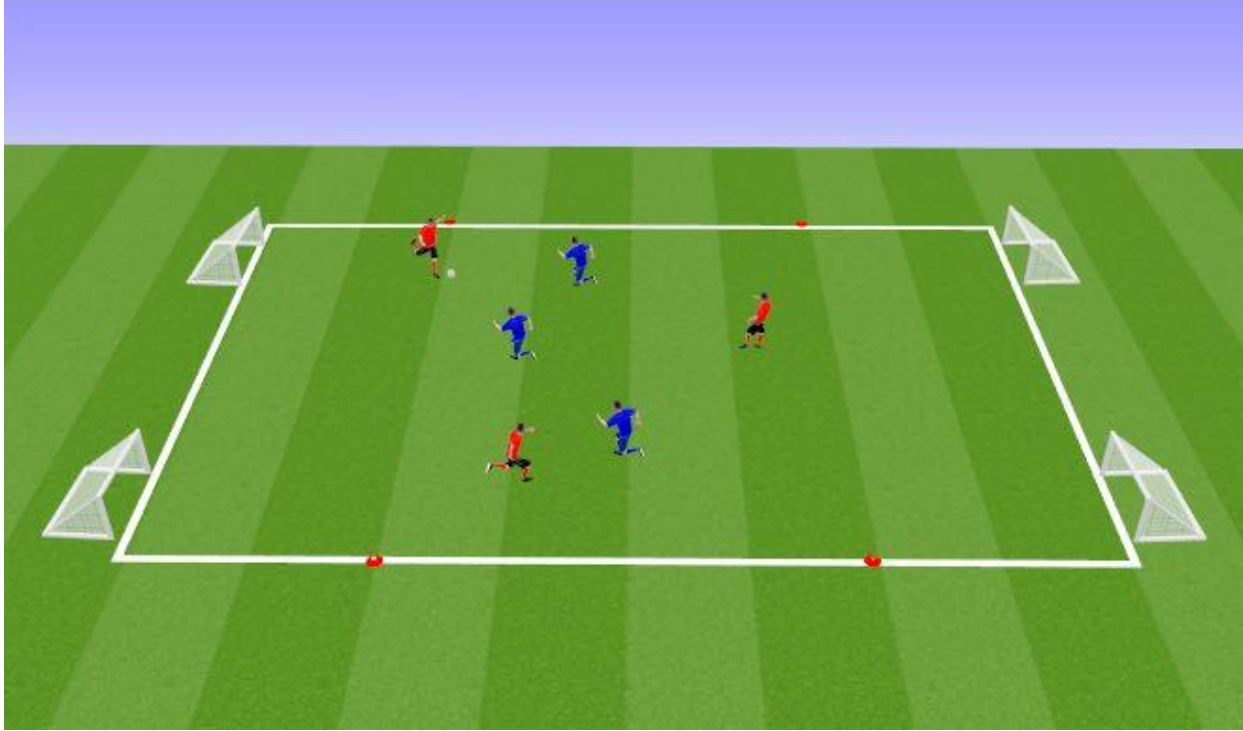


Set up:

- a field of 20x20yds.
- 3 teams of 4 players.
- 1 team is spread on the outside of the field.

Execution:

- free 4v4 in the field. 5/10 consecutive passes=1 point. The team in possession should use the outside players to create triangles and numerical superiorities.
- if the game is too easy you can limit the touches of the outside players, or the players in possession, etc.
- switch the outside players frequently.

**Set up:**

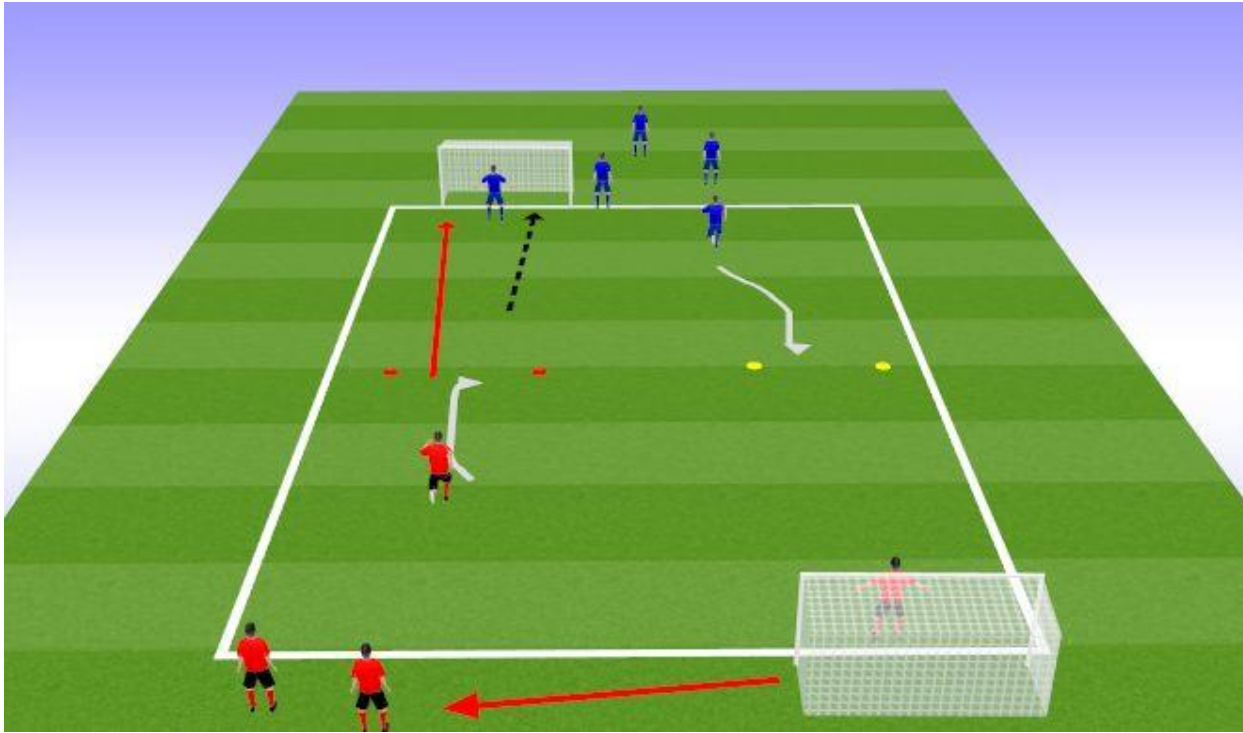
- a field of 28x22yds with 4 mini goals.
- 2 teams of 3 players.
- set up a scoring zone with cones on each side.

Execution:

- free 3v3 game, player must be in the scoring zone to score.

Variation:

- mark the goals with pinnies or cones with team colors. Teams can score only on their marked goals or opposite color. Change the pinnies and goals frequently to force the players to pick up their heads and adjust to the new situation.



Set up:

- a field of 20x20yds
- 2 groups of 3-4 players.
- set up 2 cones or a gate 10-11yds in front of each goal.

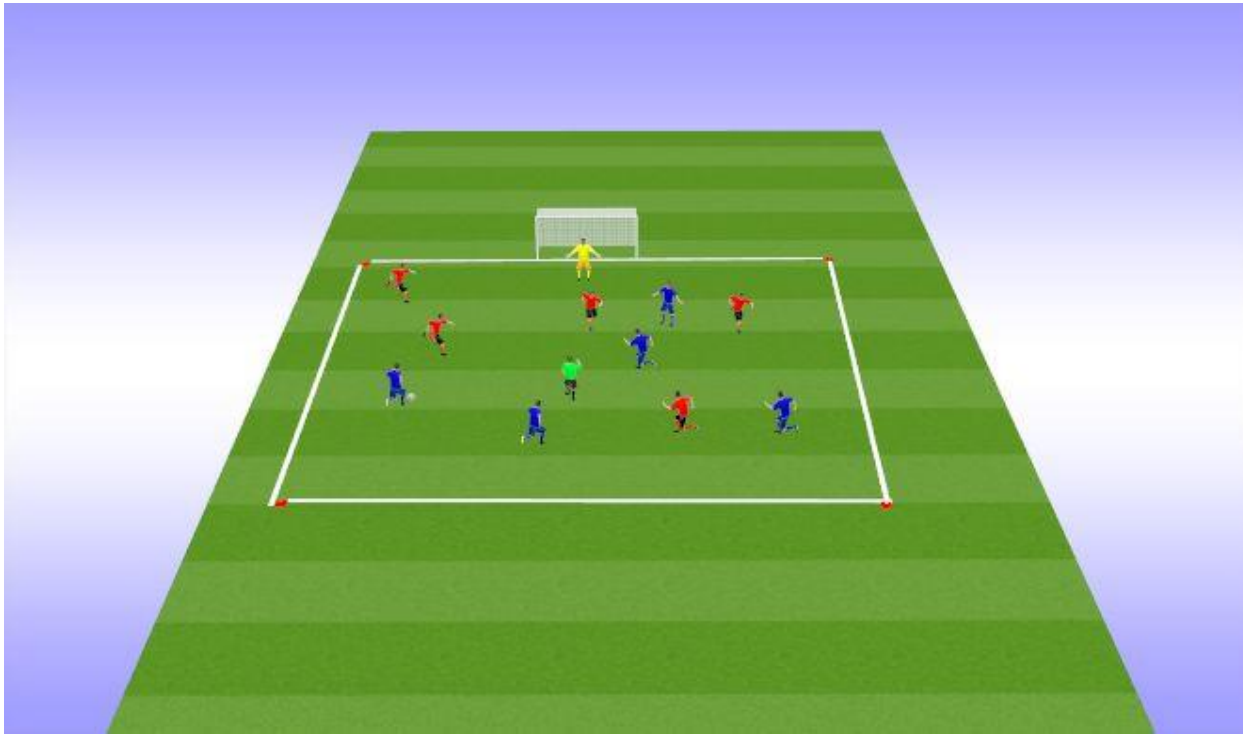
Execution:

- one player of each team starts as a goalie. The first player of each group starts to dribble to the opposite and tries score before the gate. The shooter becomes a goalie and the goalie lines up to shoot.
- create a competition: 4-5min > who scores the most goals?

Variation:

- player must kick the ball forward and must then finish before the gate
- the player must do a trick before finishing.

Block: Free Play



Set up:

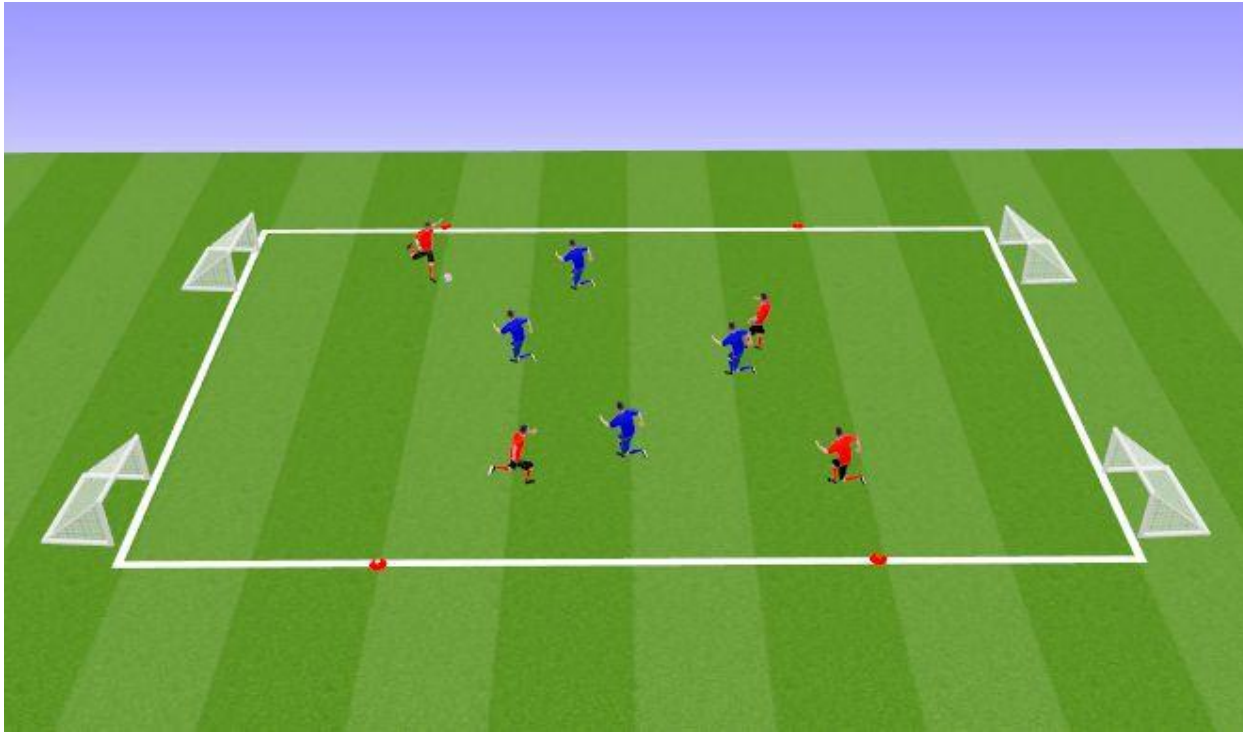
- a field of 30x20yds, one goal.
- 2 teams of 5 players and one goalie.

Execution:

- free game. The team that is defending first can score by winning the ball and passing it to the coach. The attacking team tries to score on the goal. If either team scores 5 goals, the teams switch their role.

Variation:

- a second coach plays with the attacking team > 5 + 1 vs 5.

**Set up:**

- a field of 25x25yds with 4 mini goals
- 2 teams of 4 players.

Execution:

- free game. The game on 4 goals provokes the players to use the space of the entire field and the interplay of the players.

Age group recommendation: 8-10

periodization with the main focus on the basics

The more developed cognitive and motor skills of the 10-12 years allow to teach technical and tactical basics. If we have a structured plan for the season, it will help us to reach the learning objectives for the season. We all know that the concentration ability is more developed at that age which makes it easier to teach the technical and tactical basics, and we coaches should take advantage of it. Of course, fun should be part of every practice session. We suggest structuring the training content and the focus systematically with a periodization. We suggest focusing on a topic for a block of 4 weeks, for instance the focus on dribbling. The practice sessions in a block should be planned in many varied forms, fun, in game and in competition forms in connection with cognitive and coordinative challenges to keep

the concentration and learning level high during that block. Additionally, a good and structured season plan helps to facilitate many touches, less waiting time, and the learning outcome. When planning a session, we should consider the field space availability, the number of players, the equipment, the number of coaches that are available, the time of the training session and drinking breaks, and the time that is needed to set up a next exercise. In the following we want to illustrate an example of a season plan and some practice sessions on different focuses. At this age group we want to focus on the basics in dribbling, shooting, passing, receiving, and competition.

SEPTEMBER							OCTOBER							NOVEMBER							DECEMBER							JANUARY							FEBRUARY								
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Passing							Receiving and ball control							Dribbling and moves							shooting																						



focus on passing

Category: Technical: Passing & Receiving
Difficulty: Beginner

Diana Groth, Coming, United States of America
Individual-Adult Member

Warm up 1 (15 mins)



set up a field of 20x20.
every player has a pinnie tugged in (visible).
everyone plays against everyone: on coach's command, all players try to steal the pinnies of the players.
If a player gets another pinnie, he or she will tug it in visible.
who wins the most pinnies?
variation:
create teams > which team collects the most pinnies?

Warm up 2 (15 mins)



Set up a field of 20x20yds.
2 teams and one ball.
The team in possession tries to keep the ball in possession by passing it with hands.
The other team tries to intercept and to steal the ball.
5 consecutive passes = 1 point.
Which teams get the most points after 2 min?
Variation:
vary the amount of passes.
play with the foot.

Main part 1 (15 mins)



set up a hexagon, 5-6yds between the cones.
6 players and 2 balls.
the player with the ball passes to the next player clockwise.
After passing the player tries to chase the ball until he or she gets back to the cone.
Variation:
change the direction.
left or right foot only.
the players have to pass a small ball with the hands additionally counterclockwise.
add another ball.

Main part 2 (20 mins)



Set up a field of 30x24yds with 4 mini goals and a 7yds deep scoring zone.
team blue starts with a ball and 3 players against 1 defender of the red team.
the players can score only when they are in the scoring zone.
If the defender wins the ball, he or she can score on the opposite goals.
If the ball goes out of bounds or if either team scores, game is over and the next players start.
switch roles and teams frequently.
variation:
a second defender enters the field after a short time.

Final game (25 mins)



Set up 3 fields with 2 mini goals on each field.
6 teams of 2, 2 teams on each field.
one team starts with 2 players and a ball and try to score on the goal.
the other team starts with one defender. If the defender wins the ball, he can score as well. If the ball goes out of bounds or if either team scores, the defender switches with the other defender.
game time is 2 min. After 2min switch roles, now the other team starts with 2 players and a ball.
When the game is done, the winning team gets a point and is moving to the next field.
Who wins the tournament?

Age group recommendation: 10-12

planning by game phases

In this age group the players have learned and experienced the basics, and they are better developed in their physical, cognitive, and mental skills. Now the players can see and understand the game as a whole. Therefore, we want to focus on developing the ability to find solutions, technically and tactically, for different game situations. It is important that the players now learn in more complex game formats, for instance more players, bigger field, complex game situations, etc. We want to focus on finishing, creating chances, ball regaining and ball possession. We encourage to include or to coach the transition with every exercise as well. If your sessions focus on finishing, you also want to coach regaining the ball and defending.

Below you will find an example of a season plan and a couple examples of practice sessions.

	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
Finishing										
Creating chances										
Ball possession										
finishing										
Creating chances										
Ball possession										



Finishing

Category: Tactical: Attacking principles
Difficulty: Beginner

Diana Groth, Coming, United States of America
Individual-Adult Member

Screen 1

Set up:

set up a field, double penalty box.
2 teams of 4 players with balls.

execution:

the first player starts to dribble and tries to score on the opposite goal and becomes a defender then.

Player 2 then starts to dribble and tries to score, player 1 is defending. Then player 3 starts to dribble and plays together with player 1, and player 2 is defending. It continues until all players are on the field. After that the red team starts with the first player.

variation:

play with time limit (8 seconds per attack).



Screen 2

Set up:

Set a double penalty box.
3 teams of 4 plus 2 goalies.

execution:

2 teams are playing 4v4, the other team is sitting out at the half line. If one team scores, that team stays on the field and keeps the ball, the team that got scored on switches with the team that was sitting out.

Variation:

The team that scored keeps the ball but changes the direction of play. The team that is coming on has the ball.



Screen 3

set up:

42x28yds field with 2 goals and goalie, 2 end zones (12yds) and a middle zone (24yds).
2 teams of 4 players, 2 in the middle zone and 1 one in each end zone as shown in the picture.

execution:

The team plays 4v4 but the players cannot leave their zones. Players can score from any zone.

variation:

after a pass into the next zone, the passer can follow into the next zone.

play with time limit in the end zone, 6-7 seconds to finish.





Creating chances

Category: Tactical: Attacking principles
Difficulty: Beginner

Diana Groth, Coming, United States of America
Individual-Adult Member

Screen 1

Set up:

47x42yds field with one youth goal and 3 mini goals on the opposite side.

2 teams of 4 players.

execution:

the teams play 4v4, red starts the game and tries to score on the big goal. If blue wins the ball they can score on 3 mini goals. The players cannot leave their zones. The players cannot skip the middle zone. After 10 attacking attempts, the teams switch roles. Which teams scores the most goals?

variation:

players can skip the middle zone.

players have 3 touches only.



Screen 2

set up: 3 mini goals on top of the PK box.

1 group of defenders lines up next to the mini goals, and 1 group of attackers lines up behind the cone as shown in the picture. Distance between starting cone and mini goals can be adjusted to the skill level, size of the field, etc.

execution: the first player at the cone starts to dribble and passes to his or her teammate who tries to get open. With the pass the defender enters the field and tries to defend. The receiver tries to score on one of the three mini goals in a 1v1 situation. If the player scored, if the defender wins the ball, or if the ball goes out of bounds, the game is over. Now the passer is receiving and the defenders lines up behind his or her group again.

Switch group and roles after 3-4 rounds.

Coaching points:

The receiver should fake the defender before receiving the ball to create space when receiving the ball.



Screen 3

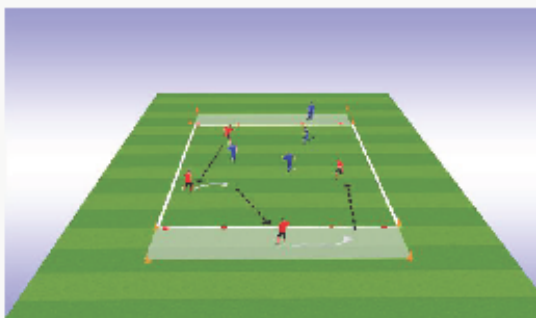
Set up: a field of 42x27yds with end zones (8-10yds) and 4 scoring gates as shown in picture as red cones.

2 teams of 4 players. 1 player of each team is in one end zone, 3 players of each team in the middle zone.

execution: 3v3 in the middle zone: a team can score by passing to his teammate in the end zone and the receiver then must complete a pass through the gate (from the back) to his teammate into the middle zone = 1 point. If a team scored, passer and receiver switch roles and the zone, player in the end zone goes into the middle zone, and the receiver goes into the end zone.

coaching points:

It is important to move off the ball before receiving.





ball possession

Category: Tactical: Possession
Difficulty: Beginner

Diana Groth, Coming, United States of America
Individual-Adult Member

Screen 1

set up: 32x17yds field with 3 zones. 3 teams of 4 players.

execution: 8v4 in the entire field. One team is defending and can have one defender in the end zone and 2 defenders in the middle zone. The teams in possession can move and leave their zones. The goal is to keep the ball in possession. The team that loses possession of the ball becomes the defending team and must stay in their zones.

coaching points: players need to recognize and use the open space in the different zones to keep the ball in possession.

variation: limit the amount of touches.



Screen 2

set up: 2 squares of 10x10yds. place some extra balls in the middle of the two fields. 2 teams of 4 players.

execution: players play 4v1 in one square, the team in possession gets one point after 10 consecutive completed passes. If the defender wins the ball, he plays into the other square to his teammates. One player (the closest one to the ball) of the team that just lost possession becomes a defender in the other square. If the defender touches the ball, he can grab a new ball and plays it into the other square. After a few rounds, the defender now has to win the ball to play it into the other square.

variation: limit the amount of touches.



Screen 3

set up: a 27x17yds field. with a mini goal on each side.

10 players per field, 3 start as defenders > 7v3

execution: the 7 players try to keep the ball in possession, if they complete 15 consecutive passes, they get one point. If the defending team wins the ball, they can score on any mini goal. If the ball goes out of bounds, the closest player grabs a new ball from the ball depot to keep the game going without breaks. Pick 3 new defenders after 2 minutes.

variation: after 15 completed passes, the team in possession can score on any mini goal as well.



To sum up, these are just examples on how to plan a season and can be easily adjusted. We recommend to plan your season age appropriated though to keep it fun, interesting and challenging for each age group.

If you are interested in other topics, please check our website: [Soccer through Soccer Newsletter](#)

As always, email me with questions, feedback, or if you have a specific topic for us to cover: dgroth@nyswysa.org. Have a great season and stay healthy!