

COACHING VERY YOUNG PLAYERS

THIS ARTICLE IS WRITTEN BY A WELL RESPECTED SOCCER COACH VERY FOCUSED ON PLAYER DEVELOPMENT YOU CAN USE ITS PRINCIPLES AND ACTIVITIES AS A GUIDELINE WHEN COACHING OUR MICRO PROGRAMS.

DENNIS MUELLER'S KINDERGARTEN SOCCER GAMES

I have had a request about what to do with kindergarten kids. Here are things I've done that seem to work.

Rule #1: be nice and have fun.

Rule #2: if things aren't working give it a minute then move on.

Rule #3: when more than one kid loses focus, change activity

Dribbling

Every player with a ball.

Rules

- Every player must keep moving and not run into anyone else.
- When coach says "one" they must stop and put their right foot on the ball (never mind that most cannot yet tell right from left just tell the lefties to use their other right foot).

Ask what part of your foot you should use when dribbling, get lots of answers. Correct one is all parts (trick question). Show how to pull ball back with sole of foot. Ask them to try it after you say start. When they are dribbling around, say "ONE"; once they are all stopped, tell them that now when you say "TWO" they are to stop and sit on the ball. "START", "TWO", Now show some other dribbling technique, for instance cutting the ball across with the inside of the foot. "START", "ONE", Tell them to move faster and to keep their heads up. "START", "TWO". If they did go faster, they probably had some collisions. Ask them how to avoid them. (Right answer is just like cars on Route 1, go slower in traffic and speed up when no one is around and always pay attention to what the other drivers are doing.)

Tell them when you say "THREE" to stop and put their nose on the ball. "START", "THREE", START, encourage them to find space on the field, help them say "there's space over here", "now it's over in the other corner". etc. Do several of the stops and starts to get them a little silly and maybe introduce another dribbling move. Other things „Four³/₄ - elbow, „FIVE³/₄-left ear, etc.

Sharks and minnows

Need a moderate space with boundaries (about the dimensions of one long, for these guys, kick). All but one player (the shark) has a ball. The shark tries to kick the minnows' balls out of the area when the coach says to start. First let the minnows retrieve their ball and continue, then play poison where the minnows become sharks after they lose their ball and continue play until all the balls are gone. Retrieve the balls and go again.

Use a few cones to make a 10 to 15 yard square. Have all players with ball inside area. Tell them to try and kick each other's ball out, but to keep their ball in. If their ball is kicked out, they must sprint after it and bring it back inside as quickly as possible. Stop them, ask them to count how many times they can kick someone else's ball out. Start up again. Stop and ask who had more than 2,4,.... Now ask them to count how many times their ball is kicked out. Start and stop again, forget to ask for total.

Another game is to give 1/2 the players balls and tell the others to take a ball away and try to keep it. Players with a ball after 1 minute win. Repeat 2 or 3 times.

Arrange them in pairs. If you have an odd number, have one play with you. Play 1v1 keepaway for 1 minute. Player in possession after 1 minute is winner. Rearrange the pairs and go again for a total of 3 or 4 times.

Passing

Have them find a partner, one ball per pair. This will take a little while so you might tell them to come back from the break with a partner and a ball before you dismiss them.

First have them pass the ball back and forth while standing about 3 yards apart. They will look hopeless.

Stop them and ask what part of foot to use for short accurate passes on the ground. (Answer is inside of foot, show them what you mean; that part of the foot between the heel and ball of foot.) Have them resume. Point out that a pass is no good if it can't be received by their teammate. Ask what that means (answers on ground, within reach, not too hard, not too soft, when it is expected, for example it does no good to pass to a teammate's back, or to one picking dandelions)

Stop them ask them how to receive the ball (answer: cushion the ball so it slows and is left in front of you so you can step forward to pass it, Don't let them stop the ball under their foot, or so close that the ball is stuck between their feet and must be moved before it can be kicked, tell them the ball should be kept moving) Now you will also have to tell them to back up after they pass the ball or else, they will end up too close together. Resume

Stop and tell them to do two-touch passing (you probably will have to ask what Two-touch is and find a correct respondent). Resume

Stop tell them that you want to count the number of passes in a minute and to start on your command. Start and time for one minute. Ask each pair how many passes, repeat.

Tell them to do one-touch passing. Time them for one minute while they count. Offer praise, "that's very good", "That's better than I though a bunch of 6-year -olds would do", etc.

Now tell them to pass and move after they pass. Tell them to keep track of their partner, to avoid the other players (It's harder than it looks), and not to dribble (two- or three -touch).

If you have an even number break them up into equal groups. 2v2 or 3 v3 is good, but 4v4 is confusing and will need a good neutral player or two to work, if you have an odd number pair yourself, or an older sibling with the obviously weakest player.

If you do pairs, have them play keep-away for one minute. Encourage the player without the ball to move to get open and the defenders to challenge for the ball and to deny passing lanes. Team with the ball after one minute wins. Go again. Go again. Keep reinforcing the idea of getting open on the attack (in a position where your teammate with the ball can see you, where you are not too close, but close enough and where the other team can't intercept the pass).

If you do 3v3, consider using a neutral player to help the team with the ball. Again, reinforce the need to move to get open. Point out what happens if you hold the ball too long before passing (you get ganged-up on). Keep such observations very brief and generally make them in the form of a question (to which you will likely get lots of wrong answers, just say "no, that's not what I'm looking for" or "that's it!" when you get the right answer) If the neutral player is reasonably talented, have them ask the players to get open whenever there is no good target. The neutral player needs to move to be a good receiving position all the time. The better the neutral player, the more players that can be involved. Tell the players with the ball to make the longest pass they are capable of to a teammate who is open. (Not the longest kick, but the longest pass to the teammate farthest away from the other team's players; Same comments about passes as before, within reach, on ground, not too hard, not too soft).

Shooting

Players love to shoot and score. Almost anything that gets lots of shots in a short time is fine. With 6 or fewer, a simple line taking turns and retrieving the balls works fine. Have them stay out of the way of each others shots.

For more than 6, you need to keep the "standers" occupied some way. Having them serve a ball to the shooter, then move to the shooting line and the shooters retrieve ball and move to serving line.

Easiest serves are those coming from behind and slightly to the side of the shooter, also ball must be on ground and in front of shooter Shooter should be facing sideways so he

can see both the ball coming and the goal at which she will shoot. Next easiest are serves coming from the goal on the ground back to the shooter who is facing the goal; hardest serves are those coming across the field from either side.

If a larger goal is available, a parent as keeper (preferably a totally inept keeper) is lots of fun.

The youngest will be lousy servers and you will have to decide if it is "working" when you have them serve. If not simply change the activity.

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

Other

1v1: Have the players find someone of comparable ability. Use two pairs. Have one pair serve as "goals" standing with their legs spread apart and the other two compete to score. Tell them the goals must be scored by shooting on the ground. After one minute goals and players switch.

If you have an odd number of pairs, use parents as "goals" .

Scrimmage

Encourage the team with the ball (attackers) to spread out and to move to get open. Encourage the defenders(team without ball) to get between the ball and the goal (goal-side) (or between an attacker who is "up front" and the goal).

Don't worry about the finer points of throw-ins, offsides, etc. Do prohibit sliding tackles, encourage the attackers to shoot, defenders to get back as soon as they lose the ball.

Defenders are everyone on the team that doesn't have the ball. Attackers are everyone on the team that does have the ball. When noone has the ball, deciding whether you should act like a defender or an attacker is hard to determine, but the team that gets it right most often usually wins the game.

The scrimmage will likely look like a swarm around the ball. If the coach must engage in some tactical instruction, have one player play behind the swarm to collect any balls coming to him and play the ball forward to space in front of and to the side of the swarm.

Later introduce players to the sides of the swarm to collect any balls to the side or passes from behind and then dribble forward and shoot or pass to the middle. Finally, add a player in front of the swarm to serve as a target. Now with 4 players outside the swarm, the remaining few players are just midfielders, the others are just in good supporting positions. Encourage the swarm to pass to any teammate outside the swarm, yes a pass back is good and should be tolerated, even if it is a bit risky for K-3 s. The players outside the swarm should be rotated frequently.

It will take K's all fall to get to the point where more than a couple will play outside the swarm. (except, for those who are really not playing at all and just standing with no clue as to what is going on, encourage those to get into the swarm. and get involved)

Do not relegate the only kid with a booming kick to stay back all the time. The point here is to learn and not to restrict the chances to learn in an effort to win or avoid an embarrassing loss.

Of course, there are lots of variations on all of these and you probably have your own favorite. With these guys silly games are not a bad idea. Just remember these little ones have trouble staying focussed on one activity for too long, so make lots of changes. If something isn't working, change after a very short time, especially if you don't have a clear way to make it easier or more fun to do.