U4-U9 Ideas for Coaches and Parents

Posted by STLCoach - 14 Aug 2009 05:45

You Need To Get Back To Basics First

Dear Coach,

I was watching an U9 game over the weekend and overheard the coach of one team saying to his assistant 'why do my players kick the ball away so much? I've told them over and over again to take their time, get their heads up and pass. But they won't do it!'

He obviously felt that his team should have been playing like Manchester United!

But it was pretty obvious to me why these kids weren't passing the ball around - they simply didn't have a good enough first touch.

So when the ball came to them, they panicked and tried to get rid of it as soon as they could.
I expect that this coach has shown his players the basics of good ball control but he hasn't worked on it week in week out until it becomes second nature.

I know that young soccer players want to play soccer when they come to practice and so they should. But every session should include some technical work. It doesn't have to take up a lot of your precious practice time and it doesn't have to be boring.

The key to effective technical practice is to challenge your players to work hard and make every touch a good one. And make it competitive - how long can they go without making a mistake?

Accept nothing less than 100% effort from your players, whatever they are doing. It's all right if they can't perform the skill or technique very well (it's your job to help them with that) but there's no excuse for being half hearted. Making players of any age understand that only their best efforts will do is a 'must have' skill for every coach.

To construct a complete practice session from these drills, combine two or more of them with a suitable warm up and a small-sided game to finish the session.

Remember - the key to success with technical work is to do it in small, intense bursts so keep each exercise short but demanding.

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4v4 4 goal dribbling game

Posted by STLCoach - 25 Sep 2009 02:54

4v4, 4 goals, dribble to score
Objectives
Improve decision making, passing, receiving and dribbling.

Equipment
Flat cones to define the playing area. Coloured bibs to identify teams. A couple of balls.

Set up
Use the same grid as above but with a small goal in each corner.

How to play
The players play soccer with no goalkeepers. They score in one of two ways: dribbling the ball into one of the goals or by stopping the ball on the end line betwen the goals they are attacking. You can award one point for a traditional goal and two for a controlled stop on the end line or vice versa.

Coaching points
Players need to get their heads up and see the 'big picture'. They need to pass, move and make decisions quickly to take advantage of the unguarded goals.

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U4-U9 Teach players to play in a basic shape

Posted by STLCoach - 29 Sep 2009 09:00

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3 or 4 lane football
Objectives
Teach players to play in a basic shape

Equipment
Flat cones to define the playing area. Coloured bibs to identify teams. A couple of balls.

Set up
Mark out a 40 x 30 grid with goals at each end. The grid is divided with flat cones into three channels (or lanes) that run from one goal line to the other.

Play 3v3 to begin with (one player in each zone). Goalkeepers are optional.

How to play
Each team must have at least one player in each of the three channels. They can receive, pass and dribble but can't go out of their channel. They run, get open and mark defensively inside their channel. If they leave their channel (even if it is just by stepping over the line), they concede a free kick wherever the infringement took place.

After a few scores, swap the players to a new zone.

Progressions
After playing 3v3 widen the centre lane and play 4v4 (2v2 in the centre lane).

When playing 4v4 allow two players of each team to be in any lane at one time. If a third player from that team wants to enter that same lane, one of the two players from his team must leave the lane before he can enter it. This reinforces the need to keep the team shape. It also teaches players to make "ball side" runs within their lanes to receive the ball.

Set up three teams of 4 players. Two teams play on the field and winning team stays on. Winning can

be one, two or three goals (we play just one goal wins a game). When playing "winners stay on" we add these conditions for balls played out of bounds: Balls kicked over the goal line outside of goal result in corner kick or goal kicks, BUT balls kicked across the touch-line mean an automatic loss for team that last touched the ball. The team sitting out must be ready to immediately defend their goal (or attack) when the ball goes out of touch.

Do not assign players to a specific zone and allow movement between zones provided at least one player from each team is in each zone.

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Ages U4-9 Ghostbusters

Posted by STLCoach - 09 Oct 2009 06:45

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This is a great game to play at any workout.

Inside the area 10 players have a ball while the two
remaining players are the evil ghosts.
The players must dribble their ball around the area
– they can move in any direction as long as they stay
within the area – trying to stay away from the ghosts.
The ghosts attempt to tag the dribbling players. Once a
player has been tagged they freeze and stand with their
feet apart holding their ball above their head.
See how many players the ghosts can freeze in 1
minute. The quickest time to tag all players, or the most
tagged when the time runs out, wins.
After each game nominate two new ghosts and restart
with all players back in the game.

Dribbling, close control, turning away from defenders.
Set Up
Area: 30x30 yard square
Players: 12
Equipment: 10 balls
What To Call Out
“Head up”
“Accelerate”
“Freeze if you’ve been tagged”
Progression
Allow free players to unfreeze tagged players with a nutmeg
– playing the ball between their legs – which means the ghosts
have to work harder to tag everyone. In order to be unfrozen
players must shout out “I need a ghostbuster”.
Make it even harder by getting players to crawl through a
frozen players legs after they have played the nutmeg
Hint
Times and results should be told to players as you go as an
incentive to be the quickest, most evil ghosts.

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U4-U9 Player responsibilities

Posted by STLCoach - 15 Oct 2009 07:52

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Player responsibilities
When you call a young soccer player a defender, for example, they think that is their only job - to defend.
SIMPLY PUT: WHEN THE OTHER TEAM HAS THE BALL WE ALL DEFEND AS A TEAM, WHEN WE HAVE THE BALL WE ALL ATTACK AS TEAM. DO NOT CONFUSE PLAYERS BY LABELING POSITIONS "DEFENDER", OR "DEFENSE".

That's because players up to the age of about eleven find it hard to grasp that they can have more than one job to do at the same time.

And labelling players 'defender', 'attacker' etc. is one reason you see youngsters playing statues on the pitch instead of running around, learning how to play the game.

The other reason that children play statues instead of soccer is poor quality coaching and/or coaches who are trying to win games rather than encourage their players to learn in the most effective way - by making mistakes.

So over they years I've found it useful to move away from labelling players as 'defenders' or 'attackers' and give them jobs to do instead.

The only fixed position in my teams is goalkeeper (and even she has been known to dribble the ball to the half way line!).

To begin with, we discuss the jobs that the team as a whole has to do:

Create as much space as possible, both width and depth;

Keep possession! So if you can't pass the ball forwards easily, play square or back - don't force a pass that isn't really on. If you do, you'll lose possession. It's better to pass square or back and start again;

Try to maintain good team shape.
We then move onto individual responsibilities.

These guidelines are designed for teams who play 7-a-side but should still be useful for 8/9 or 11-a-side teams.

Goalkeeper. Positions himself in relation to the defender. Restarts play (roll, throw, kick). Also acts as an extra outfield player whenever possible - don't be afraid to take risks!

Full-backs. Position well apart, make the playing area as wide as possible. Play the ball to the midfield or the attackers. If there is room in front of you move forward with the ball and participate in the attack. If you're playing left back, play to the left of the rest of the team. This might mean you're in the middle of the pitch when the rest of the team is playing on the right but you're always playing on their left. The same goes for the right back. Don't let the opposition score. Be brave.

Central Defender. When the opposition has the ball you should be the last player back. You should be able to see every other player on the pitch apart from your own goalkeeper. When you have the ball and there is space, go forward and attack. Try to score if the opportunity arises but you will need to get back quickly if we lose the ball. Don't let the opposition score. Be brave.

Midfield players. Take the ball towards the opposition goal as quickly as you can or pass to a teammate who is in a better position than you. If you're playing left mid or right mid play to the left or right of the rest of the team (as described above). Try to score.

Attackers. Position as far forward as possible (make playing area long), while still being in a position to receive a pass. Try to score but don't forget you are the first line of our defence if we lose the ball in the opposion third. Don't let their ball carrier get past you.
Tell your players that when we have the ball EVERYONE is attacking. When the opposition has the ball EVERYONE is defending.

Key skill - beating your opponent
It is important that you arm your players with the skills to create space by taking a player from the other team out of the game, by coaching them to wrong foot and beat their opponent.

Using these two simple practices will give the players confidence to try it in games.

To start, player A runs with the ball towards a mannequin (or one of your helpers), performs a move to beat his opponent (the mannequin), uses a change of pace to go past and passes to player B on the opposite side who repeats the sequence.

Progress by adding player C who acts as a wall to one side of the mannequin. Player A runs at the mannequin as before but instead of using a move or a trick to beat his man, he passes to player C who passes first time back to player A. This simple wall pass achieves the same objective, ie beating your opponent.

Give the players a choice, either trick your opponent or play a wall pass. Let the players decide.

As before, player B repeats the process from the other end.

Transitions
Objective: to practice passing, shooting and dribbling skills. It also rewards the team that keeps a good 'shape' because when there is a transition, the back becomes the front and vice versa.

Set up: mark out one rectangular grid about 30x45 yards per eight players. Position a regular size goal on one end of the grid and two smaller goals at the other end.

If you can't divide your squad into groups of four, it's best to play with unevenly sized teams as it gives the players additional opportunities to take advantage of and more problems to solve. For example, if you have nine players play 5v4. If you have ten, play 6v4. Just make sure the teams are evenly balanced in terms of skill.

How to play: while one team attacks the large goal, the opposition attacks either of the two smaller goals.

Coaching points When the team scores in one of the two smaller goals, they must change directions and take a turn at attacking the larger goal and vice-versa. The team trying to score in the large goal must now switch to attacking the smaller goals.

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U4-U9 Dribbling COPS & ROBBERS

Posted by STLCoach - 05 Nov 2009 03:18

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Cops and robbers game
You can use this game to teach young players the basics of attacking and defending in a fun game. Awareness of where players are and the ability to control, pass and stop the ball can all be coached.

How to set it up
Use the centre circle and put three cones to form a triangle in the centre. If your pitch doesn't have a centre circle use a circle of cones in a similar size. With all players in the playing area, have some players with a ball – the cops, and half as many without a ball - the robbers.

How to play it
The robbers have to try and win a ball from one of the cops. If the robber wins the ball, they attempt to score by stopping it in the centre "bank". If the robber manages to do that the cop who lost the ball also becomes a robber. Play continues until the last player with a ball wins.

Key coaching tips:
Cops should keep the ball close, with head up so the players are aware of the robbers. If the ball is lost, recover quickly and fight to win it back before the robber puts it in the bank. Robbers should move quickly from defence to attack to avoid other players and control the ball into the bank.

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