



Fun Games that Teach Skills

NOTE: Several of the games listed are "knock out" games where the losers are knocked out and the last player left is the winner. Since the first ones knocked out are often the ones who need the most practice, those knocked out should be required to do something to either get back into the game or to keep them working on their ball skills until the game is over. One possibility is to set up a parallel game for those knocked out to participate in.

DRIBBLING

Explode

Every kid has a ball. You get them all around you dribbling their balls as close as they can get. Make sure they begin their dribbling using the insides of both feet...no toe balls at the first practice! Make them keep control of the ball....always within one step....and do not let them run into one another or dribble their ball into another ball or another player. Keep telling them to get their heads up and see the open spaces. Yell "Explode!" at which point they all run away (dribbling their balls) as fast as they can. First one to get to a boundary or cone "wins".

Flags

Players start with a ball and 2 flags. A flag is a cloth strip about 2 inches wide and a foot long. Flags are stuck into the waistband of the players' pants at each side. A player is eliminated when he/she loses both flags and his/her ball. A ball is lost when it is kicked out of bounds (by another player with a ball) or stolen (by a player with at least one flag but no ball). You can only take someone's flag away when you have a ball. The first flag usually goes pretty quick. The real fun comes when they learn to protect both the ball and the remaining flag by using the flagless side to shield

Dribble Relay

Set up an 'obstacle-course' with cones as 'gates' - and team 'A' races team 'B'- they have to go out and back - if they lose control and miss a gate, they have to regain control and go through the gate. A variation is to have a small 'square' at the end. They have to stop the ball in the square, then sprint back and high-five the next player before he/she can take off. Another variation is to have several parents positioned at different places along the 'course' and have a different one hold up a number of fingers at random times during the race - and award points to the player that sees it and correctly yells out the number first. This gets the players heads up.

Freeze Tag

Set up a large rectangle with cones and have the players dribble in the rectangle. After a short time, take the ball away from one or two players

who then become "it." Any player whose ball is touched by an "it" player becomes frozen and has to stop dribbling, spread his legs apart, and hold his ball above his head. He is frozen in this position until another player dribbles his ball between the frozen players legs. Switch the "it" players often and make it a contest to see who can freeze the most at one time.

Red Light/Green Light

Each player with a ball lines up at one end of the penalty area. A coach stands at the other end and yells, "Green light," and turns his back to the players. The kids race across the penalty area to see who can reach the coach first. After a few seconds, the coach yells, "Red light." At that command, the players must stop and put a foot on top of the ball. The coach turns back around and looks for players whose ball is still moving. Those players must move a certain distance back to the starting line. Repeat calling red light/green light until someone wins the race. This game encourages fast dribbling while keeping the ball close.

Simon Says

Just like the common children's game, the coach gives instructions like "Simon says dribble with your left foot" or "Simon says switch balls with someone." The players only follow the instructions if they begin with "Simon says..." Anyone following instructions that do not start with "Simon says..." are knocked out. But the knocked out players should be doing something with the ball, not just watching the game continue. Continue the game until one player is left.

Follow the leader

Pick a leader and have him dribble anywhere on the field, encouraging him to make lots of turns, changing speed, etc. All other players have to follow the leader and do whatever that player does. Switch leaders often.

Get 'em

All players must stay within a grid. Player 'A' is "It" and is the only player to start with a ball. Player 'A' dribbles and tries to hit the other players below the waist with the ball. When hit, that player gets a ball and joins player 'A'. The game is over when all of the players have been caught. The last player caught starts with the ball for the next game. If you think the task will be too difficult for the one player to get another at the start of the game, start with 2 players being "It". Encourage quick movements and sudden changes of direction to catch players off guard. Encourage deceptive passing of the ball: look one-way and pass the other; use the outside of the foot. Players not caught should run, jump, and use zig-zag movements.

Dribbler's Alley

Four or more players needed. Set up one less pair of cones (gates) than the number of players you have in a line. Each gate should be about 6 feet wide and have about 10 feet between each gate. Every player guards a gate and the remaining player tries to dribble through the gates.

Last Man Out

Two players or more needed. All players stand at a cone about 20 feet from a group of balls. There is one less ball than the number of players. On the coach's command, the players run to the balls, get one and begin dribbling. The player who didn't get a ball tries to steal one from the others. The coach keeps time and after a preset period has passed, the coach stops the game. The player who, at that time does not have a ball, is out. Remove one ball from the group and repeat until there is only one person with a ball.

Tag

This drill is based on the common kids' game of tag. Mark off a grid or circle. Everybody needs a ball. Whoever is "it" must dribble to another player and tag him. The other player avoids being tagged by dribbling away from "it." If the player being chased loses his ball outside the grid, dribbles out of the grid, or is tagged, he is "it" and the game continues.

Ball Tag

Everyone has a ball and dribbles in a confined area. The player who is "it" must pass his ball so that it hits another player's ball. The player whose ball was hit then becomes "it."

Hat Tag

Bring a half dozen baseball caps to practice. Then, in a slight variation of ball tag, we assigned hats to the "taggers," gave everyone a ball and had them dribble within a grid about the size of the penalty area. Whoever got tagged, got the hat and went off in search of someone else to tag.

Bumper car dribble

The whole team does this in a small grid. Try and match players of similar height. Have one player dribbling while another partner is trying to nudge them off the ball shoulder to shoulder. This teaches them to dribble under physical pressure and teaches the players that contact is a good and fun thing. Before games I have 2 players inside a circle formed by the rest of the team playing for possession of a ball, gets the players in the mode of fighting for the ball on the field (30 sec).

Musical Chairs

One less ball than the number of players in the drill. Players run around in goal areas in a scramble until whistle is blown. Players race to get ball from center circle and dribble to score on goal. Player without ball help get balls to center, repeating this until only one player left. Make sure to keep things moving along, don't wait very long to blow the whistle. Once players have concept start adding in defenders. One more that may work for you is using a ball as the goal. Have players match up by ability. Throw one ball out as the goal. Throw a second out that the two players will try and possess and score. First player to ball is attacker, second defends goal (ball) and tries to gain possession of ball. If successful, roles reverse. Only run this for 30-45 sec depending on effort of the players. I usually have 2-3 pairs doing this at once each with their own goal (ball) and playing ball.

Egg Hunt

Have more balls than players. Have the players line-up across one end of the field. Take their balls and spread them out around the field, these are the eggs. (If you have an unusual colored ball --make it the Golden Egg or something special.) At the other end of the field is a goal. I use a portable goal and call it the "basket." Blow the whistle, or whatever, and turn them loose. The object of the game is to get the "eggs" in the basket as quickly as possible. They are all on the same team, and aren't allowed to take a ball away from another player. I like to time them to see how fast they can accomplish the task.

Snake

Players are grouped into threes (preferred) or fours. First player is the "head" of the snake, and does not have a ball. She's essentially the leader in a follow-the-leader game. Second player has a ball at her feet, and must follow the head of the snake, dribbling wherever she goes. Third player is the "rattle". No ball, just following. Emphasize to the "heads" to vary their lead -- some fast, some slow, some sideways, some stopping, etc. I let one lead for about 20 seconds or so. Then, on a whistle from a coach, #2 drops the ball to #3 and becomes the head of the snake. The rattle (#3) becomes the dribbler and the former head circles around to become the rattle.

Line Soccer

Start with two lines of players facing one another. Give each player a number and a "matching" player in the other line. Kick the ball between the two lines and call out a number. The two players with the corresponding number will play one on one while trying to kick the ball through the opposing line. This game teaches the players in the line not to chase after the ball since they have to defend their line in a limited area.

Circle Game

Set up a 20x40 yard grid, make a center circle, and split players into two teams that can be identified by a color. Have all the kids dribble their balls in the center circle. Call out a color. That team dribbles toward their goal. The other team leaves their ball and runs to slow the attackers down trying to get them to a sideline and to dribble out-of-bounds, or not get to their goal line before the coach counts to 7 or

□ Award 1 point for each out-of-bounds and 1 point for each player "held" for the coach's count. Attackers get 1 point for each "goal". Play to 10 points.

Sharks and Minnows

Start with a defined area marked, adjusted for size depending on the age of the players. Half the players have balls and are Minnows. The rest do not have balls and are the Sharks. The Minnows start at one end of the area and must dribble across the area and across the opposite goal line without losing possession of their ball. The Sharks defend the area, trying to kick the Minnows' balls out of the defined area. Minnows who retain possession turn around and go back for round two. A Minnow who loses their ball join the Sharks for round two. The last successful Minnow is the Grand Champion.

Variations of Sharks and Minnows

- Sharks steal ball and go to a goal instead of just kicking the ball out.
- Instead of eliminating players until only one is left, give points to the sharks for kicking out balls but let everyone stay in the game. Everyone gets a turn as a shark.
- Sharks who take possession of a ball immediately become Minnows; Minnows who lose the ball become Sharks.
- Players are not knocked out, but must perform some task before getting back into the game. (Such as ball dance.)
- Minnows must control the ball in a goal area to encourage good ball control instead of just kicking the ball over the end line if a Shark gets close.

Death Square

Everyone dribbles around trying to keep their own ball and kick out everyone else's ball. If a player's ball is kicked out, he must retrieve it, then dance on the ball for 10 touches before getting back in. A player gets a point for every ball he kicks out (so if you spend time outside dancing on your ball, you have less time to win points).

Under Pressure

Get all the kids dribbling around in a square area and then remove one, two, or three balls, depending on how much pressure needed. Then announce that whoever has possession of a ball after 1 minute is a winner. If they can chase someone out of bounds they automatically win that ball. Count down the last 10 seconds real loud to increase the activity. Kids without a ball have to do some token penance; a couple of pushups, make a weird face for the others, nothing real negative.

1v1 to Goal

Divide players into two teams of 4 or 5 each + one goal and a supply of balls. Station each team at a corner post of the goal, standing off, but facing the field. Place a GK in goal facing the field. Coach/assistant stands behind the center of the goal with a supply of balls. Coach tosses a ball over the crossbar to about the penalty spot. A player from each team both sprint to the ball and attempt to control it, turn, and get a shot off. The second to the ball defends (if he then wins the ball, then he tries to shoot). When there is a score, save, or ball goes out of play, restart the same way with a different pair of players.

Treasure Chest and Trolls

This is a three-team, three-goal game. Play with 1-3 balls to keep everyone moving and looking up. Three players on each team play, while a sub is kept locked in "troll prison." Each team has three pieces of gold behind the goal they have to defend. Small disc cones, water jugs, etc. can be used. Whenever a team scores in the opponent's goal, they get to claim a piece of treasure for their treasure chest. The trolls, older kids or parents, had their own treasure chest and would occasionally run randomly within the field of play. If you hit the troll with the ball, you could claim a piece of troll treasure OR free a teammate from troll prison. (decision-making!) The grand finale is the "breakout" from troll prison. Let each of the prisoners escape with a ball and head for the goal while the trolls run wild on the field for a final, furious minute of play.

PASSING

The Name Game

4 or more players needed. Players stand in a circle and pass the ball to one another, but they must call out the name of the person they are passing to. This is great at the beginning of the season, so they learn everyone's names. If the players are doing well and you have enough players, add additional balls.

Battle Field

Any number of players can be used. All players line up on one end line and try to run to the other end without being hit with a ball kicked by a coach. Those who are hit join the firing squad. The game ends when everyone has been hit.

Gotcha!

Each player will need a ball. Player 'A' is "It" and is the only player to start with a ball. All the other players are around the outside of the gridded space. Player 'A' dribbles and tries to hit the other players below the waist with the ball. When hit, that player gets a ball and joins player 'A'. The game is over when all of the players have been caught. The last player caught starts with the ball for the next game. If you think the task will be too difficult for the one player to get another at the start of the game, start with 2 players being "It". Encourage quick movements and sudden changes of direction to catch players off guard. Encourage deceptive passing of the ball: look one-way and pass the other, use the outside of the foot. Players not caught should run, jump, and use zig-zag movements.

Monkey in the Middle

The players make a circle with one player (the monkey) in the center. The players try to pass the ball around and the monkey tries to intercept it. When the monkey gets the ball he joins the circle and whoever made the "fatal" pass becomes the monkey. This game can be modified by increasing the number of monkeys and/or balls that are used.

Marbles

Split your team into two groups and line them up behind two opposing lines.

Each player should have a ball. Place an unusual color (or size) ball in the middle. This is the marble. Have them try to move the marble across the other team's line by striking it with a ball. After the game starts I don't require them to use their own ball. If they lose theirs, they are free to use any other ball they can find.

Who's Open

Four or Five players in circle formation about 15 yards in diameter (adjust for age). All players except one have a ball at feet. Two players inside circle with one designated as attacker and the other defender. To start, attacking player moves and calls name of player he wants to serve him a ball. He must control ball and return to the open player who did not have a ball at start of exercise (you can't give it back to the player who served it). Attacker then asks for another ball (calling name and making appropriate run) and repeats the exchange. Defender tries to dispossess attacker.

JUGGLING

P-E-L-E

Play with two players. First player juggles one, second player has to match. First player then juggles two and second player matches. First player then juggles three and so on. When a player misses, the other player gets a letter - first P then E then L then E. After awarding a letter, the players start out at one again. The first player to spell PELE is the winner. This can be played thighs only, feet only, head only or any combination.

Black Jack (21)

Play with two or more players. First player juggles as many touches as they can and keeps track of count. Second player goes after first misses. After second player misses, first player goes again starting count where they missed in first turn. For example if player got five touches in first turn, they would start second turn at six. First player to Black Jack (21) wins. This game can also be made more challenging by restricting it to certain body parts.

Combinations

Work to get "called" combinations. For example "Around the World" would be left foot, left thigh, head, right thigh, right foot.

Juggling with Movement

Start at one spot and walk/jog/run while juggling the ball. See how far you can go without dropping the ball. One variation of this is to start at the outside of the penalty area on the field, juggle up to the goal area and shoot/volley the ball into the net without letting it hit the ground.

Timed Juggles

See how many touches the player can get in a certain amount of time. We do a three minute timed contest. They don't have to be consecutive without a miss. This works great for getting the players focused and working hard for a certain time period and is great for aerobic fitness.

Team Juggling Contest

Have each player juggle and see how many touches they can get. Add the total touches for the whole team and create a team record. If they beat their team record, the coaches run a lap around the field. If they don't beat their record, the players run a lap around the field. When the kids are not very good jugglers, it doesn't take very long. I have seen huge improvements in my teams' juggling skills by doing nothing more than this in practice. It's just enough focus to get them working on their own.

GOALKEEPING

Keeper Wars

Using four cones create two goal about 5-10 yards apart (depending on age, ability, etc). The width of the goals should be just beyond the armspan of the keepers. The keepers sit just in front of the cones facing each other. Each attempt to score goals on the other by throwing the ball through the goal. The ball must be kept below their shoulders.