



## Soccer Skill Building Games

Soccer is a wonderful game to introduce children to sports. If you can make sure every player has 200-300 touches on the ball at each practice, they will improve their skills. The games below are designed to generate many touches while teaching game skills and field awareness. As your players' skills improve increase your expectations of the practice game's execution and add elements to the games to continue challenging their skills.

### **Hit the Coach** (dribbling, shooting)

**Skills taught:** In this game the players will practice stop and go dribbling in a crowd. They will have to keep their head up in order not to run into other players and to find their target. They will also learn how to shoot or pass of the dribble when the opportunity is right.

**How the game works:** Each player has a ball. Pick an inbounds area and use cones to establish it. The younger the children, the smaller the playing area should be. On the coach's call, the game starts. The players dribble the ball around and try to hit the coach, who is running all around in the inbounds area. After they hit the coach 5 times, the coach has to make an animal noise selected by the last player to hit the coach.

**Tip:** This game works well as a practice starter since the kids love it and you can begin with as few as 3 players with more can joining as they arrive. Make sure they see you having fun and really put some effort into those animal noises. As the season wears on, the kids will often ask to change it to Hit the Kid. Use at your own discretion.

### **Freeze Tag** (great warm up, dribbling, passing, defense)

**Skills taught:** the players will practice keeping the ball away from a defender and how to take advantage of a defender's decisions.

**How the game works:** Set up an in-bounds and give each player a ball except for one. The player without the ball is 'it' and tries to freeze you by touching (not kicking it away) your ball. When this happens the player is frozen and must lift the ball above their head and spread their legs wide to create a "goal." The player can be 'un-frozen' when another player kicks the ball through the frozen player's legs. Play until all players are frozen or the player that is it is exhausted.

**Tip:** This is another great warm up game. The players will just show up and start playing. If your players are not able to get everyone frozen add a second chaser.

## **Red Light, Green Light** (dribbling in control)

**Skills taught:** Change of speed and dribbling in control.

**How the game works:** This well known children's game makes a great drill. All players start on one side of the field with a ball. Coach yells "Green Light" and turns her back to the players. Yell "Red Light" and then turn back around. All players should have moved forward and now be standing still with one foot on the ball. Any player still moving or without his or her ball, gets sent back to the starting line.

**Tip:** If you have players not moving very fast, ask a parent to join in and have the kids try to beat the parent.

## **Advanced Red Light, Green Light or Student Driving** (dribbling in control)

**Skills taught:** Change of speed, direction and heads up dribbling.

**How the game works:** Using a similar concept to the above game, add left turns, right turns, U-turns. Have the players play within a square area (the more players the larger the area.) Increase and decrease speed on the whistle. When anyone reaches a boundary instruct them to make either a reverse, or left or right turn. Have all players avoid "crashing" and have them race to return the car to the designated parking area at the end.

**Tip:** Initially start this drill with all players on one side of the square area. As they improve, have players spread out on all sides of the square to make it more difficult to maneuver.

## **Traffic** (dribbling in a crowd)

**Skills taught:** This game helps players learn to dribble with attention to the players around them.

**How the game works:** Create a square playing area roughly 10 ft by 10 ft. Divide the players into two groups. Set one group up on the north side of the square and the other team on the east side. Each player has a ball. On the start all players must cross the square, make the turn when they get to the other side and come back. Make it a race to see which team can be the first to get its players across and back 3 times.

**Tip:** Increase the square size to give more room to less skilled players.

## **Kickball**

(passing, trapping)

**Skills taught:** In this game the players will practice trapping, one touch passing, working as a team and moving without the ball to receive a pass. It is also a good fitness drill for the runner

**How the game works:** Set this up like a kickball game using cones to lay out the bases. All the players are in the field except for the player up to bat. The "pitcher" passes the ball in and the kicker kicks it as far as she can and starts to run the bases. She continues to circle the bases until all the players in the field have touched the ball. The field players must one touch or trap the ball and pass to another field player until everyone has touched it at which point the runner is out.

**Tip:** Divide into 2 small games if you have too many players on the field for this to work well with your players' skill level.

## **Monkey in the Middle**

(passing, trapping, spacing)

**Skills taught:** The players will learn to pass under pressure, receive a ball and get rid of it quickly and how to move around to get open.

**How the game works:** Another game that many kids will already know makes for fun on the soccer field. Divide the kids into groups of 4. Three players set up in a triangle with one ball leaving one player in the middle. The 3 players in the triangle pass the ball around while the middle player tries to get it. If he gets it, the passing player goes into the center.

**Tip:** Depending on skill levels, add another player to the middle, designate small areas that triangle players must stay in to pass and receive the ball. For younger players, it's helpful to have a coach join and talk about spacing. This is a good drill to group players by ability in order to keep it fun for everyone.

## **Team Keep Away**

(passing, trapping, defense, teamwork)

**Skills taught:** More skilled players will really enjoy this game. They will be learning teamwork, passing, trapping, and spacing. They will also practice quick transitions from offense to defense.

**How the game works:** This is a team based variation of Monkey in the Middle. Using half the field or less, divide the players up into 2 teams. Start them on opposite sides of the field with 1 ball for every 3 players. Reduce this to 1 ball to every 2.5 players for a more advanced game. (ex: if you have 5 players on each team you can use either 1 or 2 balls per team; with 7 players 2-3 balls.) Teams play against each other trying to steal and keep as many balls as possible. Play for a timed period to see which team has the most balls when play is stopped. Play several times.

**Tip:** Use jerseys to prevent confusion.

## **Topple Ball**

(shooting accuracy)

**Skills taught:** This is a game that gives the coach an opportunity to teach correct kicking technique and the value of really spotting your target before striking the ball.

**How the game works:** Set up a cone in the middle of a large circle with enough cones spaced around it for all players. Each player gets a ball and stands by a cone. The cone in the middle has a ball balanced on top of it. On the coaches call, everyone shoots and tries to knock the ball off. Have the players run and retrieve a ball and set up to play again.

**Tip:** Divide the kids into 2 groups and have one team compete against the other.

## **Ultimate Soccer**

(passing, spacing, field awareness)

**Skills taught:** This is a fun way to have the players practice passing, spacing and getting ahead of the ball.

**How the game works:** It is played like Ultimate Frisbee. Divide the players into 2 equal teams and have them set up on either end of the field. Establish an end zone at each end with cones. The "kick off" team will kick the ball long to the other team. The receiving team traps the ball and the player that does so can make a few dribble moves but then must pass to a teammate to move the ball up the field. The goal is to move the ball up the field to a player in the end zone area who "scores" by trapping the ball in the end zone. The team without control of the ball should try to steal passes and mark open players, but the defensive players cannot steal the ball directly from a player with control.

**Tip:** For less skilled players, play more offensive players versus less defenders.

## **Relay Passing**

(passing, trapping)

**Skills taught:** Use line relays to learn to use every part of both feet to pass.

**How the game works:** Depending on the number of players, divide them into 2 or 3 equal groups. Line the players up in evenly spaced parallel lines. Vary the distance between players based on skill and type of pass you have them execute.

Start with simple instep passes. The first player in line passes to the next who must trap the ball and make the turn to pass to the next player. Begin with the players making their own choice in which foot to use and then increase the complexity. Have them trap left, pass right, or trap right and pass left. There is no end to the different ways to do this game:

Backwards pull passes: All players face forward. The first player in line pulls the ball backwards to make a pass to the player behind. Next players traps and makes pull pass to the next player.

Heal pass: Trap and use the heel to kick the ball backwards.

Top poke pass: Trap and use the toe to poke the ball forward.

**Tip:** The relay line does not always have to be straight. Set the players up in a square or a zigzag to create a situation where the ball is receive and then passed in multiple directions.

### **3 to Score** (passing, getting open)

**Skills taught:** Use this game to improve field awareness of teammates and passing skills.

**How the game works:** Divide the players into 2 equal teams and establish a playing area roughly half the size of the field. Have the players spread out all over the playing area. Toss the ball in to start. The goal is to gain control of the ball and make 3 passes in a row between teammates. If the defense intercepts then that team tries to make 3 passes in a row. After a score of 3 successful passes, the coach restarts with a thrown in. Play for a certain amount of time or until 10 points are scored.

**Tip:** For players that are more skilled require 5 passes to score but decrease to just 2 passes for beginning players.

### **Soccer Croquet** (passing, dribbling)

**Skills taught:** This fast-paced game will help the players learn teamwork, passing and dribbling in a crowd.

**How the game works:** Have each player get a partner, 1 ball and spread out on the sideline. Set up the field by placing sets of cones about 2-4 feet apart (to create a goal) all over the playing area. When the coach blows the whistle, one player dribble the ball out and makes a pass through any goal to their teammate. The teammate then dribbles the ball to the next goal to make the pass through. The players can go through the goals in any order they want but they must pass to their teammate through every set of cones before returning to the sideline with their ball.

**Tips:** For younger players use less goals.

### **Throw-In Relay** (throw ins to the player)

**Skills taught:** This relay will teach quick thrown in technique.

**How the game works:** Divide your players into 2 equal teams. Break each team into 2 equal lines facing each other with about a 15-20 feet space. The first player in line using correct thrown in technique, will throw the ball to their teammate in the line 15 feet away. That player traps the ball then passes it back to the line it came from where the second player in line now picks it up. The first players in line that have already thrown and trapped the ball now run and take a place in the back of the opposing line. The throwing and trapping continue until the first player that

threw the ball is at the beginning of the thrown in line. The 2 teams play at the same time and whichever team finishes first, wins.

**Tips:** Increase or decrease the length of the throw depending on the players skills.

## **Throw-in Relay 2** (throw ins to the open space)

**Skills taught:** This game focuses on throwing the ball to the open space for the receiving player to receive.

**How the game works:** Establish a throwing line on the sideline and a receiving line on the field. Set up 2 cones to create a small goal about 40 feet away. The throwing player should throw the ball towards the goal and the receiving player must run onto the ball and make at least 2 touches before passing it through the cones. The receiving player retrieves the ball and dribble/passes it back to the thrown-in line where the next player awaits. Players switch lines and continue to all players have thrown and received. If you have enough players, divide the group into 2 teams to race each other, otherwise time the players the first time through and create a timed goal to beat.

**Tips:** For more advanced players move the receiving line back so they can get a running start.

Tip: When young kids scrimmage at practice, only the strong players benefit.

Tip: Keep players playing and not standing in lines.

Tip: Build fitness with games that keep everyone moving, not by running lines.

**Tip:** if you are having trouble getting kids to practice on time, make sure you start with a fun game. Tell the kids that Freeze Tag will only be played for the first 5 minutes so they should come early if they want to play longer.

## **Why use games instead of drills?**

The skill building games are meant to make sure the kids enjoy practice, but there are many benefits to using game based drills. The players will not only have more fun but they will play at higher intensity and at game pace. The games should allow them to have fun and appreciate the sport while learning and practicing the skills they need to master their sport.

### **Practice Game Guidelines:**

- Have every player touching the ball as much as possible.
- Use games that keep all kids playing until the end. Don't have the weak players get knocked out and watch the stronger players get more touches.
- Avoid rewarding "winners" and punishing "losers" (push ups, laps, etc).
- The games must replicate true game skills to be effective.
- Shorten or ideally eliminate lines.
- Keep it simple. The games should be easy to explain and to set up.

- Don't have too many different games. Find a few games that the kids love and just expand the game as they need more challenges.

Let them play without worrying about proper execution of the skill. After a couple of times through the game ask them what they need to do well to win the game. When you hear answers like "dribble in control" or "make good passes" you can then make suggestions for how to achieve that. With a little creativity you can probably turn many of the drills you are currently using into games. Have fun. If you have a game to share, please send it to us to add to the site.

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