**Three Sample Practice Plans**

Each Sample Plan has similar components, and follows the simple to complex approach favored by US Youth Soccer. At the top of each plan are five elements that coaches should consider when planning every practice:

**Name**

**Objective** – Each practice should have one main objective, and the coach should think carefully about this objective first, so that the inevitable “on the fly” adjustments stay focused on the main objective.

**Layout** – It’s good to think about the field layouts you will need first to keep transitions smooth and quick. When possible, layout in advance.

**Grouping –** Some drills will work best if players are grouped by skill level. Others demand mixed skill levels for balance. It’s good to think about this first. The plans will use “like pairs” to describe activities that should match players of similar skill level, and “mixed group” when the activities should feature balanced groups.

**Coaching Points –** What you intend to emphasize

I usually break my practices into three segments – Warm-up/Technical Skill, Main Drills, and Scrimmage.

I have starred what I consider the most “optional” activity in each “Main Drills” section – the drill that could be skipped if time runs short, but I find it’s better to over-plan than under-plan. Each practice is set for a 60 minute time window, and I always try to spend at least 10 minutes of each practice on an unstructured scrimmage, just to give the kids a chance to enjoy playing soccer. During this time, I try to minimize my intervention and just let them play.

Please understand that these plan are just guides, feel free to mix and match or substitute drills. I chose drills that, in my experience, have generated interest and enthusiasm while developing soccer skills.

For each of these plans, I’m going to provide a full detailed description of the practice plan, followed by an outline that I might take to practice.

I’m sorry that this is so “text” heavy. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at ceejaysquared@gmail.com.

Above all, please remember to emphasize fun and “getting better” with your young players.

**Practice Plan #1**: **Dribbling**

**Objective:** Improve dribbling skill

**Layout:** 15 x 15 circle, 20x20 grid, scrimmage field

**Grouping:** Mostly all, similar skill pairs for attacking and defending gates

**Coaching Points:** Head up, inside of foot, dribbling under control

**Warm-up:**

**(5) Dribbling Around, Change of Direction** – Have players dribble in the 15 x 15 circle, emphasize head up (coach can hold up hand and call out “how many fingers am I holding up?” to encourage keeping the head up). As players become comfortable dribbling, introduce the idea of “Change” – when the coach calls “change!”, players are to change direction with their balls.

**TIP:** At various points, the coach or assistant should demonstrate some of the variety of ways to change direction – pull turns, outside of foot, back heel, step over, scissors, etc… and encourage players to use them.

**(3) Crossover –** Station players outside the circle, and direct them to dribble around the outside of the circle. When the coach calls “crossover!”, players are to turn the ball and dribble across the inside of the space to the other side. Resume dribbling, then repeat.

**TIP:** Emphasize turning the ball with the inside of the foot and accelerating across the circle without encountering other players.

**(4) Tail Tag –** Players inside the circle, each with a pinny “tail” tucked in to her shorts. Players then attempt to grab the pinny from other players while defending their own. If a player has no “tail”, she can still attempt to steal others’, but as soon as she has a pinny, she must tuck into her shorts again. Extra pinnies can be held in the hand, but if the players has a piney, it must always be in the shorts. Time this, and every minute or so declare a “winner,” then reset. **Variation:** Add balls.

**(3) Water, Stretch** – Keep this moving quickly. **TIP:** encourage players to all bring their water bottles to a central spot, and instruct them to jog to bottles and back to coach, or you can spend half your practice trying to re-gather players after breaks.

**MAIN DRILLS**

**(5) Knockout** – Using the same grid, have players dribble inside the grid and attempt to kick others’ balls out of the circle while defending their own. If a players’ ball is kicked out, he/she must catch up to the ball before it stops rolling. If he does, he can dribble back into the circle with no penalty. If the ball stops, the player has to perform three toe taps (touching the top of the ball with alternating feet), then they may return.

 **TIP:** Coaches can clear balls of players who leave their own balls to go kick others’ to encourage ball protection.

**(5) Gates**  - Enlarge grid to 25 x 25, set up random pairs of cones inside this grid, cones spaced one yard apart. Players score “goals” by dribbling through the cone pairs in any direction. They keep their own score. Time them for 60 seconds. After a few repetitions begin challenging them to beat their own scores.

**\* (5)** **Attacking and Defending Gates –** Players grouped in similar-skill pairs. In the same 25x25 grid, create one goal for each pair. One player from the pair is the attacker, one is the defender in 1 v 1 play. On scores or takeaways, players switch roles from attack to defense.

**(5) Movable Goal** – No grid. Coach and assistant (or two parents) hold up a pool noodle (or sheet or towel), and this is the “goal” – Can be played with shooting or dribbling only. The moving goal encourages players to keep their heads up, and the coach can vary the challenge as appropriate by moving the goal faster or slower.

**(5) Break, Water, Team Talk** – good time to talk to players about planning, positions, etc… is while they get water and catch their breath from drills.

**(15) Scrimmage –** I try to just let this go and let the kids have fun – this is the fun payoff for running drills and games

**(3) Wrap up -**  Congratulate team on what went well, go over coaching points from the session, choose next week’s captains, etc…

**Here is the abbreviated Practice Plan:**

**Practice Plan #1**: **Dribbling**

**Objective:** Improve dribbling skill

**Layout:** 15 x 15 circle, 20x20 grid, scrimmage field

**Grouping:** Mostly all, similar skill pairs

**Coaching Points**: Head up, using inside of foot, dribbling under control

**WARM-UP/Technical:**

**(5) Dribbling Around, Change of Direction**

**(3) Crossover**

**(4) Tail Tag**

**(3) Water, Stretch**

**MAIN DRILLS**

**(5) Knockout**

**(5) Gates**

**\* (5)** **Attacking and Defending Gates**

**(5) Movable Goal**

**(5) Break, Water, Team Talk**

**SCRIMMAGE**

**(15) Scrimmage**

**(3) Wrap up**

**Annotated Practice Plan #2**

**Practice Plan #2**: **Passing**

**Objective:** Improve Passing skill

**Layout:** 10x10 Grids of four cones each, 20x20 grid, scrimmage field with two goals at each end

**Grouping:** Mostly all, similar skill pairs

**Coaching Points**: Using inside of foot, toe up, foot locked, plant foot points in direction of pass

**WARM-UP/Technical:** (15 minutes)

**(5) Pass and Move Square** – create 10x10 grids of four cones each. Three players per grid, one ball per grid. Player with ball passes it to one of the other two, then sprints to the open cone. Player receiving the ball does the same. **Variation:** add defender

**(5) Soccer Marbles** – In like pairs, everyone with a ball. One of the partners passes his ball into space (emphasize passing, not shooting). Second player tries to hit the moving ball with his ball, just like a game of marbles. Play is continuous. **TIP:** encourage players to play fast, never let balls stop rolling, restart immediately if they do.

**\* (5) Bridge Passing**- In like pairs in the 20x20 grid, one ball per pair. The player without the ball straddles her legs wide to form the “goal”, and the player with the ball kicks it through her legs using good passing technique. Then both members of the pair sprint towards the ball, and the other player provides the “goal” by straddling her legs. The player receiving the ball dribbles to a comfortable distance, and passes the ball through the new “goal.” Repeat. Try timing the pairs and encouraging them to beat their previous scores.

**TIP:** To make this drill work, the coach needs to really emphasize keeping the ball moving, so that the girl who was just “the goal,” immediately turns and races after the ball, while the shooting player, the one who will become the next “goal” to present herself to her partner – don’t just kick it and stand there, but come to the ball and provide a good target. This is a great drill for teaching cooperation, how both teammates must work together to complete tasks, but it needs some coaching.

**(3) Water, Stretch**

**MAIN DRILLS** (25 minutes)

**(5) Gates Passing** – In the 20x20 grid, set up 5-8 small goals of cones 1 yard apart. Players are in like pairs with one ball per pair. To score, they must make an accurate pass through a goal (either direction). Then the “shooter” needs to quickly find an open goal, and the receiver dribbles to that goal and passes it to him. After they get the hang of the drill, time them and challenge them to beat their previous scores.

 **TIP:** Point out which teammate is deciding which goal they will attack next. Young players often say “the player with the ball,” point out that it’s faster when the player off the ball locates the empty goal and runs there.

**(5) Frantic ball** – Using the 20x20 grid, divide team in half, mixed ability grouping (you can use this to set up teams for the later scrimmage by giving one group pinnies) with half inside the grid, and half outside. Inside players each have a ball, the outside players do not. On your command “frantic ball!”, the inside players begin making one touch passes to each other or to the team outside the circle, who can one touch pass balls back in. The objective is never to let the balls stop, so players will be making quick passes and quick decisions. You could start with one less ball to get players in the rhythm. After a few repetitions, switch the inside and outside players.

**(5)** **Wall Passing to Goal**- This is a classic drill that many of us will remember from our soccer days. One player is goalie (if you have them in your age group). The other players form two lines 20-25 yards out, lined up with each goal post. One line has balls, the other does not. The first player in the shooting line (with balls – 25 yards out) passes to the first player in the passing line (20 yards out) and runs towards the goal. The receiver “wall passes” the ball back for a shot. Both players follow the shot, then switch lines.

 **TIP:** A “wall pass” is a one touch pass back to the player who passed the ball first. Tell your players to imagine what happens when a ball hits a wall – it rebounds diagonally, and they are to act as a wall – sending the ball back to the player who passed it to them. Emphasize that they need to pass the ball to where their teammate is going, not where they were. Young players have trouble with the idea of “leading” a teammate – if they’re not ready, don’t push it, but keep trying – they’ll get it eventually.

**(10) Multiple Goals** **–** On the scrimmage-sized field, set up two small goals (4 yds each) at the wide corners of the field. Play as a normal scrimmage without goalies – should force your players wider and encourage passing.

 **(5) Break, Water, Team Talk**

**SCRIMMAGE** (20 minutes)

**(12) Scrimmage**

**(3) Wrap up**

**Here is the abbreviated Practice Plan:**

**Practice Plan #2**: **Passing**

**Objective:** Improve Passing skill

**Layout:** 10x10 Grids of four cones each, 20x20 grid, scrimmage field with two goals at each end

**Grouping:** Mostly all, similar skill pairs

**Coaching Points**: Using inside of foot, toe up, foot locked, plant foot points in direction of pass

**WARM-UP/Technical:** (15 minutes)

**(5) Pass and Move Square**

**(5) Soccer Marbles**

**\* (5) Bridge Passing**

**(3) Water, Stretch**

**MAIN DRILLS** (30 minutes)

**(5) Gates Passing**

**(5) Frantic ball**

**(5)** **Wall Passing to Goal**

**(10) Multiple Goals**

**(5) Break, Water, Team Talk**

**SCRIMMAGE** (15 minutes)

**(12) Scrimmage**

**(3) Wrap up**

**Practice Plan #3**: **Shooting**

**Objective:** Improve Shooting, Encourage Shooting – young players are often reluctant to shoot

**Layout:** 20x20 box with a goal, scrimmage

**Grouping:** Mostly all, split into two balanced teams (mixed group) for Main Drills

**Coaching Points**: Plant foot, strike ball with laces, head down until contact, follow through

**WARM-UP/Technical:** (15 minutes)

**(5) Find the Coach –** Have players begin dribbling in an unconfined area, then challenge them to “find the coach”! (or a parent sucker if you can draft one) Run away at whatever speed is appropriate, challenging them to hit with you a ball. (For younger players, I call this game “ouch!” and it’s a hit). To increase the challenge, trade off coaches – make them also chase your assistant or another parent.

**(5) Soccer Golf** – set up a short “golf” course, using trash cans, goals, cones, trees, whatever is available. Have players count their “strokes”, then challenge them to beat their score. **TIP:** This can be a good place to introduce/remind players of good shooting technique to get more power on the ball. Players should plant their off foot; Keep their head down; strike the ball with the laces; kick \*through\* the ball, not at the ball; and follow through. That’s a lot for young players, so I usually tell them the whole thing first, then emphasize one or two components each practice.

**(3) Water, Stretch**

**MAIN DRILLS** (25 minutes)

**(5) First! (1 v 1 50/50 Balls)** – This drill is described and illustrated in the “camp drills” that you should already have received. Briefly, you create a box approximately the size of the penalty area – 20x20 is a good approximation, with a goal in the center, and cones set up aligned with the goal posts 20 yards away. Split the players into two balanced groups (mixed ability in each group), and have them lineup on either side of the goal. The first player in each line puts her hand on the goal post. The coach serves the ball into the center 12-15 yards away, and the players must race up to and around their cone, then compete for the ball and a shot. **TIP:** Remember to emphasize good shooting form, stopping the drill if necessary.



**(5) Attack and Defend in the box --** This drill is also described and illustrated in the “camp drills” that you should already have received. Briefly, you create a box approximately the size of the penalty area – 20x20 is a good approximation, with a goal in the center. Place a goalie in the goal, split the rest of the team into two lines – red and yellow, for example, with one line at each corner away from the goal. Everyone has a ball. The first player in the red line dribbles into the box and takes a quick shot, then immediately turns and defends against the first player in the yellow line, who takes a quick shot, and then defends against the next player in the red line. This drill should go very quickly. **TIP:** Remember to emphasize good shooting form, stopping the drill if necessary.



**(10) Many Balls** – set up a normal scrimmage field with equal teams (no goalies). Warn players that any ball on the field is in play, but when they go out of play, don’t fetch them and set up for throw-ins. The game will move continuously. Gather all the balls you can and enlist help to gather balls when they go out of bounds. Begin with one ball, then add more at your discretion, so there could be as many as 3 balls in play at once. Use this to involve those who are getting fewer touches and to increase awareness. There are usually a lot of goals scored in this game, and it’s a great fitness builder since it never stops.

**(5) Break, Water, Team Talk**

**SCRIMMAGE** (15 minutes)

**(15) Scrimmage**

**(2) Wrap up**

**Practice Plan #3**: **Shooting - Abbreviated**

**Objective:** Improve Shooting, Encourage Shooting – young players are often reluctant to shoot

**Layout:** 20x20 box with a goal, scrimmage

**Grouping:** Mostly all, split into two balanced teams (mixed group) for Main Drills

**Coaching Points**: Plant foot, strike ball with laces, head down until contact, follow through

**WARM-UP/Technical:** (15 minutes)

**(5) Find the Coach**

**(5) Soccer Golf**

**(3) Water, Stretch**

**MAIN DRILLS** (25 minutes)

**(5) First! (1 v 1 50/50 Balls)**

**(5) Attack and Defend in the box**

**(10) Many Balls** \*(Shorten this drill if time is short)

**(5) Break, Water, Team Talk**

**SCRIMMAGE** (15 minutes)

**(15) Scrimmage**

**(2) Wrap up**