



PRINTABLE DRILLS

SOCCER

PASSING FRENZY

What you need: 10- x 10-yard-grid. 4 players. 2 balls.

How it works: Use the following steps for this drill:

1. Position three players in a line, with about 5 yards between each of them.
2. Give the player in the middle a soccer ball.
3. Position another player opposite the threesome, about 10 yards away, with a soccer ball.
4. On your whistle, the players begin passing the balls back and forth among themselves. The single player is forced to make quick and accurate passes, because the balls come at him rapidly.
5. Perform for a minute and then rotate so that each child in the group gets a few turns being the single player.

Coaching pointers: Keep a close eye on the accuracy of the single player's passes. If balls are missing their mark, make the necessary corrections in the player's technique to get her passes back on track. The child may be using her toes rather than the inside of her foot to kick the ball, which drastically decreases accuracy. If the drill proves too difficult initially, use one ball until the kids get comfortable passing that one back and forth. Then work in the extra ball when you sense that they're ready for the additional challenge.

ELIMINATION

What you need: 10- x 10-yard grid. 4 players. 4 balls. 8 cones.

How it works: Mark off the playing area with cones, and position a group of four players in the area, each with a ball. The object is for the players to maintain control of their ball while attempting to knock other players' balls out of the playing area. When a player's ball is knocked out of the area, he's eliminated from the game.

Coaching pointers: A lot goes on during this drill, but make sure players are using legal techniques when attempting to knock another player's ball away. Also, anytime you use a knockout drill always have a side drill set up so that the kids who are eliminated can continue to work on their skills. You never want kids who are eliminated from the drill to stand around and lose valuable practice time.

TAG THE COACH

What you need: A soccer ball for each player.

How it works: Give each of the kids a soccer ball, and have them form a circle as you stand in the middle. The idea is for them to kick the ball at you while you do your best to avoid being touched by any of the balls headed your way. It gets the kids running around, laughing and having fun. Plus, it's a great skill-building drill because the kids are kicking the ball at a target.

Coaching pointers: During this drill you simply want the kids at the youngest levels to begin getting comfortable being around one another and getting a feel for kicking a ball at a target.

1-ON-1

What you need: 30- x 30-yard grid. 2 players. 1 ball. 2 cones.

How it works: Set up two pylons 25 yards apart. Start the drill with one offensive player at the pylon with a ball and one defensive player about five yards away. The object is for the defensive player to stop the offensive player from working the ball down the field to the other pylon. If the defensive player knocks the ball loose, you can work the drill a couple of different ways:

*When possession of the ball changes, you can have the players switch roles. The player who stole the ball then tries to move it downfield toward the opposite pylon.

*When the defensive player pokes the ball away, the offensive player retrieves it and continues to work toward reaching the pylon with the ball.

Coaching pointers: Monitor the defender's footwork, and make sure that she doesn't get herself out of position by going for any body fakes by the other player. Also, watch the defensive player's movements to ensure that penalties aren't being committed in her efforts to swipe the ball.

BREAKAWAY

What you need: Area of field with goal. 3 players. 1 ball.

How it works: The goaltender takes his position in the net. Two players start about 20 yards away from the net. The players move in on net, passing the ball back and forth until someone decides to take a shot. To increase the difficulty, add a defensive player to the mix. Or make players deliver shots with their less-dominant foot.

Coaching pointers: In order to effectively defend, goalies must be able to move side to side quickly. Footwork is crucial to success and should be monitored closely during this drill. Also, make sure that the goalie protects the ball with her entire body when she stops a low shot on the ground. This protection prevents opponents from getting their feet on the ball for a follow-up shot and reduces the chances of the goalie's hands or fingers being injured if an opponent tries kicking at the ball.

PRACTICE TIPS

Don't neglect defense – Sure, kids love shooting, passing and maneuvering with the ball, but playing offense is only one part of the game. During your practice sessions be sure that you are devoting an equal amount of time to playing defense, too. Since roughly half the game will be spent defending, your players must be well-versed in this area of the game, too.

Scale down the scrimmages – Having a couple of smaller games going is always better than having one game where all the players don't get their feet on the ball quite as often as they would in a scaled down game conducted on a smaller playing area.

Think outside the box – Sure, a scrimmage for the kids is fun, but you can rev up the excitement to even greater levels by including a couple of more balls in the action. Just try a scrimmage where three balls are in play at one time and see what happens. The kids will love the action-packed game with the balls flying around the field, so that will keep their attention. With the additional balls in play, your players get the chance to experience two and three times the action they see in a typical game. It will also build their timing, enhance their coordination and improve their reaction skills.

Look beyond sports – Soccer coaches are in a great position to impact kids' lives well beyond learning and developing skills. While the kids are stretching, talk to them about the importance of staying away from tobacco, for example. Even though its dangers are well documented, an alarming number of youngsters still use some form of tobacco. Talk to them about how tobacco not only affects their health, but how it also hinders their performance on the soccer field. Warnings associated with performance will carry more weight with them.

Give the kids a voice – Throughout the season allow the kids the chance to choose a practice drill to run, or even allow them to design their own. Your players will appreciate being included in this process and that their thoughts are valued. If you allow players to choose drills individually just be sure that everyone gets a turn.

GAME DAY TIPS

Assign positions ahead of time – Before you get to the field have your line-up and substitution patterns in place. Being organized will help you ensure that all players get an equal amount of playing time. Without a plan in place you'll find that keeping track of each player's minutes is virtually impossible with everything else that you have to direct your attention toward during the game.

Sportsmanship matters – Remind your players before the game – and, if necessary, during the game – to display good sportsmanship at all times; to show respect toward officials, regardless of what calls are made; and to shake hands with the opposing team's players, regardless of who wins the game. One of your goals should be to make your team a model of good sportsmanship that others in your league will try to emulate.

Refrain from repetitiveness – You don't want to sound like a broken record saying the same things all game long. If you do, your players will tune you out. So be sure to vary your comments and avoid giving the same instructions. If you catch yourself doling out the same instructions, take a closer look at spending more time on that skill in your upcoming practices because that may be a signal that the team needs additional work in that area.

Encourage communication on the field – Since the play during a soccer game is nearly continuous, players being able to communicate on the run is crucial for success. Encourage players to talk to one another and communicate what's taking place on the field at all times. Their voices can be just as effective as their feet, especially if they're alerting a teammate that they're open to receive a pass, or if they're letting a teammate know which opposing player they've got covered when the opponent is pushing the ball really hard on the attack.

Use all the field – There is a lot of room on a soccer field, so be sure your players take advantage of it. Sometimes as soon as the game begins players can become one-dimensional in their thinking. They may develop tunnel vision and disregard a lot of the field except what's directly in front of them. Moving the ball downfield with that type of limited view is tough. Utilizing the entire field is critical to the team's success. If your players are constantly trying to push the ball down the center of the field, that approach will be easily defended by the opposing team. So stress sending some passes out wide along the sideline. This helps stretch out the defense and creates more open spaces to maneuver the ball in.