



St. Alban Roe Coaching Clinic
Fall, 2011

A coach can have a tremendous impact on a child's life. It can be tremendously bad or tremendously good.

- Encourage each child to explore their potential, whatever that is. Give the weaker player one or two tangible things to work on. When it clicks, they will be ecstatic and hooked.
- Focus on player development, not wins.
- Encourage and reward trying new things.
- Praise a good attempt to execute correctly whether successful or not.
- Criticizing a failure in execution will put a child in a shell. We all try and fail. Kids need a leader, not a critic.
- ***Fun in and of itself is not the prime directive.*** Fun is a natural result of exploring potential and being part of a team effort.

You as a St. Alban Roe Leader

Thank you for your extremely valuable contribution to the SAR soccer program! The well being of the program rests largely on the quality and commitment of its volunteers.

- Your parents and players will follow your lead. If you're a griper, they'll learn to gripe. If you're gracious and a good sport, they will follow your lead. If you have a problem parent or player, deal with them directly and decisively.
- Your enthusiasm and dedication will be a magnet for your team and the SAR soccer program.
- Consider playing year round or at least one other session.
- Looking back on your coaching years, you will treasure your experience as will your players.

The Effective Practice

The following will result in a good, effective practice:

- Minimize lines.
- Minimize scrimmaging. 14-16 players and one ball means fewer touches per player.
- Maximize touches on the ball.
- Everyone should bring a ball.
- Come prepared with a written plan.
- Focus on the **85%** (see below).
- Don't get hung up on nuances. A game has rarely turned on a throw in or a goal kick.
- Minimize shooting on goal. In a game of soccer, a handful of players will get a handful of shots. Kicking the ball is easy. Playing team soccer requires much more preparation.

Boom Ball is not soccer

Recreational soccer lends itself to mindless boom ball due to the size of the field and the large number of players. Soccer is a simple sport. It is a game of keep away. Boom ball is when a player sends a ball down field to nobody in particular. At best, these are usually 50-50 balls and are more likely giveaways.

The 85%

Soccer can be broken down into three elements. These three elements comprise 85% plus of the game. If you focus on these three things, you can make a recreational team great.

1. **Attacking**
2. **Possession (keep away)**
3. **Defending**

But, before we get to the 85%, let's provide some structure.

Formations: Getting them to spread out

How many times have you fruitlessly begged your kids to spread out? Here's how to do it:

Who are you supporting? Put your kids in a formation without a ball on the field. If it's a 4-3-3 (always count from the back line up), then you will have four defenders, three midfielders and three forwards. In recreational soccer, I usually use a sweeper, which is the last defender who usually is in the middle. So using this formation, you have 3-3-3 stacked on top of each other.

They should stay a "kick apart". How far is a kick? That depends on the age, but let's say it's about 25 yards. Have your right defender point to the right midfielder. That defender supports that midfielder. Ask them, "Who are you supporting?" and have them point to their player. Then ask the right midfielder who they are supporting and have them point to the right forward. Their spacing should remain about the same throughout the game. The same holds true from side-to-side. The left defender should stay about a kick apart from the center defender except for in particular game situations where it is necessary to close the gap.

By using a teammate as a point of reference, they will stay in position relative to everyone else.

This simple approach helps keep the players from crowding their teammates. The center mid, for example, cannot be a kick apart if she is standing near the touchline in a throw in. The right attacker cannot be a kick apart if she is standing shoulder to shoulder with the right defender.

This spacing is essential to playing high possession soccer.

Good spacing also results in less fatigue and easy scoring chances. Poor spacing results in the following. Maybe these sound familiar:

→ You keep seeing big open spaces in the middle that leads to a breakaway for the other team.

- Your team is attacking, your forward is stopped and there is no trailer because your midfielder is back in your 18 (penalty area) seventy five yards from the ball.
- Your team can't get the ball out of your end because all 11 players are in your 18.

When I teach spacing, I will line my team up in a formation and hold a ball over my head. As I move the ball around the field, I ask them to all adjust. As I move into the attacking end, I expect the midfielders to stay within a kick of the forward in **support**. Likewise, the defender must stay within a kick of the midfielder to support. Good spacing is essential to playing 360 degree soccer. It takes conditioning and encouragement for kids to pass the ball back toward their own goal, but as we know, possession is king. If the open teammate is the trailer, then that is the best option.

During a game, it is important to watch how players are moving without the ball. This is where games are often won or lost. Remind your players who they are supporting so they can move into position.

Specific Formations

There are many formations out there and which you choose depends on the age and skill of your players. By the time your players reach high school, you should be playing a flat backfield for the offsides trap. However, I am going to assume that this is not your objective as it is a rare and risky strategy at a young recreational level.

For 1st grade on down, I don't emphasize formations so much as playing keep away. If you want, you can keep one or two defenders deep, but generally the kids want to move in a herd. They are not too young to teach the concept of keep away. In fact, it is important that you teach them good habits from the beginning.

For the older kids, I like to play a sag formation. This means every player has a safety valve. I play a sweeper and a stopper to fulfill this role.

The Sweeper The sweeper is usually a fast, smart and tough player who you would buy a beer if they were 21 for all the attacks they turn away. This player roves in the backfield and is **always positioned between the ball and the goal**. This player's role is to take on the attacker should she beat the defender. *Side note: is imperative that if a defender gets beaten that she make a beeline toward the goal and become the safety valve. Make sure she takes the inside track and get positioned between the ball and the goal.*

The Stopper The stopper can either be your center midfielder or a fourth midfielder who roves behind the midfield line. Just as with the sweeper, the stopper's role is to be a safety valve against an attack. Should the player she is supporting get beaten, her job is to attack the ball. The player who was beaten must then overlap back behind the stopper and become the new safety valve. When the danger has passed, they can switch back into their original roles. Like the sweeper, the stopper is a fast, smart and rugged player who can control the ball under

pressure. They should be able to send the ball at a 45 degree angle to her wings or midfielders, creating a counterattack.

Choosing Your Players

Consider keeping your players mostly at the same position or at least the same line (defense, midfield, offense). This helps the player thoroughly learn their position and gain confidence. It also builds team continuity. Players like to get used to seeing the same players around them. They get used to playing with each other and will continually improve.

Build from the back and the middle. Your four best players will likely be your sweeper, stopper, center midfielder and center forward. This is up to you. I have sometimes taken a high octane player and put her on the wing so she can sneak in behind the defense and score. If you have a specific strategy like this, your players must all understand what the game plan is. In this example, your center mid and center forward will be sending long through balls to the high octane winger.

There is much discussion about how to pick a goalie and what to do with weaker players. I have a simple rule with respect to choosing a goalie: whoever wants to be goalie is your goalie. Forcing players to play keeper will stress them out and make them quit. Don't be tempted just because you know a player who doesn't to play keeper is your best chance at keeping the ball out of the net.

With respect to weaker players, I like to surround them with some other players to help their confidence. This usually means playing them either at the forward wing or left/right midfield. This gives them some security and confidence that they will not be alone on an island. I also insist that my players play the ball correctly and not by who they *want* to get the ball to. By involving every player on the field, you will build a team and your weaker players will gain confidence.

Defense

As discussed in **Formations**, a good strategy is to sag players behind each other. Every player should have another player supporting them. ***The sag player should be positioned between the ball and the goal.***

This strategy is commonly known as **first defender/second defender**. The first defender is the player who is attacking the ball. The second defender sags back between the ball and the goal and will attack in the event her player is beaten. The first defender then runs back and becomes the second defender. If you stay true to this strategy, you will dramatically cut back on goals against.

Some defensive tips:

- Practice goal side marking. Your defender should be between the defender and the goal and slightly in front so she can intercept an incoming pass.
- Move the ball wide, not up the middle.

- Allow your players to try and dribble/pass out of trouble rather than a mindless clear.
- Allow your defender to carry the ball if she has green in front of her. Most defenders are taught to kick at the ball. Possess it, instead.
- Work on step-in-fronts. It can be a little risky, but stepping in front of an offensive player to intercept a pass results in excellent counter attack opportunities and shuts down an attack.

Attacking

If you want to put the ball in the net, take your high octane player, put her at forward and tell everyone “get the ball to that kid!”. I have seen this many times. However, ***if you want to build a team and include everyone in the plan***, then focus on a few basics when attacking:

- Attack in 45 degree angles by passing between the defenders to a player who is running behind them and up field.
- Always send a player far post to either receive a cross or to pick up a rebound.
- Keep a player at the top of the 18, usually the center midfielder, who can receive a trailing pass.
- Use your midfielders to trail on the attack. They can then either shoot on goal or switch fields (pass the ball to the other side) and the attack can start anew from the other side.

Practice your attacking power play Take your players and line them up in attacking position. Put your forwards across the 18, the midfielders a kick behind them and the defense opposing these two lines. Start the ball with the center midfielder and try and attack the goal in 45 degree angles. So, the center midfielder is looking for the right or left wingers, particularly if they are sneaking behind the defense (be mindful of offsides). The winger then can either shoot or send the ball across the net for an easy bump in by the center forward or opposite winger. If there are no options, your winger should pass the ball back to the trailing midfielder who starts the process over again. If the defense wins the ball, they should send it back to center field where the center midfielder on offense starts it all over again.

The Through Ball: Line up two defenders and two attackers across the field. Feed the ball from midfield at the middle attacker who charges the ball, redirects it to the side and then sends a long through ball between the defenders to the other attacker. As the first attacker is preparing to send the ball, the other attacker must begin her run in order for the through ball to be effective. She must get a step on the defender. This play will result in break away opportunities.

Possession

Two great things happen when you play possession soccer: 1. You can score; 2. They can't.

High possession soccer is dependent upon good ball skills, vision, movement without the ball and a cool head. Kids will panic when they get the ball. They will turn and pound the ball. Teach them to focus on first winning the ball, then protecting it and then keeping it. We call it WPK and you may have seen it on the backs of futsal t-shirts.

Win It Winning the ball is part effort and part skill. Effort is the easiest part. Try as hard as you

can and you can't ever go wrong. Teach your kids that effort is not a skill. Effort is a decision.

Protect It Use the body. Using the body to shield the ball is a legal and effective technique. Teach your players to position their body between the ball and the opposing player.

Keep It You must fundamentally shift the way your players think about soccer. They need to think of it as a big game of keep away. How they will keep the ball away from the other team is a combination of:

- shielding the ball with the body
- moving without the ball to receive a pass
- passing to space or to an open teammate
- foot skills
- dribbling

Rules Basics and Tips

The refs do not need your input, but asking for clarity on a rule or an explanation at the appropriate time in a polite manner is usually acceptable. Many young refs have quit due to the stress of getting criticized by coaches and parents. Our refs are a valuable part of the program and as an adult leader, your demeanor and interaction with the refs will go a long way to ensuring their participation.

The following are rules that come up the most:

Hand ball: CYC refs are taught to ask "hand to ball or ball to hand?" In other words, did the player intentionally reach for the ball or did the ball play the hand? In a situation where a hard shot or pass hits the hand, *unless the arms are extended away from the body or over the head*, a hand ball will most likely not be called. CYC refs are also taught not to call a hand ball if a player protects her chest in a defensive posture.

Substitutions: Have your players at the center line ready to sub. Do not sub off of the bench. Indicate to the referee "next available sub, please". This is courteous and will keep the game flowing. Subbing is a request, not a right. Tell your players to wait for the referee to wave them in before entering the field. Substitution situations:

- Throw ins: Free substitution. If the team with possession is subbing, the other team may sub. Otherwise, if the team with possession is not subbing, the other team may not sub.
- Corner kicks: Same rule as throw ins.
- Goal kicks: Either team may sub.
- Injury: If the team with the injured player subs, the other team may sub an unlimited number of players (new this year).

Offsides: CYC uses a two ref system. This makes it difficult for a ref to be in a good position to call offsides except in obvious situations. Some basics:

- Being in the offside position is not in and of itself an infraction
- To be an infraction, the player in an offside position and must be either gaining an advantage, interfering with a play or interfering with an opponent. In other words, it must be as if the player in an offside position is invisible in order for offside to not be called.
- There is no offside on your defensive half of the field. If the other team's defense pushes past midfield, you can keep a player at the midfield line and send a through ball. In this situation, I have made it a point to clarify with the ref that there is no offside.

Foul Throw Ins: It is not a foul to have a foot on or mostly over the line. As long as neither foot is *completely* over the line and there are no other violations, the throw in is legal.

Legal/Illegal Contact: Depending on the age and skill level of the players, there is a spectrum of contact that the referee will allow.

Typically, a player will be called for illegal contact for:

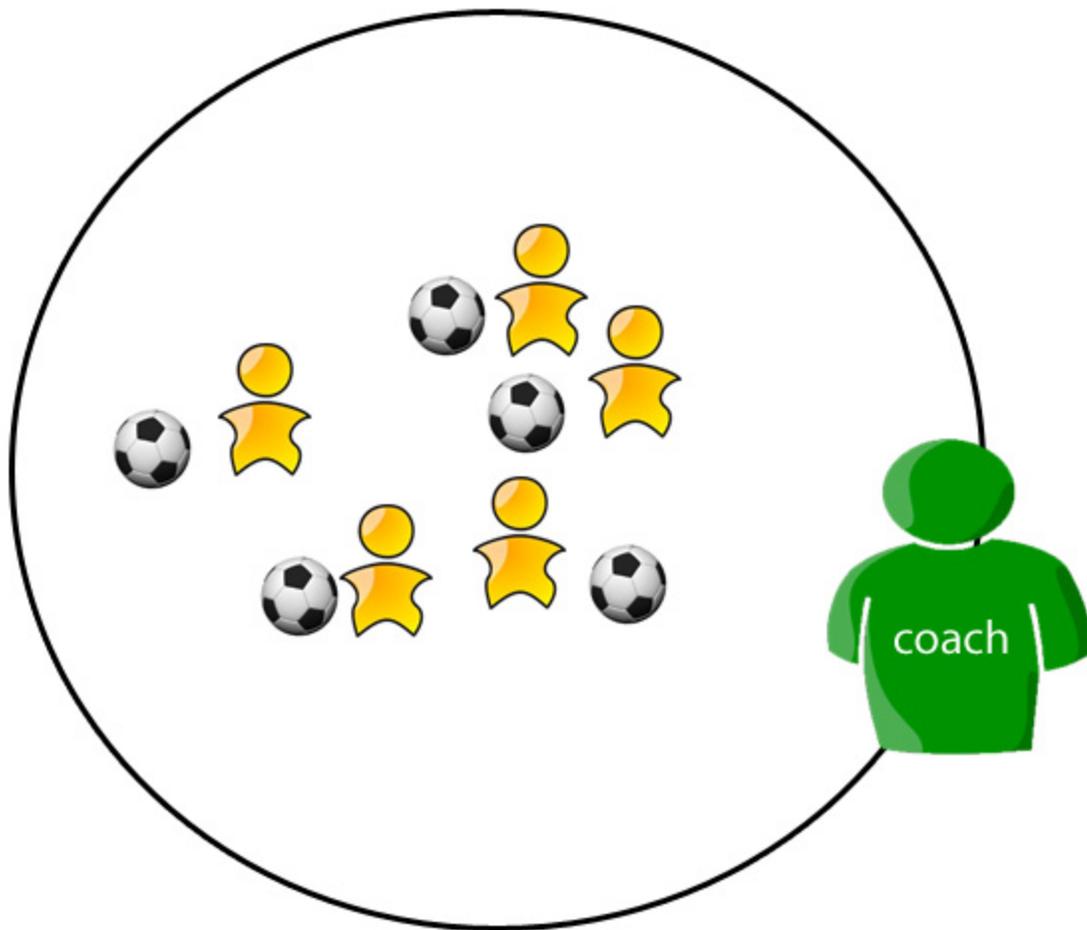
- slide tackling from behind
- impacting an opponent with enough force to knock them off balance
- pushing
- slide tackling without contacting the ball
- playing in a reckless or dangerous manner

Legal contact includes:

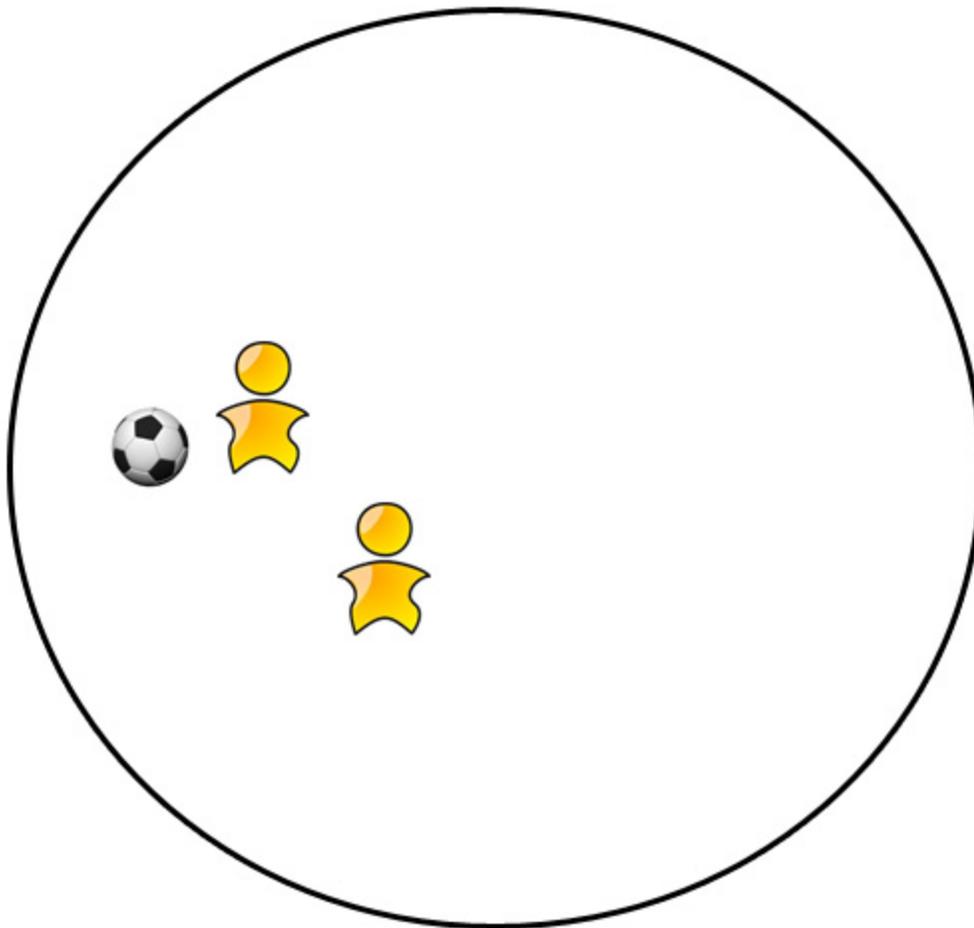
- using the body to shield the ball
- using the hip/shoulder to win a 50/50 ball (within reason)

Games for Protecting the Ball

Keep Away From Coach In this game, each player has a ball inside of a circle of cones. Have them start dribbling. The coaches will then attack the players and try and kick the balls out of the circle. This is a lot like sharks and minnows except your job is to help coach the kids on the fly how to protect the ball and how to escape into open space. If the ball is between you and your player, instruct them to turn their back on you and "hide" the ball from you. If you kick the ball out of the circle, they can either just sit out or you can have them run around a ball that you kicked 40 or 50 yards away prior to the game starting. I generally stay away from sharks and minnows because it's chaotic and not a good teaching tool. If you don't have enough coaches, pick a helper or two.



One v. One Small Circle Create a small circle with cones about 10 feet across. One player has the ball and the other tries to send the ball out of circle. Have a contest to see who can keep the ball in the circle the longest. Have a circle for every two groups. Alternate who is offense and who is defense.

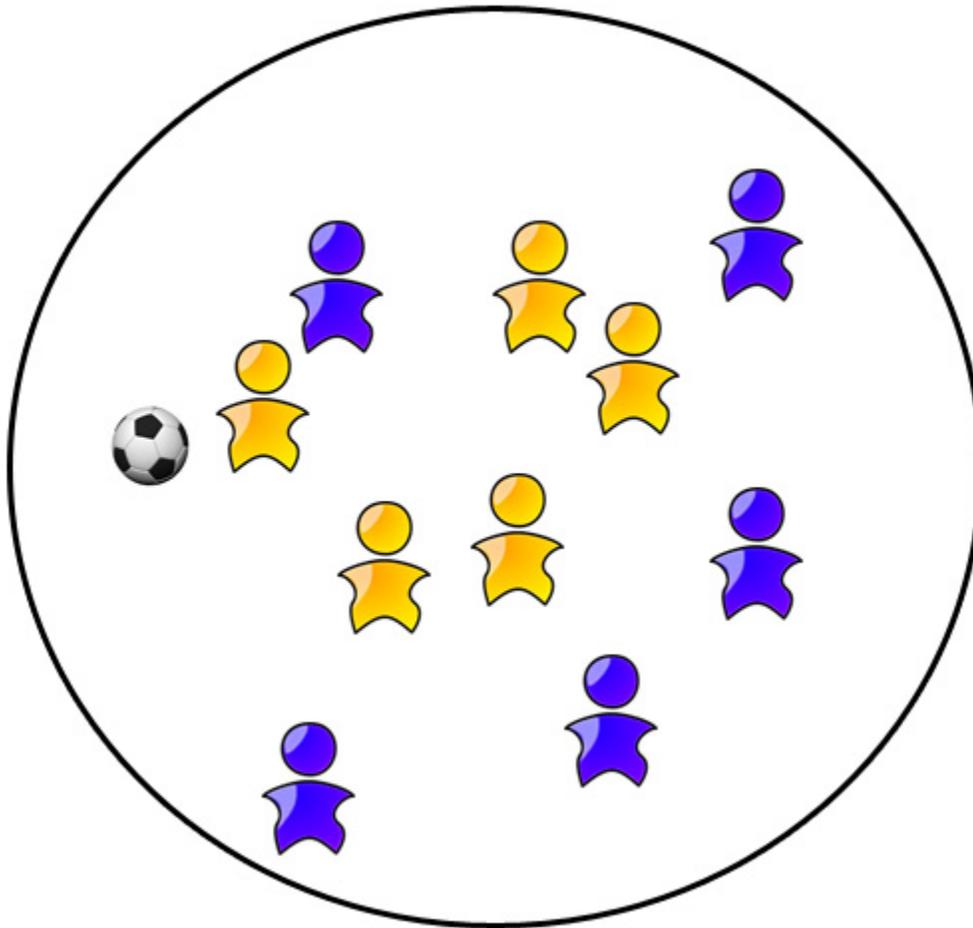


Games for Keeping the Ball

Keep Away Game: I feel so strongly about this game that my teams will frequently play it 75% of practice. Split your team into groups of 3-6 players. Depending on the number of players playing, create a smallish field to prevent too much running, but not so small that passing is impossible. The object of the game is to score points by successfully passing to a team mate. There are no goals, just passing. **A successful pass equals one point.** If the ball goes out of bounds, the nearest player restarts play with an inbound pass. There are no points on the inbound pass. Have a coach announce the ongoing score. Play to 20 or 25.

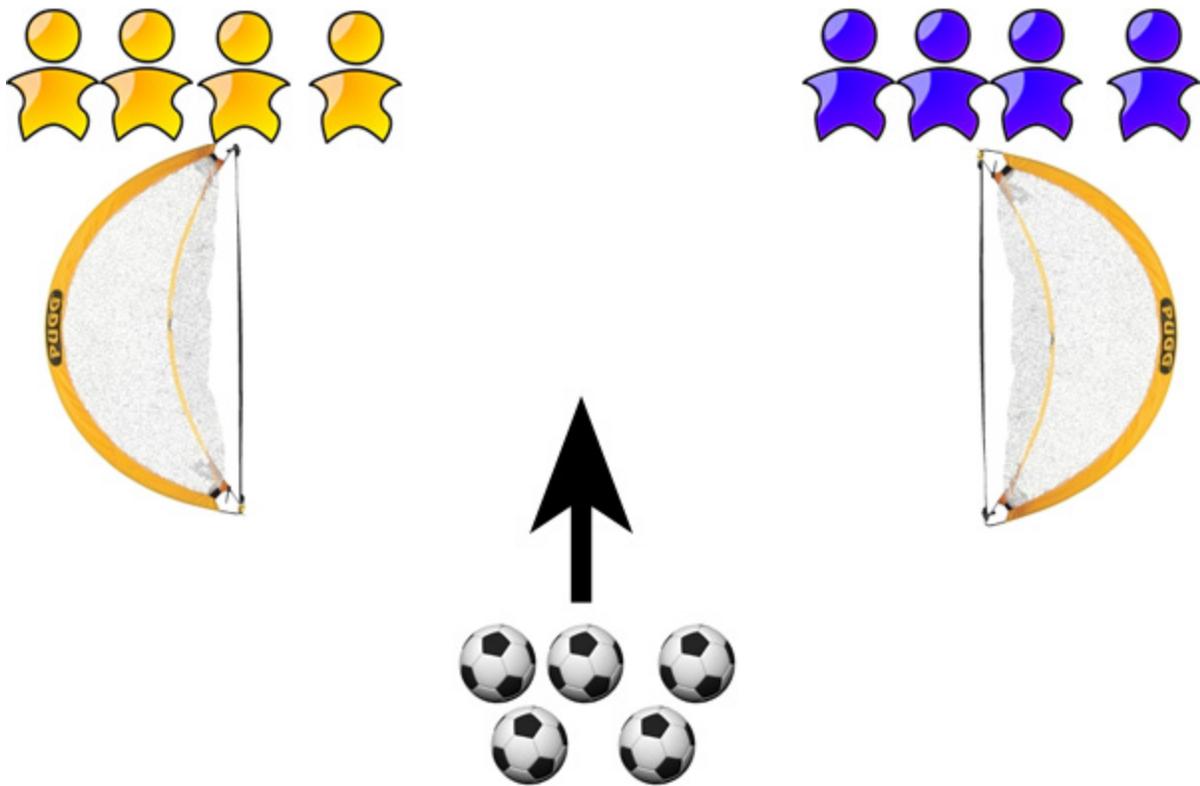
This game teaches players to win the ball, protect it and then look up for a player to pass to. It also teaches the other players to move into space to receive a pass. When they get the hang of it, it's a beautiful thing to behold. Players will move the ball from side to side and between

the defenders while the defenders run in circles trying to catch up with the ball. ***This is good soccer. This is the only game you really need to know to make your team a great high possession team.***

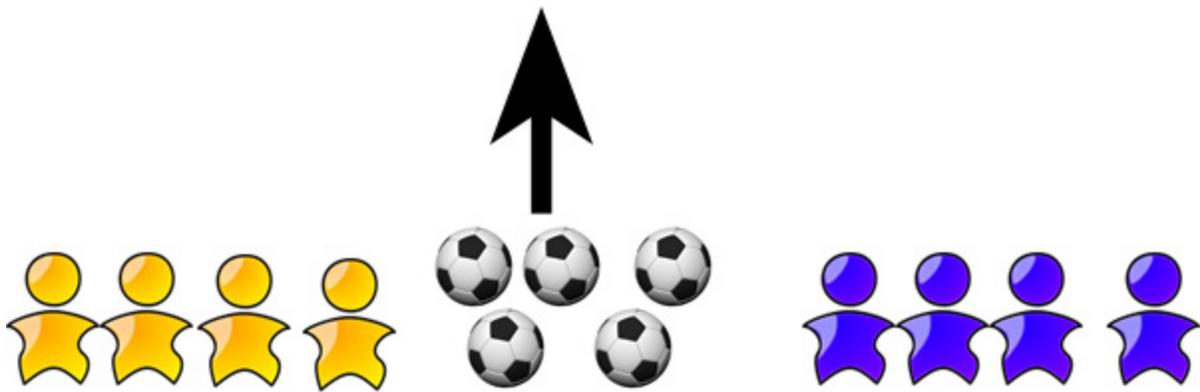


Games for Winning the Ball

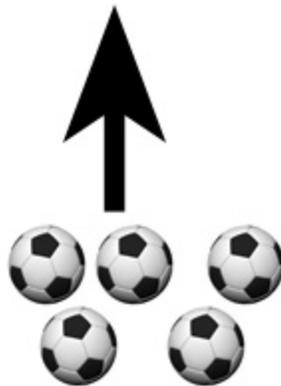
Little Kid Combat Form two lines facing each other about 30 yards apart. Put two cones for goals at each end or use puggs. Each team will try and score on their own goal. This helps avoid high speed collisions. Keep several balls outside of the field at center line. Toss the ball into the middle and have the first player in each line attack and try and score on their own goal. They need to use all of the effort to get to the ball first and then use their body to shield it. Once they have won the ball, they can then use the dribble to try and score on their own goal. Keep each contest to under 10 seconds.



Shoulder Tackle With a Common Goal Start with a group of balls and two lines on either side. Put a pugg goal 35 yards away. Both lines are facing the same pugg. Send a ball 12-15 yards toward the pugg and both players break for the ball. Each player tries to score on the same goal, using their hip and shoulder to gain positioning.



Step in Front Split the team in half and put one half shoulder-to-shoulder on one side of the goal along the goal line and the other half shoulder-to-shoulder on the other side of the goal on the goal line. Stand about 25 yards from the goal in the middle facing the goal with a group of balls. Send a ball toward the penalty spot. One player from each side charges the ball. One tries to score on the goal and the other tries to win the ball and pass it back to the coach who delivered the balls. They need to learn to use their speed and then body to win the ball and shield it. Rotate sides after each turn. Make sure they are clearing the field and shagging balls for you.



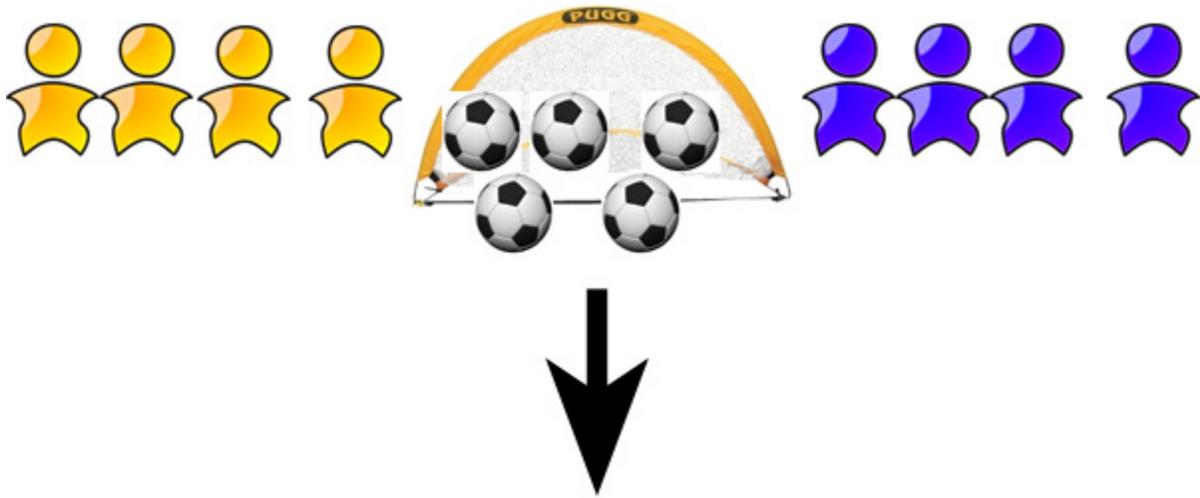
Redirect Same set up as the Step in Front, except one side is providing token defensive pressure. One player from each side charges the ball. One side eases up a little and the other player redirects the ball using the outside of their foot around the defensive player and then scores on the goal. If the offensive player who is redirecting is on the left side of the defensive player, then they should use the outside of their right foot to redirect the ball to the right, turn and then shoot. If the offensive player is on the right side of the defensive player, they should use the outside of their left foot to redirect the ball to the left of the defensive player, turn and shoot.

Games for Attacking

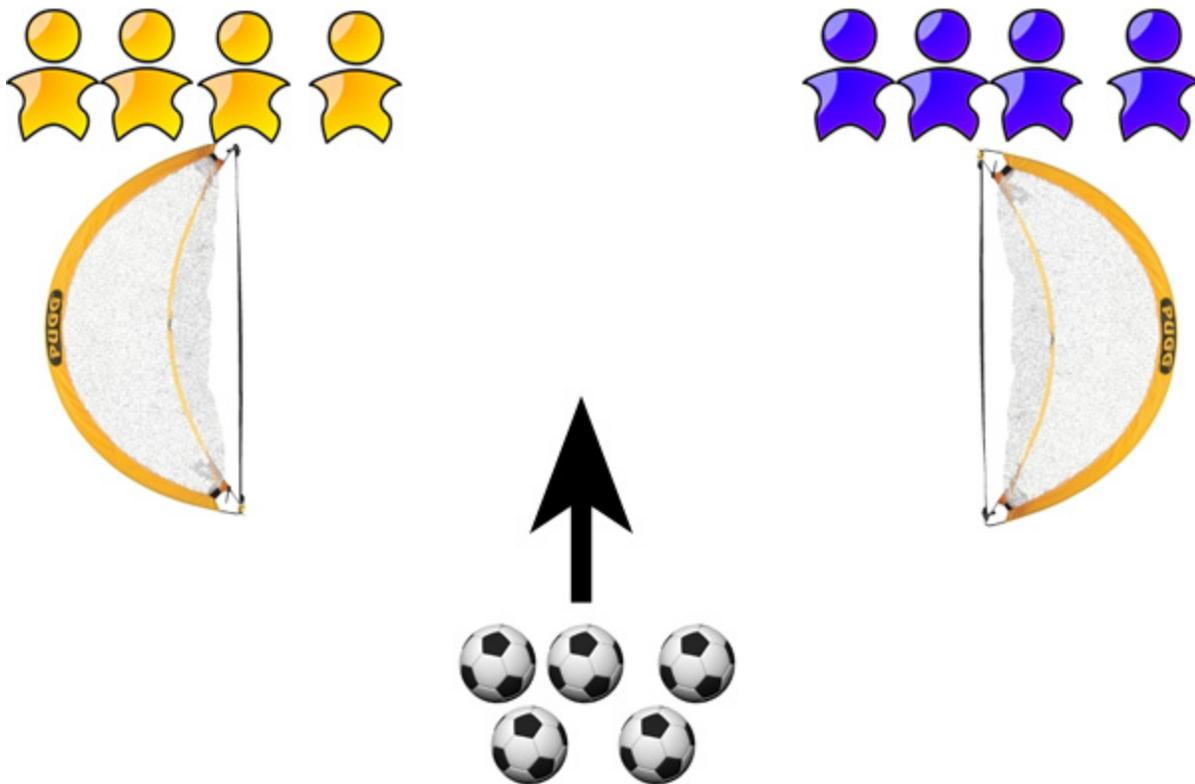
Split the D This game is important not only for attacking, but for possession. An effective way to penetrate the defense is to pass between them. A side-to-side pass keeps the defenders between the ball and the goal, but a pass between the defenders puts the ball behind them and therefore out of position.

Split your team in half. Use pinnies for one group. Line them up shoulder-to-shoulder on either side of a goal. Stand inside the goal with a group of balls. Kick a ball out of the goal to the top of the 18. Send the next two players from each side after the ball. Both groups of two will be trying to score on the same goal, but before they can score, they must pass the ball between the two defenders. This teaches the player without the ball how to get between the defenders.

It also teaches the give and go.



Three v. Three Split your team in half. Place goals about 40 yards apart. Have one group stand at one goal and the other at the other goal. Form lines. Send three players (two if you have fewer numbers) against the next three from the other side. Each group is trying to score on their own goal. This helps avoid high speed collisions. ***Each player on a team must touch the ball before they are eligible to score.*** Play to 5.



Finishing Drill Line up an offensive forward line and midfield against a defensive midfield and back line. Start the ball with the offensive center midfielder and work the ball in 45 degree angles. Have them try and score. If the defensive side wins the ball, have them clear it to center field and start the process over. Be diligent about emphasizing spacing. Players should not crowd each other. It is common in this drill for the wings to crowd the center players. They are bringing a defender with them and closing down the passing lanes. Keep them wide. Practice give-and-goes, splitting the D, through balls and crosses.

Conditioning

Dribbling Relays

Dribble around a cone 30 yards away, send ball as soon as round corner. Players sit after they've gone.

Overlaps

Place two balls 50 yards apart. Line up your players single file and have them jog very slowly. The last player will sprint to the front of the line at 100% speed. When that player reaches the front, the last player again sprints to the front of the line and so on. Do this for 15-20 minutes.

Relays Without a Ball

Run this five times. Place a balls or cones about 40 yards apart. Keep your groups to 3 or 4 players each. Each player runs around the far cone and returns. The next player goes when they slap hands. Run a race for each quarter and then one for overtime. Remind them that they have to learn to play tired.

Shuttle Runs

Place a four cones about 10 yards apart. Keep your lines short (3-4 players in each line). Each player runs to the first cone, touches it, returns to the starting cone, touches it, runs to the second cone, touches it, returns to the first cone, etc. They must not jog this or they will get no conditioning benefit.

Foot Skills

- **Tick tocks** Players tap the ball between their feet, hopping on each step.
- **Toe Taps** Tap the top of the ball and quickly switch feet.
- **Pulls** Set up two lines of cones about 20 yards apart. Each player has a ball standing shoulder-to-shoulder down one line of cone. Dribble to the other line, pull and return to the starting point. Repeat several times.
- **Inside Cut** Same cone set up as Pulls. Each player has a ball. Dribble to the other line of cones, cut the ball back in the opposite direction with the inside of the foot. Repeat several times. Alternate left and right foot.
- **Outside Cut** Same cone set up as Pulls. Each player has a ball. Dribble to the other line of cones, cut the ball back in the opposite direction with the outside of the foot. Repeat several times. Alternate left and right foot.
- **Right/Left foot rolls** Same cone set up as Pulls. Each player has a ball. Move sideways to the other line of cones. Use the back foot to roll the ball by stepping on top of the ball and moving it sideways. For example, if the player is moving to her left, use the right foot to roll the ball to the left.
- **Toss ball, break fall** Each player has a ball. Toss ball into the air. Breat its fall by catching the ball with the top of the foot and gently bringing the foot down.
- **Drop ball, tap back to hands** Drop ball to the foot. Just before it hits the ground, tap it back into the hands.

Kicking Lines Form two lines facing each other about 30 yards apart. Use one ball. One line passes the ball firmly to the other line. Before the ball is passed, the first player in the other line should charge the ball, receive it and pass it back to the other line. Players switch lines after each turn. Look for: firm passes, soft feet when receiving and accurate passes back. The ball should never leave the ground. The players should contact the ball at the equator to keep it down.

Practice Plan

If you were to do everything on this plan, you would practice for 4-5 hours. It is up to you to try different combinations. My suggestion is you keep the number of games you teach the kids to a minimum. I have selected a small number of games that I have found to have a big return on developing my players. The more you play them, the better they will get at the games and the more they will get out of them. My other suggestion is you select a just three or four of the items below and do them for 10-15 minutes each.

Practice Plan for K through 2nd Grade

Kicking Lines

Foot skills

- Tick tocks
- Toe taps
- Pulls

Little kid combat

Dribbling relay

Keep away

Scrimmage

Practice Plan for 3rd Grade on Up

Kicking Lines

Stretch

Footskills

Pick two or three:

- Tick Tocks
- Toe Taps
- Pulls
- Inside Cut
- Outside Cut
- Right/Left Foot Rolls
- Toss Ball/Break Fall
- Drop Ball/Tap back to hands

Aggression Games

Pick one or two:

- Little kid combat
- Shoulder Tackle With a Common Goal
- Step in Front
- Redirect

Protecting the Ball

Pick one:

- Keep Away From Coach
- One v. One Small Circle

Attacking

Pick one or two:

- Split the D
- Three v. Three
- Finishing Drill

Possession

Keep Away Game

Scrimmage (15 minutes or less)

Conditioning (4th or 5th grade on up)

Pick two or three:

- Dribbling Relays
- Overlaps
- Relays Without a Ball
- Shuttle runs

Always end practice by getting your team in a small group, review the lessons you covered and what you were trying to teach and if you see a player who was struggling, make it a point to pull them aside and tell them how much you appreciate their participation. Kids can easily feel embarrassed and out of place. An adult's attention goes a long way!

For hundreds of drills that follow the same philosophy as above, visit soccerhelp.com

soccerhelp.com has graciously offered a free premium membership for SAR:

<http://www.soccerhelp.com/premium/index.php>

username: stalbanroe

password: stalbanroe

This is free to all coaches and referees associated with St. Alban.

For any questions, comments or suggestions for improvement, please drop me a line:

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Thank you for all you do for the kids!