

REACH FORTH

Sports played. Lives changed.

U4 DIVISION (Age 3-4)

This practice manual is setup for teams to work on specific skill areas for multiple weeks in a row to allow coaches adequate practice time to teach the skill fundamentals. With each skill set, example drills have been suggested. Many of these have been provided through the Byte Size Coaching resource and have been effective for coaches in the past. This manual is intended to provide a guideline for coaches when planning practices over the course of the summer. Teams may vary on the drills they use or the focus of their practice however we hope this resource provides some consistency within this age group and provides a starting point for coaches.

General Tips and Example Weekly Schedule:

10 minutes - Kicking the ball around/taking shots on net, chatting with parents and kids (name tags for first couple of weeks)

10 minutes - Simple warm up (i.e. a few minutes of running/skipping/side-stepping followed by stretching arms, legs, back etc). You may want to go over names in the early weeks while you are sitting in a circle stretching

20 minutes - Play the following games first without a soccer ball to ensure they understand the game then add in the soccer ball. It is important to emphasize soccer skills in the games, for example emphasize ball control during Red Light Green Light. Also have players follow basic soccer rules like not touching the ball with your hands when you are trying to control it. Pick one or two games and use them for a few weeks before adding another.

Here are a few that lend themselves to soccer:

Simon Says, Red Light Green Light, Breakfast Lunch & Dinner, What time is it Mr. Wolf?, Tag, Follow the Leader, having races or challenges (Who can throw the ball the furthest? Who can hit the pylon?)

When doing drills, it is important that the kids don't spend most of their time standing around waiting for their turn. If the drill is one in which only one person can do it at a time, divide the kids into three groups and that way three kids can individually do the

task and their turn will come again more quickly than if they were in one long line.

10 minutes - Snack/Water break and Devotional time. It can be helpful to let them eat the snack while you talk unless you find it too distracting. Finish devotional message with a prayer.

20 minutes - Soccer Game or more drills.

- Do not change ends half way through at least not in the early weeks because players may get confused which way they are going. Every couple of weeks add in new rules to the game and explain them clearly to the kids (i.e. The first few weeks focus on not picking up the ball, starting at centre and going in the right direction). Then add in the concept of staying in bounds with the goalie getting the ball if it goes behind the net. Once they learn throw ins they can add this to their rules.) Use a lot of encouragement. On warmer days, give a water break whenever needed.

Tips:

- Don't spend too much time on one activity/game/drill
 - Change up the game/drill etc when you see the kids losing interest
 - As summer wears on kids tend to arrive later and later, try your best to start close to the start time
 - If a child is misbehaving: you can try to redirect them, take them aside and speak to them at eye level, ignore the misbehaviour (if it isn't hurting anyone), emphasize the positive behaviour in others ("Wow, look how quickly Josie lined up for our game!"), ask the child to sit with their parent for a short time if they are not responding to the before mentioned attempts
 - Parents don't like seeing other children hurt their children so deal with aggressiveness when you see it especially if the parent of the aggressive child isn't intervening (i.e. pushing to get the ball, hitting, throwing sticks)
 - Try to be encouraging and positive
 - Use the children's names often in the beginning, as it helps you to remember their names
 - Use plain language during devotional times and when giving instructions
 - Don't feel uncomfortable asking younger siblings to stay off the field once you have started (most younger siblings are happy if you offer them one of the extra balls to play on the side lines), it is for the safety and enjoyment of participants and volunteers if little ones (and pets) are off the field during the practice and game
 - Refer to each other as Coach _____ and wear your shirt each week
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Weeks 1-2

Kicking and Stopping the Ball Focus

1.) Kicking the ball

A.) Rules and technique: Introduce basics for the proper kicking technique. Stepping beside the ball with the non-kicking foot and hitting the ball with the inside of the foot, not the toe. These first two weeks should be basic and allow children opportunities to understand the concept before moving on.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Drills for this skill (and at this early point in the season) can be very simple and involve players kicking the ball back and forth to teammates and coaches.
- Soccer Golf

2.) Stopping the ball

A.) Rules and technique: teach players how to properly stop the ball with the side or bottom of their feet. Ensure that players are stopping the ball before shooting/passing and that they are moving their body to get in front of the ball before stopping it.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Have players partner up and line up across from one another. On the coaches whistle, partner 1 passes the ball to partner 2. Partner 2 stops the ball and waits for coaches next whistle.
 - All players line up (side by side), coach moves down the line passing the ball to each player and offering instruction on how to effectively stop the ball.
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Weeks 3-4

Dribbling and Ball Control Focus

1.) Dribbling and Ball Control A.) Rules and technique: players need to develop a sense of the field around them – field boundaries, net and other players (opposing and fellow team). Practices to help stop the ball, run with the ball, and use both feet in controlling the ball are essential to mastering this skill

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner/Dessert
 - Freeze Tag
 - Simon Says
 - Carl's Keep Away
 - Red Light/ Green Light
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Weeks 5-6

Passing and Shooting Focus

1.) Passing

A.) Rules and technique: Coaches should work with players to ensure passes are being made using the inside of the foot rather than the toe. It is also a challenge for players to fully understand the team mentality of the game as the focus usually remains on keeping the ball if they have it or trying to steal it if they don't. Much of this understanding can be taught by coaches in the game setting as they work with players on the field to look for their open teammates when they have the ball. One idea to encourage passing might be to award players with a sticker (for their jersey) when a coach sees them passing in the game. Once most of the players have at least one sticker, work as a team to set up a teammate so that they will get a sticker.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Begin with simple drills where players are standing still while passing. These passes can be made to another player or coach. Ensure that they are using the proper part of their foot when kicking
- Move to a more advanced drill where players are moving towards the net while passing back and forth to each other
- Soccer Golf
- Nutmeg Tag

2.) Shooting

A.) Rules and technique: When teaching the proper shooting technique, ensure that kids understand the concept of kicking the ball with the side of their foot and not the toe. Players should practice the technique of lining up their body to the target they want to shoot at and step into the kick.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Circle Game
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Week 7

Throw In Focus

1.) Throw Ins

A.) Rules and technique: awareness of field boundaries and ball possession rules are very important to establish. When teaching throw ins, ensure kids understand that their feet must remain behind the line and on the ground and that they must bring the ball behind their head when throwing. Use throw ins when the ball goes out of play during the game. Allow for 2nd and 3rd attempts if the throw in technique is incorrect at first.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Have team line up (side by side) facing the coach. Each child should have a ball. Coach moves along the length of the line (from in front and away) and indicates to each child to throw in the ball. Quickly go along the line having each child throw-in right after one another, correct incorrect techniques. After all players have thrown, they retrieve balls and return to the line (repeat multiple times)
 - Have players divide into pairs and stand “throwing distance” apart. Players alternately take turns throwing the ball to their partner with proper technique.
 - Line up pylons as targets for players to aim for and take turns doing throw ins at the pylons
 - Teach the kids “the secret to longer throws” once they understand throw ins. They buy in immediately when you tell them you’re going to let them in on “the secret.” Have them stand one foot in front of the other (in a lunging position) and shift their weight as they reach back before throwing the ball.
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Week 8

Defence/Goal Keeping/Positioning Focus

1.) Defence

A.) Rules and technique: It is important that players at this level develop an awareness of the defending positioning. It may be helpful to refer to them as “goalie defenders/guards” and explaining that it is their job to defend the goalie. Encourage them to engage the ball as soon as it comes to defensive mid-field – this prevents the standing-on-the-spot that can occur. Again, a coach on the field encouraging action is the best way to reinforce.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- What Time is it Mr Wolf?
- Cat and Mouse
- Catch the Coach

2.) Goal Keeping

A.) Rules and technique: At this level, the most important thing is that players understand the goalie can use his/her hands and no one else can. Teach players the proper way to do goal kicks and when goal kicks take place in the game. (*Note: rather than teach corner kicks at this stage, always give the goalie the ball when it goes out past the goal line). Allow different players the chance to play goalie and rotate throughout the game.

B.) Practice (Drills)

3.) Positioning

A.) Rules and technique: Ideally, instruction should be given on the difference between forwards and defenders in terms of their responsibilities and positions on the field. This is generally a difficult concept for younger players to master right away however. As you progress, continually remind players to spread out and not crowd around the ball and again separate the goalie (can use his/her hands, stays around net) from players playing out.

B.) Practice (Drills)

Weeks 9-10

Dribbling and Ball Control Focus

1.) Dribbling and Ball Control

A.) Rules and technique: Review the drills and instruction to help players stop the ball, run with the ball, and use both feet in controlling the ball. Return to drills that were effective earlier in the season and work with players to help them become more comfortable controlling the ball and ensuring that they are using the proper stopping technique.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner/Dessert
 - Freeze Tag
 - Simon Says
 - Carl's Keep Away
 - Red Light/Green Light
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Weeks 11-12

Passing and Shooting Focus

1.) Passing

A.) Rules and technique: Continue to work with players to ensure passes are being made using the inside of the foot rather than the toe. This skill foundation will require regular practice and reminders from coaches over the course of the season. It is also a good idea to review lessons on passing to teammates during gameplay (from the beginning of the season).

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Begin with simple drills where players are standing still while passing. These passes can be made to another player or coach. Ensure that they are using the proper part of their foot when kicking
- Move to a more advanced drill where players are moving towards the net while passing back and forth to each other
 - Soccer Golf
 - Nutmeg Tag

2.) Shooting

A.) Rules and technique: Review the proper shooting technique from earlier in the season and ensure that players are beginning to use this more consistently. Return to effective drills.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Circle Game
- Mack 1

Week 13

1.) Throw Ins

A.) Rules and technique: continue to emphasize awareness of field boundaries and ball possession rules. Review skill foundation for throw ins from the beginning of the season including: feet must remain behind the line and on the ground and ball must be brought behind the head before throwing. Review and redo skills and drills as necessary.

B.) Practice (Drills)

- Have team line up (side by side) facing the coach. Each child should have a ball. Coach moves along the length of the line (from in front and away) and indicates to each child to throw in the ball. Quickly go along the line having each child throw-in right after one another, correct incorrect techniques. After all players have thrown, they retrieve balls and return to the line (repeat multiple times)
- Have players divide into pairs and stand "throwing distance" apart. Players alternately take turns throwing the ball to their partner with proper technique.
- Line up pylons as targets for players to aim for and take turns doing throw ins at the pylons

Drills and Games

Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner/Dessert Designate 4 areas as above using pylon markers. Each player has a ball and when the coach calls out one of the "spots" players race to get to that spot.

Carl's Keep Away

Organization:

- Mark a grid 15 x 15 yards depending on numbers.
- Assuming there are 10 to 12 players split group in half, say two groups of 6.
- Use pinnies to distinguish the two groups.
- One group of 6 goes into the square and just one of the other group also goes into the square. The rest wait in line for their turn.
- The 6 players try to keep the ball away from the one defender.
- When the defender wins the ball or forces the ball to be played out of the area he/she changes with the next defender. This goes on until every defender has been through and they then change with the other team.
- The team that keeps the ball for the longest time (stop watch out) is the winner.
- If a team is doing so well the defender cannot get the ball after 30 seconds shout, "Change!" and the next defender replaces the one in the middle.
- The coach keeps a supply of balls handy so after an interception or a ball is kicked out of play he/she kicks or rolls another ball in. Teaching:

- Coach must assess whether the playing area is too big or too small and make adjustments if necessary.
- For the first few minutes allow the players to play in a non-competitive way so that when a mistake is made, the coach can recreate the situation and then ask the player who made the mistake what the alternatives are. Praise him or her for coming up with the answers (as they surely will). If they can see what should be done they will learn more quickly to do it when the ball is in play.
- After a few minutes go into the stopwatch competition described above without any interventions by the coach other than putting the ball back in play.
- This practice should be used on a regular basis and progressed when the children are ready. The ways to progress are-
 - Make the space smaller
 - Reduce the numbers attackers, e.g., 5 vs. 1 and then 4 vs.1
 - Or increase the number of defenders, e.g., 6 vs. 2
 - Condition the attackers, e.g., no more than two touches (control and pass).
 - Although the defender is outnumbered encourage them to look for the misplaced or miscontrolled pass to pounce on the ball.

Target:

- To keep the ball for the longest time; for the defender to win the ball as soon as possible. (Courtesy of ByteSize Coaching Resources)

Cat and Mouse

This game is similar to British Bulldog. Choose one player to be the “Cat” and all other players are the “Mice.” The mice have to cross a certain area on the field and when they do the “Cat” attempts to take away the ball from each of the “Mice.” If he/she is able to steal a ball, that “Mouse” becomes a “Cat” for the next crossing.

Catch the Coach This has been a favourite for many Tyke players. Always preempt the drill with the reminder to get the ball away from the coach and no grabbing the coach – without this reminder, kids have a tendency to try and tackle the coach vs. developing the skill to get the ball. Start off by explaining the rules and then have them all line up, with the coach being 20 paces away – blow the whistle to start and run away from the team with the ball, as they try and get the ball from you. Let them get close and then move away quick, doing fast turns and dodges, and finally allowing the pack to get the ball away from you. Once this is done, you can reverse it and try to get the ball from the pack. Signal with the whistle when complete.

Circle Game

Organization:

- Mark a circle having a center mark (line intersection; a coin; a scratched "X").
- A center circle works well, but may be too big for young players.

- 5-yard radius for 6-year olds; 6-yard for 7-year olds, etc.
- Use marker disks to make a circle.
- From center spot pace out the radius by going North, South, East and West. Then fill in the rest of the circle.
- Each player on one side of the circle has a partner directly opposite.
- If there is an odd number the coach joins in.
- Each pair has one ball between them.
- One player passes the ball towards his or her partner, but tries to knock over a cone in the center circle.
- The partner retrieves the ball and returns the pass through the center circle, again trying to kick over a cone.
- The ball must be passed from outside the circle.
 - The game is stopped when all cones are knocked down. Teaching:
- Encourage the players to use pace as well as accuracy of pass.
- Suggest they continue to kick towards the ball even after they have actually kicked (follow through).
- Encourage them to approach the ball at a slight angle to the direction they are kicking (45 degrees). Target:
 - The coach uses a stopwatch to set the "team" record of knocking all cones down. Later, winners are the pair to first knock over the cones 5 (6, 8,10) times. (Courtesy of ByteSize Coaching Resources)

Mack 1

Organization:

- Two marker cones placed five yards in front of each sideline 15 yards from the goal.
- No goalkeeper and goals may be narrowed.
- First player on right does a "throw-in" to coach, who rolls ball for a first-time, right-footed shot.
- Player retrieves ball then goes to back of the left line.
- First player at left marker cone does the same exercise, but shooting with left foot, then retrieves ball and goes to back of the right line. Teaching:
 - No goalkeeper, so players don't sacrifice accuracy for power and poor technique.
 - Encourage careful, accurate shooting.
 - For weaker players, roll ball closer to goal.
 - As all players improve, roll ball at 90-degree angle or greater, or move cones back to force a more powerful shot without losing accuracy.

- Don't change practice conditions too soon. Each team should try beating its record.

Target:

- Record results for future competition (Courtesy of ByteSize Coaching Resources)

Nutmeg Tag

Description: select one player to be IT and everyone else has their own ball. If the player who is IT tags another player, he/she must stop running and stand with his/her feet apart until another player comes by and passes the ball between their legs to free them.

Red Light-Green Light

Organization:

- Players start on end line each with a ball.
- The coach starts five yards in front of them. He turns so now his back is to the players and shouts "Green Light."
- This is the signal for the players and the coach to move forward.
- The coach will then shout "Red Light!" and turn quickly with the ball. If he catches anyone moving they must move back four paces.
- When the coach gets to the end of the field and shouts "Red Light!" and turns, the winner is the player nearest to the end-line who is not moving and has the ball under control.
- Then reverse the direction to start the next phase.

Teaching:

- Encourage players to make short fast movements, with the ball under close control.
- Advise them to keep an eye on the coach and their ball.
- Encourage them to quickly put their foot on the ball on the "Red Light!" shout. Target:
- Not to get caught out on the Red Light, but also to get ahead of team-mates. (Courtesy of ByteSize Coaching Resources)

Soccer Golf

Description: setup pylons around the practice field and have kids take turns attempting to knock over the pylons with passes. Form two teams and keep track of which team can knock over the most.