

YOUTH SOCCER COACHING GUIDE

U3 – U18



A complete framework for coaching soccer

Based on the 4 PILLARS OF SOCCER™

&

The Seven Speeds of Soccer

Tom Sauder

Best-selling author of soccer practice books

www.soccerpracticebooks.com

Contents

1. Introduction
2. 4 PILLARS OF SOCCER™ Overview
3. The Seven Speeds of Soccer
4. U3 – U6 recreational
5. U7 – U8 recreational
6. U9 – U12 recreational
7. U13 – U18 recreational & competitive
8. U16 – Adult competitive
9. Goalkeepers

1. Introduction

This guide can be used to structure soccer practices and drills for any team and competitive environment. It has been developed based on 30 years of coaching experience, observation, and researching best practices around the globe.

It naturally complements our own soccer practice books by providing a framework for coaching all age groups, competitive levels, and goalkeepers. It allows you, the coach, to select the appropriate soccer practice plans and activities from our, or any other, collection of soccer practice resources.

The guide is formatted around the **4 PILLARS OF SOCCER™** which are the underlying foundation of the activities and practice plans in our practice books. In the next chapter I will review the **4 PILLARS OF SOCCER™** in more detail, but in essence they are:

1. Technical Skills
2. Tactics
3. Physical Fitness
4. Mental Fitness

Here is an example of a **4 PILLARS OF SOCCER™** development profile:

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
Youth Competitive (U13-U18): 7v7 Flank Attack					
Technical Skill	●	●	●	○	○
Tactical	●	●	●	●	●
Physical Fitness	●	●	●	●	○
Mental Fitness	●	●	●	●	●

The second principle underpinning our coaching philosophy and practice design are **The Seven Speeds of Soccer**, a German concept created to improve the cognitive and physical speeds of soccer players. The seven speeds are:

1. Perceptual speed
2. Anticipation speed
3. Decision Making speed
4. Reaction speed
5. Movement speed without ball
6. Action speed with ball
7. Game action speed

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive review of the seven speeds of soccer

For each age group, competitive level and for goalkeepers we will:

- recommend the appropriate **4 PILLARS OF SOCCER™** development profile, showing the emphasis on each pillar for the specific age group
- break down what each pillar means
- provide an example practice activity/drill and show how the 4 Pillars and Seven Speeds of Soccer are incorporated
- refer you to the appropriate soccer practice book from our library to consider for your team practices

Youth soccer development has become more targeted to specific age groups. In the “old” days organized soccer started at U10, all games were 11v11 and played on a full field with regular size 5 balls. That was possible because the essential soccer skills were learned playing street (or beach) soccer for hours every day and children got the required touches on the ball before they ever showed up for organized practices or games. Today soccer is mostly played in organizations and touches on the ball mostly happen during practices and games. Our practices maximize touches on the ball. To allow a reasonable level of involvement and satisfaction, FIFA has recommended to make fields, goals, players/team, and balls smaller for the younger age groups. FIFA still regulates all dimensions and rules for full field soccer but has made recommendations for small field soccer. Associations and clubs have a lot of flexibility based on fields and equipment

available as long as they follow the concept. I have seen many different models and thought it would be useful to give an example:

Age	Structure	Field Size (m) Length x Width	Fields on full field	Goal Size	Ball Size	Game Length
U3 – U6	3v3 (no GK)	20 x 15 m 22 x 17 yds.	6	2 x 1 m 6 x 3 ft.	3	30 min + 30 min training
U7 – U8	5v5 (incl. GK)	35 x 25 m 40 x 30 yds.	4	3 x 1.5 m 10 x 5 ft.	4	50 min
U9 – U10	7v7 (incl. GK)	50 x 35 m 55 x 40 yds.	2	3.5 x 2 m 12 x 6 ft.	4	70 min
U11 – U12	9v9 (incl. GK)	70 x 50 m 80 x 55 yds.	1	5.5 x 2 m 18 x 6 ft.	5	70 min
U13 – U14	11v11	FIFA	1	FIFA	5	80 min
U15 – U18	11v11	FIFA	1	FIFA	5	90 min

FIFA expresses all dimensions in metric units. For imperial units I have converted as closely as possible.

If you choose one of our practice books you can be assured that the 4 Pillars and Seven Speeds of Soccer are present in every book and every activity. Once you start thinking about them you will recognize them as you practice.

2. The 4 PILLARS OF SOCCER™ Overview

This provides a brief review of the four pillars which are used in each and every one of our soccer practice books:

1. Technical Skill Development

There too many skills a soccer player can perform to mention here. Entire books have been written on soccer skills alone. But to list a few:

For Out Players:

- ball control – receiving, second touch, passing
- 1v1 moves
- shooting, heading
- shielding
- tackling
- dribbling
- running with ball

For Goalkeepers:

- Catching the ball
- Parrying the ball
- Foot saves
- Angles
- 1v1
- Collapsing dives
- High dives

2. Tactical Development

Tactics apply to the team as a whole, to units (goalkeeper, defense, midfield, attack), and to individual players. Tactics can be expressed as a formation (e.g. 4-4-3), as a philosophy (e.g. high possession soccer), and/or as a strategy (high pressure, line of engagement, etc.)

I advocate choosing all of the above elements based on the player personnel available, i.e. their skills, maturity level, understanding of the game, age, etc. There is no point talking possession soccer to 5 year olds or high pressure to 15 year old recreational teams. My recommended tactical steps for any coach are:

1. Evaluate the context of your team – age, competitive level, league
2. Evaluate your players
3. Choose an overarching philosophy (possession, fast transition, fun, etc.)
4. Choose a formation
5. Select strategies

Then coach individuals the tactical elements required for their position, functional units on how to play together, and finally how the units function as a team. For example:

- systems of play suited to number of players on field
- learning positional roles
- essential game elements – overlaps, give and go, switching play, etc.
- recognizing other team's tactics
- etc.

3. Physical Fitness

The elements of physical fitness can be very complex. At the professional level they are monitored during practices and games (e.g. top running speed, heart rate) and during idle times (oxygen levels, enzymes, resistance capacity, etc.). For youth soccer training I recommend to consider both the physical fitness attributes and their evaluations, but measure them somewhat more empirically. For example with young children, observe flexibility. With older and competitive youth players clock sprint speed and test endurance. With older and competitive goalkeepers evaluate vertical leap and horizontal diving reach.

Here then are some of the attributes of physical fitness to consider in your training:

- speed
- endurance
- strength (legs, upper body)
- agility
- flexibility

4. Mental Fitness

Under the umbrella of mental fitness fall several areas which on their own are entire fields of study – psychological development, emotional development, social development, performance status. Again, depending on the age group and competitive level some of these areas are more relevant than others.

Examples of mental fitness attributes are:

- focus
- concentration
- confidence
- decision making, anticipation, perception
- team atmosphere and environment
- peak performance states
- communication
- social interaction

For each age group and respective competitive level I will offer a **4 PILLARS OF SOCCER™** development profile, explain what each pillar means, and give an example soccer drill from our relevant practice book showing how the pillars are applied.

3. The Seven Speeds of Soccer

The seven speeds of soccer is a German concept and credit must be given to the inventors – Gero Bisanz, Gunnar Gerrisch, Jurgen Weineck, and those who expanded it with relevant soccer drills and wrote a book on it. The book is called “How to Improve the 7 Speeds of Soccer” and is part of the Performance Soccer Conditioning series. It has been authored by experts from across the soccer and training spectra – V. Gambetta, J. Luxbacher, J. Osorio, R. Quinn, N. Sedwick, and M. Thyron.

Speed is more than the physical speed of a player, such as when sprinting. Yes, physical sprinting speed is an important aspect of a player’s or a team’s performance. But when considering the number of sprints during a game relative to the length of the game it becomes evident that there is more to speed than running fast.

You have likely observed players who are a little older yet they get to the ball before a younger, physically faster opponent. How is that? It’s because the experienced player likely perceived the situation faster, anticipated the game faster, made a quicker decision as to where to move to, reacted to the final ball motion faster, moved into position without the ball quicker, got the ball and then likely played a quick pass increasing the speed of the game. And there you have them – the 7 speeds of soccer:

1. **Perceptual Speed** – the ability to observe, process, and integrate the game as it unfolds around the player, using visual and auditory senses.
2. **Anticipation Speed** – the ability to predict future events based on previous experiences, observations, and intuition.
3. **Decision Making Speed** – The ability to develop options and quickly decide on the best one to execute.
4. **Reaction Speed** – The ability to react to events such as opponent, teammate, or ball movements.
5. **Movement Speed without Ball** – The ability to move at maximum physical speed
6. **Action Speed with Ball** – The ability to handle the ball at maximum physical speed, 1v1 moves, dribbles, passes, shots.

7. **Game Action Speed** – The ability to pull all other speeds together during a game, considering technical, tactical, and physical circumstances to increase the pace of your team’s game. That is what I described in a previous article as catching the opponent out of shape and out of balance – play the game faster than the opponent.

Just to level set, when we discuss speeds of soccer, we are talking about thought processes that take fractions of a second and action processes that don’t take much longer. Improving these speeds then is an exercise in making small improvements as well as in training certain parts of the brain. But we do this in the context of soccer. These speeds apply to both out players and goalkeepers.

1. Soccer Perception Speed

is about taking in many, many pieces of visual and auditory information. It is that basic building block that allows the processing of the information and ultimately making split second decisions and executing them. Soccer perception speed can be trained and practiced at any level of soccer. Regardless of a player’s base level of perception speed, it will get better with continued playing experience. So the combination of practice and playing time will lead to improvements.

Let’s look at some examples of what we mean by perception speed:

- Recognizing that the ball has been passed to you, whether directly at your feet or into space ahead of you. Do you need a shout, do you perceive the ball movement as soon as it is passed?
- If you are in control of the ball, do you perceive movement of your team mates? Do you perceive spaces available to play the ball into?
- Do you perceive opponents closing you down?

It is all about your field of vision and your speed of taking in a sensory stimulus and processing what that stimulus means.

From a practice point of view, we always advocate that players are constantly moving, with or without the ball, and are getting maximum opportunities of ball touches. Questions to ask yourself as a coach when you run soccer drills:

1. Are all players moving or are they standing?
2. Does the ball keep moving or is it a stop/start situation?
3. Are players making contact with the ball as early as possible? This includes attacking the ball as opposed to waiting for it to come to you.

2. Soccer Anticipation Speed

describes a player's ability to predict the probability and end result of a game action situation. Because they can predict what will happen they can execute their own response/move that much faster. For example, if an outside defender can predict that the opposing midfielder will switch the play from the opposite side of the field to their side with a long ball, they can scan other opposing players, decide where the ball will likely end up, who the likely recipient is, and get physically and mentally ready to get into the target space before the ball or opponent get there.

This speed is highly dependent on a player's experience. A professional will have seen more game situations and has developed a larger mental data base than a youth player in their second year of soccer. But it is not only experience, anticipation can be trained.

The best coaching method is small sided games in relatively small spaces, 2v1, 2v2, 3v2, 3v3, 4v4, etc.

3. Soccer Decision Making Speed

Let's review a real life example to illustrate this speed:

Seven year old boys play in a league game on Tuesday evening, 5 a-side including a goalie on a small sized field. One player is very aggressive and always wants to win the ball, and he does. Once he gets the ball, he holds on to it, runs/dribbles with it, and gets entangled with opposing players. The coach **may** shout at him to pass to an open team mate, but nothing happens. The immediate diagnosis is that the boy is a "ball hog", doesn't want to pass. The technical analysis might suggest that he keeps his head down and is not aware of his surroundings. Both may be reasonable causes of why he keeps holding on to the ball far too long.

The coach actually praised the player who “hogged” the ball for his great efforts in winning possession and then asked why he wouldn’t pass and eventually lose it again by running out of space or being swarmed by the opposing team. The answer was: “I don’t see the open players”. That may lead to the conclusion that his head is down and in practice we need to work on keeping the head up. But when asked if he would do anything different if he did see open team mates he hesitated, maybe trying to figure what we wanted to hear. It suddenly became clear that he actually didn’t know that he had to make a decision of what to do with the ball once he gets it, and that the decision should lead to a positive play. So at the next practice the coach asked him to think about what he could do after he gets the ball. It took a few minutes but together they came up with dribbling, passing, and shooting, depending on where on the field he was and what he saw. Now that he knew there were options he realized that he had to look up, not because the coaches told him, but because that would give him information to make a good decision.

Experience is a key factor in decision making. The more experience you have, the faster information is taken in and processed. That in turn allows the decision to act to be made faster.

4. Soccer Reaction Speed

is defined as the ability to react to a previous action as perceived by the player.

We typically think of reaction and its speed in the context of goalkeepers making saves. And that is true as goalkeepers are trained to react to the motion of the shooter and the flight of the ball immediately after it leaves the foot. But all other positions rely on reaction speed as well. Although a player has perceived and anticipated the next play, and made a decision on what to do, the actual play may be somewhat different. Therefore one must react to the actual outcome of the anticipated play. A good example is a forward getting sent into the penalty box with a through ball. Both forward and passer perceive the space behind the defense. The passer anticipates the run and the forward anticipates the pass. The decision is to pass and the forward decides to shoot on goal on the first touch. At the moment of the shot a defender slides in from behind to block the shot. The forward now reacts to the new situation, controls the ball to the side past the defender, and then shoots on the second touch.

Many factors impact the reaction speed of a soccer player, arguably the most important one is aerobic fitness. As individuals become tired, the reaction speed slows. Other factors are the type of reaction, age, gender, motivation, emotional state, intensity of the situation, muscles involved, etc. So it is a very complex process and training has to be very specific to develop reaction speed.

5. Soccer Movement Speed without Ball

Vern Gambetta of Gambetta Sports Training Systems said it best:

“Game analysis has shown that the average player will be in possession of the ball only 2% of total match time. What happens the other 98% of the time?”

The answer is that players move, or at times rest. The average professional soccer player runs between 10 km and 14 km during a 90 minute game. That is a lot. Using the math above 9.8 km to 13.7 km are run without the ball. The running is a mix of many physical movements, for example:

1. Short sprints to receive a pass
2. Long sprints to close down an attacker
3. Short jogs when the play is shifting
4. Long jogs to get up the field to take a corner kick
5. Jumps for headers
6. Side steps
7. Running backwards
8. Quick changes of directions to lose a defender
9. Quick moves getting into position to receive a throw in
10. Short steps or long strides
11. Sliding for tackles
12. Diving for goalies

6. Soccer Movement Speed with Ball

The sixth soccer speed, action with ball, totally involves the mastery and control of the soccer ball. It is about executing all required soccer skills with a high degree of accuracy at maximum speed.

It is good that a player perceived the play, anticipated the exact end point of a pass, decided to meet the ball there, reacted to the actual pass, and out-sprinted the defense to get to the ball first. All this will be wasted if that player needs a many touches to control the ball, needs to adjust their body to get ready for a shot, and then hope to strike with pace and accuracy. It may work at very young ages but as players mature, competition increases, and the demands of the game grow, it will not be successful.

What is required is to execute ALL skills at maximum speed with accuracy. I always start with emphasizing accuracy first, then add speed. The ONLY way to improve skills is through repetition. Assuming reasonable natural aptitude for soccer, the kids who practice most and touch the ball most often will eventually turn into the best soccer players. Studies have shown that 4,000 ball touches a week, starting at age 5, will suffice. A typical 1.5 hour youth practice will have each player touch the ball at best 100 times. So even three practices a week isn't even close. Our practices average around 500-600 touches per player if coached correctly. Still not even half of what is required in three sessions per week. This then leads to individual extra ball work for those who aspire to higher level soccer.

7. Soccer Game Action Speed

relies on all of the other components of soccer speed for its execution. It is the ability to make fast, effective decisions during the game in relation to technical, tactical, and conditioning possibilities. The capacity to process information quickly during a game is an individual player attribute. It can even vary within a player depending on the game situation or the emotional, physical, and psychological state of the individual.

4. U3 – U6 Recreational

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
U3 – U6 Recreational Soccer					
Technical Skill					
Tactical					
Physical Fitness					
Mental Fitness					

Overview

You may be surprised that skill development has a low emphasis and physical and mental fitness are very high. What is more typical when observing coaches of young children is spending time on technique development. But skill development involves a lot of instruction with kids standing idle, followed by repetition which is boring.

At this age group it is far more important to keep kids moving, to get them to interact with other children and to have fun. This is why I recommend a higher emphasis on physical and mental training in a fun and active environment.

I should note that grouping U3 – U6 is a very broad age band and differences between players in each age group are far larger than in any other age group. You can have three year olds that have been kicking a ball around at home quite skilled and then have four year olds who have never seen a soccer ball.

This can lead to the advanced child “hogging” the ball when the game happens and others just standing and watching. Typically clubs organize the “game event” such that there is 30 minutes of activities before the 30 minute game. It is important that the activities are fun – they can include parents and siblings for the very young ones.

In the typical 3v3 game with teams of up to 9 players there is a lot of idle time on the sidelines. This is not good. I would rather play a continuous 3v3 and divide the field into smaller areas. I suggest the “coach” bring some extra cones and consider that. That way all the kids are involved and the occasional “drama” of getting children back on the field is avoided.

Technical Skill means encouraging kids to play the ball with their feet. There is no need to get concerned with kicking technique (toe vs laces, etc.), 1v1 moves, passing accuracy or any other of the key soccer skills. Running with the ball and just kicking it is sufficient.

Tactical training is reduced to teaching the direction of play and the boundaries of the field. Coaching tactical elements like passing, positions, etc. would likely be beyond the cognitive skills of kids who just want to have fun and be busy. As mentioned above having mini 3v3 games involving everyone is recommended. I suggest grouping players by skill levels to avoid the “ball hogs” dominating and others being intimidated. This way the advanced kids can “compete” with each other. If a U5 or U6 group looks advanced then feel free to introduce the idea of team play (i.e. passing) and possibly the concept of defenders and attackers.

Physical Fitness for young children is not what coaches typically associate with soccer: running speed, endurance, strength, etc. At this age group physical fitness means:

- Coordination – can the child actually run, coordinating arms and legs?
- Agility – can the child turn while running, run and jump?
- Flexibility – can the child bend down, touch feet?

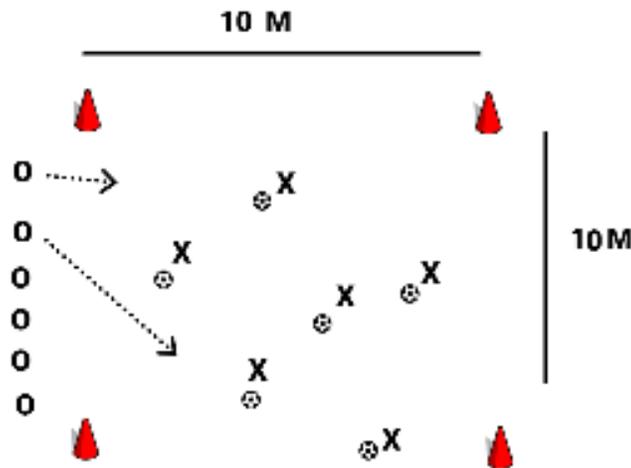
Developing these attributes has a high priority as they set the stage for future physical development and soccer fitness.

Mental Fitness also isn't the typical soccer model of focus, concentration, game readiness, toughness, confidence, etc. At this age group mental fitness relates to:

- Social Skills – getting children to interact with each other. Learning that it is ok to share the ball with others, wear the same uniform and belonging to a group, and having a good time within the context of a GAME.
- Emotional Development – it's ok to be excited to be there or initially to be unsure about the whole thing, especially for first timers. The goal in the first year is really to see if the child has an interest in sports, in playing with others, and in soccer. The success is for the child to come back the second year. Once you get to U5 and U6 they will be more interested in the sport and start to play soccer.

The recommended soccer practice book for this age group is our Kids (U4 – U8) book [Kids Soccer Practices](#)

Sample Soccer Drill from Our Book – Coordination Game #6:



1. Xs inside the grid each have a ball in their hand, they are the “hunters”
2. Two Os enter the grid at a time and the Xs try to tag them by tossing the ball at them – ensure ball is thrown below the waste
3. Os who are tagged sit down and next two Os enter the grid
4. Make the grid smaller if needed to allow more success
5. Watch out for stronger kids and ensure they aim properly

6. Younger kids may not be able to throw hard enough – allow them to tag the players with their hands
7. If it takes too long to tag players – switch roles faster or have all six Os enter grid at the same time
8. Ensure that idle time is minimized

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
Kids U4 – U8 Coordination Game #6					
Technical Skill					
Tactical					
Physical Fitness					
Mental Fitness					

Technical Skills:

It is important to vary the content of practices for young children and inject some non-technical exercises that provide some fun and laughter. This activity is not intended to develop any particular foot based skill. However, throwing the ball at a particular target can be viewed as introduction to throw-ins and goalkeeping.

Tactics:

This drill, as most drills in our Kids Soccer Basics book is not intended to develop tactical understanding. However, the concept of two players inside the grid running into space is an early introduction to movement without the ball. Also the concept of a target player is introduced.

Physical Fitness:

This drill is designed to develop coordination and agility. The players with the ball need to move close to their targets without dropping the ball. They need to work

out the body mechanics to throw the ball at a moving player and learn to aim the throw below the waist. You will be surprised at the difficulty young kids may have initially and you may have to adjust the drill to foster success. The players entering the grid as targets need to be able to recognize their attackers and avoid being hit by the thrown ball. This requires changes of direction and if the ball is aimed at them, perhaps a last second jump or side step to avoid being hit.

Mental Fitness:

The social aspect is to introduce cooperating with others. For the youngest players this may simply mean being on the field together and chase some other kids. The older ones (U5/U6) may start to develop team play by coordinating whom to go after.

The emotional component relates to having fun by playing a “hunting” game. Everyone is a hunter and can enjoy success or being the hunted enjoying “escaping”. As mentioned above, if the youngest players struggle with tossing the ball simply convert the game into a 6v6 tag game – without the ball.

By the very nature of this soccer drill the **seven speeds of soccer** come into play. Of course the younger children will need encouragement and help and the activity may need to be modified to keep them engaged.

Perception

The players with the ball need to perceive the movement and position of the target players. The target players need to perceive the movement of 6 attackers. The players waiting outside the grid need to be aware of when their turn to enter the grid comes up. So they should stay focused on what is going on. The nature of this drill makes it fairly easy for them to be engaged.

Anticipation

The players with the ball need to anticipate new players entering the grid and the space they are likely to occupy so that they will throw the ball to the spot the target will be in, not necessarily where the target is at the moment. The target

players need to anticipate the opposite – which player will throw the ball and to which location so that they can avoid it.

Decision Making

The players with the ball need to decide which target to go for. They can decide individually or communicate and work as a group of 6 going after one target or split into two groups each going after a target. The target players need to decide where the space is that makes it most difficult for the attackers to hit them.

Reaction

The target players need to react to the position of the attackers and more importantly to the ball thrown at them. If the ball is on target they need to react to avoid being hit. A quick side step or jump might do the trick. The attackers need to react to the movement of the targets.

Movement without Ball

All players are moving without the ball at their feet.

Movement with Ball

Does not apply since players are carrying the ball in their hands.

Game Action

The application to game action is the recognition of space and movement and delivering the ball to a target player.

5. U7 – U8 Recreational

Soccer Drill Development Profile©				
U7 – U8 Recreational Soccer				
Technical Skill				
Tactical				
Physical Fitness				
Mental Fitness				

Overview

At this age level you may have a mix of children who have played for a while (U3 –U6) and those who are still entering the game for the first time. As a coach you need to continue developing the more experienced players while catching up the older newcomers. The development profile reflects this balancing act. The technical skill development now moves to the forefront with a high emphasis, basic skills must be developed. For newcomers it may a bit challenging and you may need to spend a bit more time with individuals.

At this age group it is still important to keep kids moving, to get them to interact with other children and to have fun. This is why I recommend a higher emphasis on physical and mental training in a fun and active environment, although time taken with individuals to teach technique will reduce active play time.

Typically play is in a 5v5 format introducing a goalkeeper and moving to four field players. This requires the introduction of tactics to include the keeper and to promote team play.

Technical Skill now gets into the basic building blocks of soccer – receiving the ball, controlling it, running with the ball, and passing.

Tactical training starts to introduce team play and positions. With 4 field players you have three options:

1. Let them play without positional structure and focus on attacking and defending. When we have the ball we want to get it close to the other goal and when the other team has the ball we need to take it away from them.
2. Introduce positions and designate players as defenders and attackers. Explain that the role of attackers is to receive the ball and score goals and that of defenders is to take the ball from the other team and pass it to attackers. Within this context explain that the general rule is that defenders are closer to your own goal than attackers.
3. If the team progresses well, especially at U8 you may want to challenge them with the additional concept of midfield, which then gives them the typical soccer formation of defense-midfield-attack. Teaching the midfield role as a link between defense and attack is challenging but it can be done. I have done it. I would suggest a 2-1-1 formation to start.

Which of the options you choose depends on the ability of your players. It may be a safe bet to progress from 1 to 3 at a pace suitable for your team.

Players should rotate through the goalkeeper position regardless of personal preferences by the children. You never know who might be good and take a liking to the position. Remember to explain the special rules applying to keepers, such as being able to handle the ball (stopping and picking up) in a designated area of the field. If there are goal kicks then teach them how and where to kick the ball. Show them how to drop kick it out of their hand.

The key tactical ability to foster is passing to team mates and not crowding your team mate who has the ball (bunching up).

Physical Fitness remains focused on:

- Coordination – can the child actually run, coordinating arms and legs?
- Agility – can the child turn while running, run and jump?
- Flexibility – can the child bend down, touch feet?

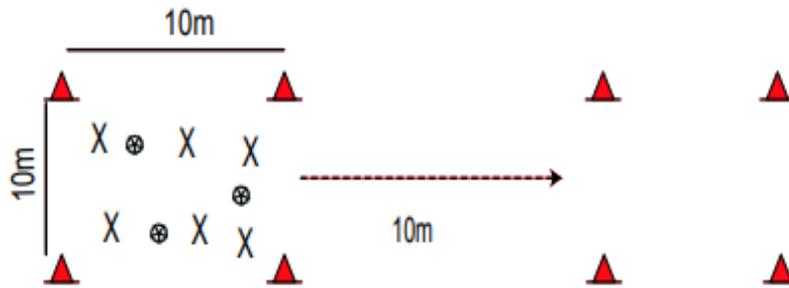
The difference to U3-U6 age group is that if you notice awkwardness in running technique take the time to show proper technique. Just like skill development you may have to spend some time with individuals.

Mental Fitness maintains focus on:

- Social Skills – getting children to interact with each other. Learning that it is ok to share the ball with others, wear the same uniform and belonging to a group, and having a good time within the context of a GAME.
- Emotional Development – The goal remains for the child to come back the next year. The additional emphasis is on team play through passing. This may sound simple but children who are used to “hog” the ball will be reluctant to pass it to what they may perceive as a less effective team mate. Those players who were more passive in the past are now encouraged to ask for or to win the ball.
- Communication – This is a good time to introduce communication in conjunction with passing. The basic building block is to ask for the ball (if the player is available).
- Focus – You will have substitutes waiting on the bench. Try to keep their attention on the game and to be ready for their turn.

The recommended soccer practice book for this age group remains our Kids (U4 – U8) book [Kids Soccer Practices](#) – however the way you approach the activities changes to become more instructional and corrective.

Sample Soccer Drill from Our Book – Ball Handling #3:



1. Players in the grid work in pairs passing the ball to each other
2. On command, players with ball dribble to other square and their partners chase after them.
3. Once in other square start passing again and repeat
4. Progression:
 - a. Ask for two touch passing
 - b. Ask players to move in square, not to be stationary
 - c. When dribbling to other square ask them to keep ball close to feet, it's not kick and run.

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
Kids U4 – U8 Ball Handling# 3					
Technical Skill	●	●	●	●	●
Tactical	●	○	○	○	○
Physical Fitness	●	●	●	●	●
Mental Fitness	●	●	●	●	●

Technical Skills:

The emphasis here is on passing/receiving and running with the ball. The passes are short so emphasize weight of pass. If the players are moving introduce the idea of passing into space. Weight is still important to allow receiving player to get

to the ball. Initially show how to receive the ball and make it stop (close control). If the group is advanced introduce two touch passing with the first touch controlling the ball in the direction of the subsequent pass. When they run with the ball to the other square emphasize control (close to feet) over speed.

Tactics:

This drill, as most drills in our Kids Soccer Basics book is not intended to develop tactical understanding. However, the concept of passing introduces team play.

Physical Fitness:

This activity still requires agility and movement in small spaces. However, the movement between squares introduces sprinting (and associated acceleration) for the player without the ball, as they try to beat player with ball into the square.

Mental Fitness:

This activity continues to develop team play and the need to work with others and share the ball. Focus and concentration are required to react to the command to move into the other square. This likely involves a change of direction as well. If appropriate introduce a competitive element by challenging the pairs to get to the opposite square first.

Seven Speeds of Soccer

Perception

The players with the ball need to perceive the movement and position of their partner. The players without ball need to know where their partners are and find a space that allows a direct pass to them. Finding this space means perceiving where all the other players in the grid are.

Anticipation

The player with the ball needs to anticipate the movement of their partner to know where to pass to. The player without the ball needs to anticipate where the available space in the grid is so they can move into it. The receiver needs to look at the body movements of their partner to anticipate when the pass will happen.

Decision Making

The player with the ball ultimately decides when and where to pass. They control the progression of play.

Reaction

The player receiving the ball needs to react to the direction and speed of the pass. They may have anticipated a pass into space, but it may actually come to their feet. This means they have to stop their run, or run into a different direction if the passer decided to pass into another space (or makes a poor pass). If the pass is weak, the receiver may have to attack the ball, if it is too strong they may have to sprint to get to it before it leaves the square.

The other reaction for all players is to the command of the coach to dribble/sprint into the other grid.

Movement without Ball

The player without the ball is always looking for space to move into. The other key movement is the sprint to the other square.

Movement with Ball

The key movement is the speed dribble into the other square.

Game Action

Recognition of space, movement, passing, team play, two touch, communication, running.

6. U9 – U12 Recreational

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
U9 – U12 Recreational					
Technical Skill					
Tactical					
Physical Fitness					
Mental Fitness					

Overview

At this age level you may still have a mix of children who have made more of a commitment to the sport with newcomers, although less than at younger ages. As a coach you need to continue developing the more experienced players while catching up the older newcomers. The development profile reflects this balancing act. The technical skill development stays at the forefront with a high emphasis, basic skills must be developed as well as advanced skills being introduced. For newcomers it may be a bit challenging and you may need to spend a bit more time with individuals. We are reducing emphasis on skill development in training a bit as tactical exercises, which means applying skills in a group, gets more emphasis (below).

At this age group it is still important to keep kids moving, to get them to interact with others. This is why I still recommend a higher emphasis on physical and mental training but the activities and exercises are taking on a more soccer specific focus. This increases the challenge for the children.

We are increasing the emphasis of tactics one level. Typically play is in a 7v7 or 9v9 format allowing the introduction of the main positional roles, defenders, midfielders, attackers, and goalkeeper. The added number gives the coach the opportunity to think about and introduce a formation that best suits the players available. With six field players the most common formation is a 2-3-1,

but 3-2-1, 2-2-2 or 3-3 have also been observed. With 8 field players common formations are 3-3-2, 2-4-2, and 4-3-1. This is not the time to shoe horn players into specific positions, rotation is recommended. Having said that, certain abilities and preferences for particular positions may be evident and that is something to leave with the player at the end of the season to take to next year's coach.

Technical Skill now adds to and advances the basic building blocks of soccer – receiving the ball, controlling it, running with the ball, and passing. 1v1 moves, finishing, crossing techniques are added as is application of skill in small groups.

Tactical training builds on team play and positions. As mentioned above there are more positions available and therefore a little more training time needs to be spent on what the positions do. Moving the ball up the field to generate scoring chances will be introduced through small group activities.

At this age some players have decided they don't like being a goalkeeper. I wouldn't force them to play goal but those who are interested or don't object should still rotate through the position. Remember to explain the special rules applying to keepers, such as being able to handle the ball (stopping and picking up) in a designated area of the field. If there are goal kicks then teach them how and where to kick the ball. Show them how to drop kick it out of their hand. If skill warrants involve the goalkeeper in the play by passing back to their feet and ask them to pass to a teammate starting the attack

The key tactical ability to foster is moving the ball up the field as a group and win it back after losing possession.

Physical Fitness progresses to:

- Endurance
- Speed
- Explosive Sprints

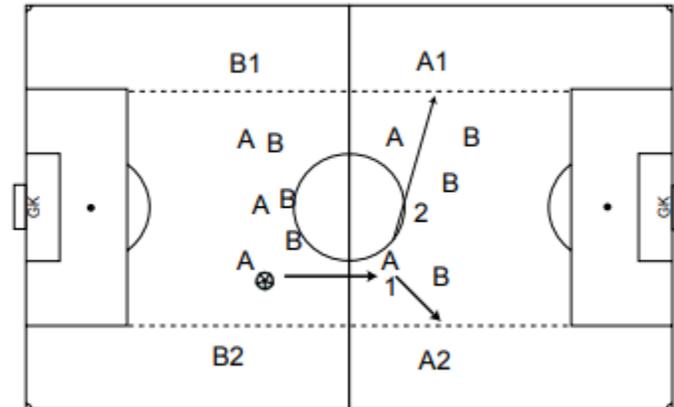
Mental Fitness focus is on:

- **Social Skills.** We add an element of concentration and focus when it comes to playing the position they have when on the field. For example ask defenders to come back after a loss of possession and remind a player on right defense not necessarily to be up on left wing.
- **Emotional Development** – The goal remains for the player to come back the next year, and consider whether they want to stay in a recreational league or try out for a competitive program. The on field team play increases and even though scores and standings may not be kept by the club/league, kids at this age know if they won or lost. Keep a check on over exuberant celebration or exaggerated disappointment.
- **Communication** – Building on asking for the ball it, is now ok to ask players to give instructions to team mates. For example on a throw-in it's ok to ask players to get open. Also. Communication between players and coach should be encouraged. Let them know if they have a concern or feel bad they can come and talk to you. Read their body language and approach them if you think they're not happy about something.
- **Focus** – You will have substitutes waiting on the bench. Try to keep their attention on the game and to be ready for their turn.

The recommended soccer practice book for this age is our Youth (U9 – U12) book [Youth Soccer Practices](#)

Sample Soccer Drill from Our Book – Tactical Drill #1

Flank Attack with Switching Play



1. Define two outside lanes as shown, if full field is not available mark as large a field as you can in the space available
2. Split team into even groups. The example is set up as a 7v7 mirroring game situation and formation. If you have more players you can either add them to the teams playing in the middle or rotate them in.
3. The game is free play with the only rule that the ball must play to a wide player in the attacking lane before the goal can be attacked (1).
4. You can encourage players to switch play (2).

There are three key players of the team in possession engaged at the critical points of the exercise:

1. The player with the ball whom we will call the initiator
2. The player who receives the first pass and then immediately plays the ball to a central player – the pivot.
3. The player making a run (if switching on the opposite side) to receive the pass from the pivot – the receiver.

In the practice book you will find options to progress the activity.

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
U9 – U12 Rec. Soccer, Flank Attack & Switching					
Technical Skill					
Tactical					
Physical Fitness					
Mental Fitness					

The profile indicates that the emphasis of this soccer drill is on tactics and mental fitness. Certain technical skills will be developed and moderate fitness training is involved as well. Of note is while the overall profile in tactics is at a (3) for this age group, this particular activity is at (5). The goal is not that each activity follows the age group profile, but that over the entire season it does. And that is reflected in our book.

Technical Skills:

Passing (crossing) and ball receiving are the key soccer skills developed in this drill.

The initiator must pass the ball to the pivot accurately, either to the pivot’s feet or into a space the pivot will run into to receive the ball. In order for the pivot to be able to control the ball quickly and set up the pass to the receiver, the initiator’s pass is preferred to be on the ground at a weight that delivers the ball at low to moderate speed to the pivot’s feet. This requires the pivot player to be relatively open when receiving the ball. If the pass could be intercepted, increase weight of pass.

The pivot wants to control the ball with the first touch and pass it across to the receiver with the second touch. They must develop superior ball receiving skills and make sure that the first touch moves the ball into the direction of the ensuing pass. This also requires the pivot to turn (open up) their body between first and second touches. The actual pass to the receiver, especially when switching) is

likely a longer pass and will be in the air to go over top of opposing players and prevent them from intercepting a ground ball. It must still be properly weighted to arrive in the space of the oncoming receiver without going out of bounds.

The receiver requires to be able to control the ball at various heights while running towards it. Ideally they arrive in the desired space at the same time as the ball so that the ball is at its lowest speed and the receiver has a fraction of a second to get their body ready to control the ball. Then the receiver either dribbles close to the goal line to execute a cross into the target areas of the penalty box, or if the opponents prevent the cross, to stop and look for a supporting player to pass to.

Tactics:

The simple pass into the wide lane for a cross requires little tactical understanding. For a switch the key is to execute it before the opponent has set up their defense, i.e. before the opponent achieves defensive shape and balance. Let's assume the play is on the right side of the field from the perspective of the team in possession. Imagine the length of the field split into four lanes (like an Olympic swimming pool). Typically opposing players will have shifted towards the side of play with most players occupying the three right lanes. This leaves the fourth and most left lane open. The team in possession should not have a player occupying that space either.

The initiator, in possession and on the right side of the field, passes to a player to the left of them, the pivot. The pivot could be a central midfielder who is in space, or a defender moving up into space. The distance between the initiator and the pivot should not be too large. Rule of thumb is that the pivot is in the next lane. The pass from initiator to pivot is the signal for an opposite side player to start running down or into the left most lane. They must stay on side until the pivot passes the ball across. The pivot player does not need to know which player is making the run or when, they need to have the confidence that someone is making the run and will be in a position to receive the ball.

In the progression where the lane is open the receiver can be any player close to the most left lane. To avoid being predictable, receivers should vary between overlapping outside defenders, midfielders, or even a central striker.

Assuming that the switch is executed properly, attackers now move into the right positions to receive the cross and finish with a shot/header on net. The target area for the cross is a triangle from the corners of the small box (goalie box) to the penalty spot. The cross should come from as close to the goal (end) line as possible to get into the back of retreating defenders and into the run of the attackers for more power.

If the switch is not on because of poor execution or good anticipation and disruption by the opponent, then the player with the ball at the time must decide on a new play.

Fitness Training:

The receiving players on the opposite side will be sprinting repeatedly, anywhere from 20 to 50 m. The pivot player must be strong to shake off any potential challenge from an opponent and/or to shield the ball.

Mental Fitness:

There must be communication (preferably non-verbal to disguise play) from the pivot player to the initiator so that the initiator knows where to pass the ball, either to feet of an open player or into space to a moving player. There must also be communication from the receiver so that only one player runs into the space and other players assume supporting positions.

Seven Speeds of Soccer

Perception

The initiator needs to perceive space of the pivot and on the opposite side of the field. If the space isn't there, the play isn't there. It could also be that the opponent is shifting towards the side of the ball and space will be available shortly. Other players need to perceive the receiver's intentions and move into supporting roles.

Anticipation

The pivot needs to anticipate the pass from the initiator and either be in free space or move into free space.

The receiver needs to anticipate the switch and perceive available space and decide when and how fast to run into that space.

Decision Making

The initiator and the pivot need to decide if the switch is still on. Even if space is available they need to perceive the distance of the pass, decide on the weight of the pass, and anticipate the opponent's movements. These decisions are all made BEFORE the pivot receives the ball and confirmed after they turn to execute the pass.

Reaction

There are two reactions. The first if the decision is that the intended play is not on, then the players need to reset and start with the new perception.

If the switch is made all players react as quickly as possible:

- the receiver to get close to the goal line for the cross
- attackers to move into the box towards the target areas of the cross. They may need to delay the run until the cross is made. They do not want to stand waiting for the ball but attack it at reasonable speed for a one time shot or header.

Movement without Ball

There is lots of movement without the ball to create space and/or run into it. If one pivot is covered they may move away from their position drawing a defender with them. This opens space for an alternate pivot to get involved in the play.

Movement with Ball

The key movement is the dribble of the receiver to set up the cross. Other than this this is mostly a passing activity.

Game Action

This is real game action with the objective to score a goal and move the ball and players to set up a good scoring opportunity

7. U13 – U18 Recreational & Competitive

Soccer Drill Development Profile©				
U13 – U18 Recreational & Competitive				
Technical Skill				
Tactical				
Physical Fitness				
Mental Fitness				

Overview

We have chosen to group together what seems to be a large age band. The reason is that in most clubs and countries we have researched, there is little consistency for the same age group. We have seen competitive U13 teams train at the level of U17 recreational teams and U14 recreational teams train at the level of U16 competitive team. One could almost write a book for each team. What we have done instead is develop one book for this age range, [Advanced Youth Soccer](#) and another more advanced book for U16-Adult competitive soccer [Competitive Pro Soccer](#), which is the subject of the next chapter. Within the U13-U18 book we are providing you with the possibility for each drill to advance the complexity to suit your team. This is the key to covering the diversity in this age range. A U13 recreational team can use the drill in its basic form while a U18 competitive team can use the highest level of progression. For highly competitive teams we encourage to also get the Competitive Pro Book.

We are reducing the overall emphasis on skill to reflect skill maintenance and application in a fast pace game environment for the advanced teams. At the same time younger recreational teams can still build upon their basic skills.

We are increasing the emphasis of tactics one level. Teams now play 11v11 requiring more positions, covering a larger field and more coordination between functional groups (GK, defense, midfield, attackers). A good resource to have is our [Systems of Play](#) book.

Technical Skill now focuses on applying acquired skills at a faster pace within the context of a faster game situation. At the same time players missing basic skills have the opportunity to catch up through individual training or executing at a lower speed. The maxim is accuracy before speed.

Tactical training builds on team play and positions. The larger field with the additional players allows for more space. Switching points of attack, building from the back, playing as units within the context of the team and flexible positional play are emphasized. This is also the time when you need to consider your team's best formation. Consider the skills and talents of your players as well as the competitive environment. Train at least two formations and also how a particular formation changes depending on whether you're attacking, transitioning, or defending. For example a 4-5-1 in defense can quickly turn into a 4-3-3 when attacking. The tactical drills in this book allow for you to train these aspects.

At this age there should be one or two permanent goalkeepers on the team. Their training needs to be balanced between playing skills and technical goalkeeping skills. We will discuss goalkeeping training later in this book. What we don't recommend is that the keepers are neglected in training and only are in shooting drills or scrimmages. There needs to be time set aside for individual training.

Physical Fitness is trained with and without balls, individually and in groups:

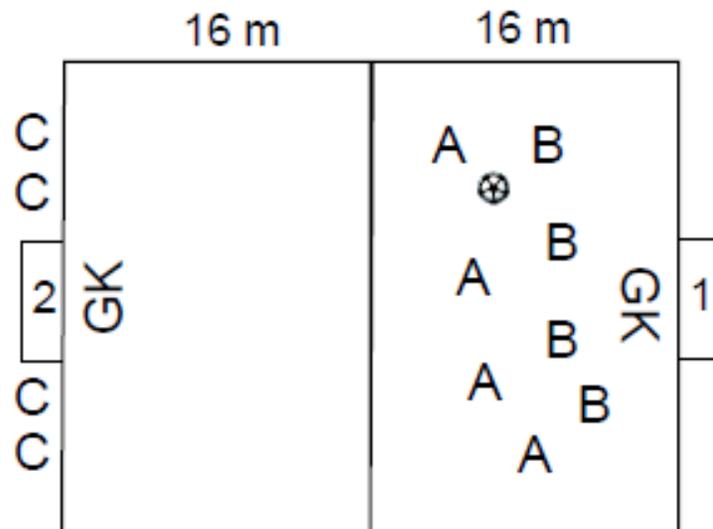
- Endurance
- Speed
- Explosive Sprints
- Strength
- Physical Contact

Mental Fitness focus is on:

- Social Skills – team activities are encouraged to build team cohesion and trust.
- Emotional Development – The goal shifts to encourage individuals with high capabilities to consider trying out for a competitive team while retaining those who want to continue playing recreational soccer. At the competitive level the playing time can be reduced based on club and league policy. Players not playing much must be developed and given the hope and opportunity to gain more time on the field. It is useful to remind everyone that more time is spent at practice than in a game so attending practices is the safest bet to play a lot of soccer.
- Communication – Team communication needs to be fostered with clear expectations of specific communication, either verbally or through visual clues. The latter requires good perceptual and vision abilities which will be trained in these practices.
- Focus – Reacting to your and the opponent's plays quickly is important. Players can't be distracted and must stay focused on the game, even if they are not directly involved in plays. They need to move with the plays, mentally and physically.

Sample Soccer Drill from Our Book – Tactical Drill #10

4v4 Transition Play with Three Groups



1. Three teams of four players (+GK each) in a 32m x 18m field (each half is the size of the penalty box, so the easiest set up is to use a penalty box with regular goal and extend it using a portable goal or cones. This requires 14 players and gives the keepers a good workout as well. Depending on numbers you can adjust team sizes or even have unbalanced teams. You can randomly assign players to teams or group them based on positions. For example a team could be all defenders or midfielders, or attackers. Or, each team could have two defenders, one midfielder, and one attacker.
2. To start, team A is in possession and attacks goal 1 defended by team B. Team C waits at the other goal.
3. As soon as team A scores or team B wins the ball, team B now transitions quickly to attack goal 2. Team C must come off the goal line quickly to defend against team B. Team A sprints to goal 1. As soon as team B scores or team C wins the ball, C now attacks goal 1 and A comes out to defend. B drops beside goal 2.

- 4. Shots can be taken from anywhere. A team can only defend once it has transitioned back to the goal line of the goal it defends. Balls going out of side touch get kicked in quickly. Shots missing net are restarted by defending team. Have plenty of balls distributed around the field to keep the game moving.

In the practice book you will find options to progress the activity.

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
U13 – U18 - 4v4 Transition (3 Groups)					
Technical Skill					
Tactical					
Physical Fitness					
Mental Fitness					

The profile indicates that the emphasis of this soccer drill is on tactics, physical and mental fitness. This is a very demanding drill and will require more time for recreational teams to get organized in, so slowing the pace or making the field smaller are options. More competitive teams should be able to perform this drill at increasing pace.

Technical Skills:

This drill requires quick and accurate passes and trains shooting from various distance. There is always pressure on the ball so all the actions of receiving and passing are likely happening while players are moving.

Tactics:

The tactical concept is quick transition. Once you lose possession as an attacking team you must quickly transition to be ready to defend. The defending team who gains possession must quickly transition to attack. The defending teams really

need to be ready to break out to defend or the attacking team will get a shot from close in. The concept is simple, the execution not so much as you will see.

Fitness Training:

This is a fast pace game with all players sprinting almost constantly. Defending teams have little rest time because as soon as they reach their goal line to defend, an attack is likely coming at them and they have to sprint out to defend.

Mental Fitness:

Transition is very demanding as players have a tendency to stop and watch after their team loses possession. In this case once you lose possession as an attacking team you must realize that sprinting to the goal line of the goal you just attacked is vital. The team winning the ball has to attack the opposite goal quickly. Require the teams to communicate amongst each other to transition properly and fast. This is a great opportunity for the keepers to help and shout their defending team to get back quickly.

Seven Speeds of Soccer

Perception

Players need to perceive when their role changes from attacking to defending and vice versa.

Anticipation

The defending team waiting at the goal needs to anticipate a change of possession at the other end and be ready to break out quickly to defend their goal. They also need to anticipate the speed with which the previous attacking team gets back to their goal line to start defending.

Decision Making

The team winning the ball must decide how much time they have to get into scoring position. If the defending team is still tracking back to their goal line, then they can advance closer to the goal and get a shot from closer in. If the defending team transitioned quickly, comes out fast, and challenges near midfield, then the team might decide to keep possession and pass to set up a shot.

Reaction

On each change of possession all three teams must react quickly to the new situation. The decision by the attacking team described above may need to change if the defenders come out faster or slower than anticipated.

Movement without Ball

There is lots of movement without the ball as two teams are sprinting either to goal line to defend or from goal line to attack. Also normal movement into space to receive a pass is critical.

Movement with Ball

In this drill there is an opportunity for a player to run with the ball if the defending team is not coming out quickly. Use the space and advance the ball to draw defenders to you and opening space for team mates to receive the ball. It is not uncommon for the defender winning the ball to be able to dribble it all the way across half and take a shot.

Game Action

This replicates a quick transition play in a smaller area. The point is to develop the automatic thoughts of transition play. This is not intended to train a high pressing game.

8. U16 – Adult competitive

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
U16 Competitive – Adult Amateur					
Technical Skill					
Tactical					
Physical Fitness					
Mental Fitness					

Overview

This is the level of seriously committed, highly motivated, and talented soccer players. They have decided that soccer is a serious passion and by progressing to this level have made significant sacrifices in their lives. This is also the level that transitions youth players to adult players. We are focused on amateur adult which includes community college, university, and amateur senior teams. This not within the scope of professional soccer, although some of the drills and activities can and have been used at the pro level.

Technical skills are maintained at a high level and focused on application. In our book, [Competitive Pro Soccer](#), we do emphasise one skill element in game situation drills – Goal Scoring.

Tactical training takes on a greater role and focused on today's fast pace game with high pressing, fast break counterattacks and high mental and physical speed.

Technical Skill now focuses on applying acquired skills at a faster pace within the context of a faster game situation. It is assumed that players at this level can execute skills and the coach's point is to look for proper application in game situations and offer minor corrections.

Tactical training focuses on fast transition play, high pressing and attacking in numbers and defending in smaller numbers initially while the rest of the team

transitions back. Because this should lead to more goal scoring opportunities, training emphasis is also on goal scoring, from the perspective of creating chances and converting them.

Physical Fitness is trained with and without balls and incorporated into each activity. It maintains and builds on:

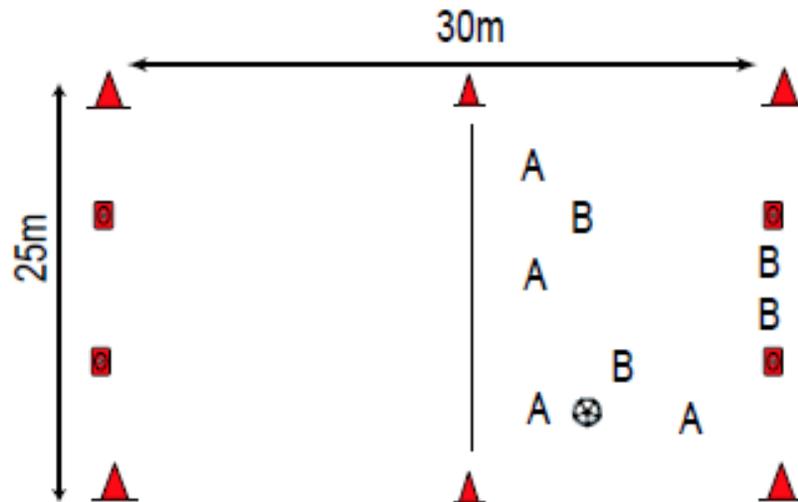
- Endurance
- Speed
- Explosive Sprints
- Strength
- Physical Contact

Mental Fitness focus is on:

- Social Skills – maintaining team harmony and cohesion while competing with your team mates for playing time and spots on the next level of soccer.
- Emotional Development – Here we are dealing with the ability to driving for winning and celebrating with humility. At the same time the disappointment of a loss needs to be transferred into motivation to train harder and perform better in the next game. Also, players need to learn accepting extended times as a substitute and transfer that into harder training and not dejection.
- Communication – Team communication needs to be maintained for moving the ball fast and effectively. In addition specific players will have additional communication responsibility. They are expected to be leaders as the voice of the coach on the field and by motivating and rallying the team when things are tough. They communicate verbally and through visible action.
- Focus – In addition to reacting to your and the opponent's plays quickly players must deal with (tune out) referees decisions and vocal spectators.

Sample Soccer Drill from Our Book – Transition Play #3

4v4 in 4v2



1. 4v4 on two full size goals (regular goals if available, otherwise cones)
2. Defending team (B) must have two players on goal line before other two defenders can challenge attackers (A). So (B) plays 4v2
3. After defenders (B) gain possession by winning ball, goal scored, or ball out of bounds, (B) now attack opposite goal. They can not be challenged after they win the ball. (A) now defends and must transition quickly into own half putting 2 players on goal line before other 2 players can challenge. (B) must get all players across half before they can score, playing 4v2.

In the recommended practice book [Competitive Pro Soccer Practices](#) you will find Coaching Points and Game Application for each activity.

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
U16 Competitive – Adult Amateur 4v4 in 4v2					
Technical Skill					
Tactical					
Physical Fitness					
Mental Fitness					

The profile indicates that the emphasis of this soccer drill is on tactics, physical and mental fitness. This is a very demanding drill and requires 75% + sprinting with 25% or less slower possession play.

Technical Skills:

This drill requires proper defending as 2 defenders try to win the ball from 4 attackers. This means that one player challenges the ball and the other tries to cover the other three attackers. For the attackers quick passing is essential. With a 4v2 attacking situation there is limited use of going 1v1 against a defender. Finishing must be accurate with two defenders on the goal line. While they can't use their hands, they still can cover a lot of the net. Attackers must look up and see the gaps in net and target a hard shot through those gaps.

Tactics:

The tactical concept is quick transition. Once you lose possession as an attacking team you must quickly transition to be ready to defend, including getting two players on the goal line. The defending team who gains possession must quickly transition to attack getting everyone across the half quickly.

Fitness Training:

This is a fast pace activity with all players sprinting almost constantly. This will challenge players, however, if they are not panting and gasping after a few minutes one of two things could be happening. They may not be trying hard enough in which case you need to get them to sprint. Or, they are sprinting hard but are in extraordinary aerobic shape. In that case consider making the field bigger.

Mental Fitness:

The key here is communication, communication, communication. Which goes to the point of leadership mentioned above. The attackers now transitioning back to defend must communicate a) which two players drop to the goal line and b) when the other two players can challenge. The defenders now attacking must communicate when they can attempt to score after everyone is across the half. Obviously the attackers transitioning to defense will have two players who need to run further (to goal line) and faster as do the defenders who were on the goal line and now must cross the half.

The other aspect of mental fitness is to be aware when possession of the ball changes and the transition happens.

Seven Speeds of Soccer

Perception

Players need to perceive when their role changes from attacking to defending and vice versa. Attackers need to perceive space which should be available in a 4v2. Attackers must also perceive who is closest to goal when transitioning to defense so that only two players run to the goal line and not all 4. The covering defender must keep shoulder checking to see if their position needs adjustments to block passes or quickly become the challenging defender.

Anticipation

The defenders on the goal line need to anticipate when their team mates gain possession and start sprinting across the half to join the attack. The attackers must anticipate loss of possession and be ready to sprint back into their half. Two players need to anticipate sprinting hard to the goal.

Decision Making

The team in possession playing 4v2 must decide when to penetrate the defense and take a shot. They must also decide when to transition back and who goes on goal line. The defending team must decide when they actually gain possession, especially if ball goes out of bounds, who carries ball and who sprints into space to receive passes.

Reaction

The key reaction moment is when possession changes. Attackers must react to the fact that they need to get back and defend and defenders need to react to break out quickly.

Movement without Ball

There is lots of sprinting without the ball as possession changes. It is self-evident.

Movement with Ball

With the emphasis on quick passing the only movement with the ball is that a player of the defending team is able to carry the ball across half after gaining possession.

Game Action

This replicates a quick transition play in a smaller area. The point is to develop the automatic thoughts of transition play. Game pace is fast. Goal scoring is not quite realistic with two players in net who can't use their hands. But it does force accuracy and pace of the shot.

9. Goalkeepers

Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
Goalkeepers					
Level: Green=U9-U18, Yellow=U13-U15, Red=U16+					
Technical Skill					
Tactical					
Physical Fitness					
Mental Fitness					

Overview

Goalkeeping is a very specialized position. At the very young ages (< U9) we don't recommend specialization and suggest players who are not opposed to spending time in goal should be rotated through that position. Typically by U9 some kids develop a liking for the goalkeeping position, or the coach can identify talent and start nudging them into that direction.

We have broken the Development Profile above into three sections:

Green:

All keepers need to be trained in that area all the time, i.e. all keepers need skill development always, the level of skill increases with age and competitive level.

Yellow:

The age at which the training intensifies. Tactical & Physical training complexity increases for U13-U15.

Red:

The highest level of training complexity targeted at U16+.

You will notice that at U16+ you are training all four pillars at very complex and intense levels, which is different from out players.

As you will see below, keepers have different technical skill requirements than other players. This requires that they need to be trained by coaches that have goalkeeping experience and understand the position. We structure our practices such that goalkeepers have their separate warm-up from the rest of the team. Then they participate with the team in a technical activity to develop their foot skills. After we take them away from the team and work on specific goalkeeping technical skills. And finally they reunite with the team in scrimmages. In addition, we recommend keepers to join special goalkeeper training programs if they are available.

Our [Soccer Goalkeeping Practice Book](#) is designed to support goalkeeping coaches but also team coaches who don't have access to specialized goalie coaches. The drawback for untrained goalkeeper coaches is that they will be challenged to correct techniques or even spot incorrect techniques.

Technical Skill starts with the basics of training body position (get set), hand position on ball, catching of low and high balls. Catching the ball while moving forwards, backwards, sideways, etc.

Once we get to U13 (or for advanced keepers in the younger groups) we start working on diving saves, starting with low dives and progressing to high dives (leaping with both feet off the ground and being horizontal in the air). We add reaction dives and reflexes and increase the pace of the shots. Cutting down angles and approaching breakaway players in 1v1 is introduced. Parrying and coming out for high balls and catching or punching them out is introduced. Concepts of recovery for a second save after a save with rebound is also added.

As we get to advanced goalkeeping (U16+) we add backward dives, increase reflex and reaction training by exposing keepers to harder shots from closer in and expose them to a high frequency of shots in training.

An important point is to recognize hand size relative to ball size. Small hands may not be able to form the perfect W grip on a larger ball. That can be adjusted by stretching the W. Goalkeeping basics can be found on our web site showing basic hand and ready positions.

With goalkeepers being asked to participate in play on the field they also need to work ball handling skills of out players. They need to control back passes, often under pressure, and starting the play out of the back.

Tactical training starts with training where keepers should be positioned on the field relative to the play and with distributing the ball from goal kicks, and after saves.

At U13 we add playing out of back which requires understanding team tactics and recognizing which outlets are open. Keepers are trained to set up walls and organize the defense against corner kicks and free kicks.

At U16 we train keepers to be more involved in the play, moving further out of net and play as last defender. Timing of these actions becomes critical. We also teach them how to read the play in front of them. Goalkeepers are the only ones with an undisrupted perspective of all other players and the entire game unfolding in front of them. As such they need to be vocal and instruct the players in front of them regarding position and movement as required.

Physical Fitness is quite different from out players.

At young ages is absolutely vital to develop flexibility, which needs to stay with them throughout their goalkeeping career. It needs to be adapted to the physical development stage and growth stage of the keeper. There may be players who just aren't flexible and never will be. They will likely be limited to playing recreational soccer or, if they have excellent foot skills, could be encouraged to play a field position. We can also start to develop vertical leap

ability by strengthening leg muscles and train momentum through very simple exercises.

At U13 we can start to train more physical strength, especially building upper body musculature for competitive environments. This is because goalies quite often are involved in physical contact and battles and strength provides confidence, protects bone structures, and gets attackers to think before they physically challenge a keeper, especially in the air.

Mental Fitness focus is on:

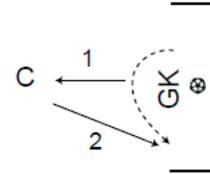
- Mental toughness. Goalkeepers can make lots of good saves but it is a personal defeat when they are scored upon. We train them to consider this as a negative event, to leave it behind, and to play for the next goal.
- Fearlessness and pain tolerance. Goalkeepers spend quite a bit of time training dives on various surfaces and initially that can be a mental hurdle, especially when asked to get their feet off the ground and fly through the air horizontally or vertically which always ends in a “crash” landing. The fear of pain is a common barrier for keepers to start diving. We start slow and increase the leap distance and height as they become more confident. Proper landing techniques is also important to mitigate pain. The key is to land on muscles and not on bones.
- Focus. Keepers need to be focussed on the ball at all times and also recognize potential plays by opponents or teammates. This is special challenge when the keeper isn’t busy or in inclement weather position. You can see keepers tuning out during games and that needs to be monitored and they need help to refocus by keeping them moving with the play and stay active in general.
- Team cohesion. Keepers can’t be viewed by team mates and coaches as “special, different, or weird”. They will become isolated lone wolves. They need to be involved with other players in practice and during game breaks.

Sample Soccer Drill from Our Book – Technique #7

Reflex Dives

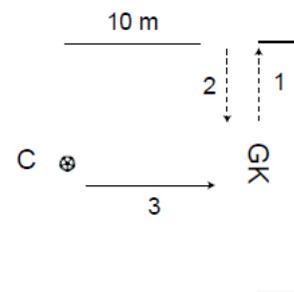
GK is on goal line facing the back of the goal. GK holds a ball bending low and has legs apart. GK now

1. rolls ball through legs to coach
2. pivots to face coach and saves shot.



1. GK starts in the center of the goal and runs to either goal post, touching post near ground.
2. GK quickly gets up, pivots and dives to catch a ball
3. thrown towards center of the goal by coach.

alternate sides/posts



Soccer Drill Development Profile©					
Goalkeepers					
Technique #7: Reflex Dives					
Technical Skill	●	●	●	●	●
Tactical	○	○	○	○	○
Physical Fitness	●	●	●	●	●
Mental Fitness	●	●	●	○	○

The profile indicates that the emphasis of this goalie soccer drill is on technique and physical fitness, with mental fitness at a moderate level. There is no tactical element in this activity. The distance, pace of throw and time between throws can be varied based on age/skill of keeper. Younger keepers may need detailed instruction on diving, catching, and landing technique/physiology.

Technical Skills:

These are diving save technique drills with reflex action. In both cases the keeper has to carry out a motion while not looking at the incoming ball. As the keeper turns, they will see the ball and make a reflex diving save. Two important technique coaching points. If the ball is thrown in such a way that the keeper can catch it and hold on to it, then emphasize proper execution of this save. Proper execution means being at full stretch, get the hands behind the ball (W) or cradle it in chest/stomach, and land properly to keep control of the ball. If the pace and direction are such that the keeper can't catch it, then ensure that they push it past the goal post to avoid giving up a rebound in front of the net.

Tactics:

N/A

Fitness Training:

The coach needs to encourage the keeper to catch the ball/make save, quickly return it to the coach/server, get up and get back into the ready position for the next throw. The constant recovery from diving to resetting quickly produces a highly anaerobic and aerobic training opportunity. Do as many repetitions as possible in the available time.

Mental Fitness:

This is all about concentration, focus, and managing fatigue. The concentration comes from precision demands of the execution. In the first activity the keeper has to roll the ball back at a fast pace, pivot quickly, lower body into ready position and dive. It is very easy for the keeper to roll the ball too slow, away from the coach, and pivot slowly. Don't let them get away with it. Ask them to focus on each repetition as if they needed to save a critical shot in the World Cup Final. As they get tired and fatigue sets in, execution tends to get sloppy. You can offer a short break but do not compromise on execution. In the second activity goalies tend to not bend down and touch the ball as they get tired. Again, allow for a break but not for sloppiness.

Seven Speeds of Soccer

Perception

Keepers need to be aware of the position of the server and their own position relative to the goal posts. As they turn from their initial move, they need to perceive the direction and pace of the ball being thrown.

Anticipation

In general, goalkeeping varies from out players in that they do not anticipate any game action, they must react to the ball immediately after it leaves the body of the attacking player. The best example is the penalty kick. Most keepers these days anticipate the corner the shooter will kick into and dive there, sometimes before the ball is even kicked. Save percentages are very low, less than 20%.

On the other hand, keepers who have very quick reaction/reflex wait until the ball is actually kicked. They can be fast enough to perceive the direction of the shot and react to it. At least they will be diving to the side of the kick.

I always encourage the second approach, especially with youth players as it is consistent with the philosophy of reaction and not anticipation.

Decision Making

The decision the keeper needs to make is whether or not to attempt to catch the ball or push it wide.

Reaction

As discussed above, keepers react as quickly as possible once they perceive the direction and pace of the shot.

Movement without Ball

In the second exercise it's the movement to touch the ball by the post.

Movement with Ball

This is the keeper controlling the ball and to throw it back to server while they recover and get back into ready position.

With the emphasis on quick passing the only movement with the ball is that a player of the defending team is able to carry the ball across half after gaining possession.

Game Action

The first activity mirrors a shot from close in where the keeper has cut the angle and now makes a save. The reason for rolling the ball facing backwards is to replicate a reaction to a change in the attacking play, like a pass across the box. The second activity is a straightforward second recovery save. The keeper made a save to one side but did not catch the ball and has to get reset as quickly as possible to save the second shot following a rebound.