

4/5th Grade League



9 Week Practice Plan

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COMMON PRACTICE PROBLEMS

#1 Having an odd number of players at practice

- If you have an assistant or a spare parent, have them work with a goalkeeper
- When doing pair activities, make a triangle instead
- In small group activities, add a shadow defender with no tackling allowed
- Scrimmage 5v4 and have team with less players loaded with stronger players
- Scrimmage 5v4 and have team with more players attacking small goal
- Scrimmage 5v4 and have team with less players with goalie, other team without
- Use assistant, parent, brother/sister to even teams out
- Play yourself

#2 Picking teams for scrimmages

- Use your knowledge and judgment to evenly match up individuals
- Random Teams
 - Choose one player to give everyone a number. Turn away and pick random numbers for teams
 - Choose players by birthday month or day

#3 Increasing competition for more advance players

- In pairs, match up players according to ability
- If one exceptional player, match up against assistant or parent
- Reduce the space
- Limit number of touches

#4 In eliminating games players sit out for long periods of time

- In games like knockout players should do a skill activity that allows them back into the game. Rather than a single winner, count number of times required to do the skill activity. Least number wins. Skill activities could include dribbling to a distant cone and back, juggle the ball x times, do x jumping jacks, etc.

#5 Defenders always win the ball without offense gaining experience

- Have defense play as a shadow
- Restrict movement of defense by playing as a crab on all 4's
- Increase the playing area

***TIP: Change games so that the players are competing against the coaches. Kids love this challenge!**

STRETCHING EXERCISES

1. Arms/Neck

- Roll arms around in a 'windmill type' action. First rotate right arm forward 10 times, then switch to left arm. This can be done using both arms at the same time. Then, change to rotating arms backwards using the same sequence.
- Move head up and down holding each position for 8-10 seconds. Move head from side to side holding each position for 8-10 seconds.

2. Quadriceps

- These muscles are the big muscles that cover the front of your thigh. Use a goal post, a wall, or a teammate to balance. Stand straight. Bend one leg and hold your ankle or the top of your foot. Pull your bent leg until your heel is close to your bottom. Hold for 10 seconds. Switch legs. (*Diagram 1*)

3. Hamstrings

- These are the muscles at the back of your thigh. In a sitting position with your left leg straight, place the sole of your right foot against the inside of your left thigh. Bend your trunk toward your extended leg, keeping your knee straight and foot in a relaxed position. Hold for 10 seconds. Switch legs. (*Diagram 2*)

4. Groin (Butterfly stretch)

- In a sitting position with your back straight, bend your knees and place the bottoms of your feet together. Pull your feet towards your groin. Place your elbows on your knees and gently push the knees toward the floor. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat. (*Diagram 3*)

5. Calves

- In a sitting position with legs straight, place right heel on top of left toes. Pull right toes towards body with hands. Hold for 10 seconds. Switch legs.

Quadriceps



Diagram 1

Hamstrings



Diagram 2

Butterfly



Diagram 3

GOALKEEPER TRAINING

Ready Position:

- ✓ Shoulders squared to ball with feet shoulder-width apart
- ✓ Hands at waist level with palms forward and fingers pointing upward
- ✓ Head steady and eyes focused on the ball

Narrowing the Shooting Angle:

- ✓ Come off goal line toward the ball, as opponent is getting ready to shoot. This cuts down on the amount of goal the shooter has to score.

Gathering Ground Balls:

- ✓ Keep legs straight, with feet a few inches apart, and bend forward at the waist
- ✓ Reach arms down with palms forward and slightly cupped
- ✓ Allow the ball to roll up onto wrists and forearms

Gathering Air Balls:

(between ankles and waist)

- ✓ Bend forward at the waist
- ✓ Extend arms down with palms facing forward
- ✓ Receive the ball on the wrists and forearms and secure it against your chest
- ✓ For waist-height balls, jump backward a few inches to absorb the impact

(chest or head-high)

- ✓ As ball arrives, position hands in a diamond position with fingers spread and thumbs almost touching
- ✓ Extend arms, slightly flexed at the elbows
- ✓ Catch the ball with fingertips
- ✓ Withdraw arms to cushion the impact and secure the ball to chest

Diving to Save Shots:

- ✓ Step and push off the foot nearest to the ball in the direction you are going to dive (push off right foot to dive to right)
- ✓ Extend arms and hands toward ball
- ✓ Receive the ball on your fingertips and palms
- ✓ Pin the ball to the ground with upper hand
- ✓ Contact the ground with your side, not stomach

Distributing the Ball:

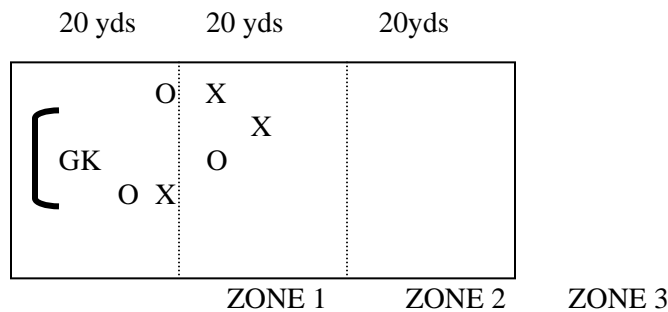
- ✓ Rolling the ball-release the ball with a bowling-type motion at ground level so it doesn't bounce
- ✓ Throwing the ball-hold the ball in the palm of the hand, step toward target and use overhand throw similar to baseball
- ✓ Kicking the ball-hold the ball in the palm of the hand opposite the kicking foot. Step forward with non-kicking foot, release the ball and kick with instep.

GOALKEEPING GAMES

Over the Top (to distribute the ball)

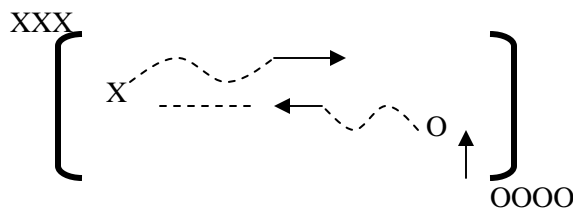
Play 3v3 in a 20x60 yard area. Use cones to mark three 20-yard zones within the length of the field (distances can be changed according to ability). Three players on offense attack the goal. The three on defense including goalkeeper defend the goal. The defense scores in this manner

- ✓ 1 point for a shot stopped and successfully distributed by goalie by *rolling* ball into first zone
 - ✓ 2 points for a shot stopped and successfully distributed by goalie by *throwing* ball into second zone
 - ✓ 3 points for a shot stopped and successfully distributed by goalie by *punting* ball into third zone
 - ✓ 1 additional point for any ball controlled by one of the goalie's teammates
- Once defense controls the ball from the goalkeeper, play begins with the offense.



Shoot and Save (goalie training for entire team)

Bring goals 30 yards apart with goalie in each goal. Other players should be in line outside of left posts of each goal. Balls in both goals. Player takes ball, dribbles towards goal and shoots. He then goes to end of other line. Goalie now becomes forward and dribbles and shoots at other goal. Front of the line replaces in goal each time. Players in line can assist collecting balls. Continue repeating rotation.



***Any shooting game or game that goes to goal can be used for goalie training as well.**

BASIC PRACTICE PLAN

- Warm-up/Stretch...5-10 minutes
 - This section will get the players moving (with or without the ball) to warm up their muscles prior to stretching. This warm-up may be as simple as tag or a review game from prior practices.
 - Be sure to stretch every practice...the earlier in life the players get in the habit of stretching, the better! One idea is to have a different player lead stretching each practice. See attached sheet on major stretches to be done.
- Skill of the Day Instruction...10-15 minutes
 - This section will be where you teach the players different skills and concepts of the game. It will also include a short drill to practice that particular skill. Take this time to give one-on-one instruction and to correct any mistakes.
- Practice Activities/Games...15-20 minutes
 - This section will involve games that will further develop the skill of the day.
- Water Break/Recap/Game Prep...5 minutes
 - Use this time to give the players a rest, recap the practice and organize for the scrimmage.
- Small/Full-Sided Scrimmages...15-20 minutes
 - This is often the most fun part of practice, for players and coaches! Small-sided scrimmages (teams of 2-4 each) are great because each player gets plenty of touches on the ball and less aggressive players are more involved. Large scrimmages present good opportunities to teach field positions and formations, team defense, and proper decision-making.

***Times are approximate and should be adjusted according to your team's needs.**

PRACTICE #1 SKILL: **Dribbling**

10 Minutes: Warm-up

1. **Box Drill**-Mark off a 25x25 yard box (or a suitable size for number of kids). All players start in the box with a ball dribbling at a jogging pace.

Key Points:

1. Head up-eyes on the field
2. Use both feet
3. Dribbling into space away from other players

*Variations:

1. Dribble with left foot only
 2. Dribble with right foot only
 3. Dribble outside of foot only
2. Stretch: *SEE ATTACHED SHEET

10 Minutes: Skill of the Day Instruction: **Dribbling**

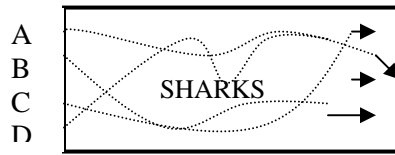
Key Points:

1. Use all parts of feet; inside, outside, laces, sole
2. Keep the ball close to your feet. If it is too far ahead, other players can steal it
3. Head up-eyes on the field
4. Introduce Moves:
 - a. *Roll*-roll ball backwards with sole of shoe
 - b. *Cut*-cut across body with inside of foot; can use outside as well
 - c. *Cryuff* (pronounced "croif")-put standing leg alongside ball. Look to shoot, then turn foot inwards and drag ball back behind standing foot with inside of other foot.

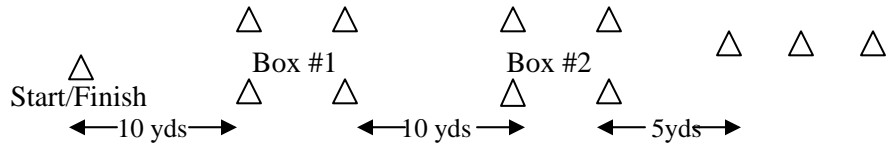
Skill Drill: Set players up in the **Box Drill** again. This time allow a few minutes of freedom to work on new tricks and moves. Encourage players to create their own move!

20 Minutes: Dribbling Games

1. **Sharks and Minnows** (see diagram next page)-Cone off a rectangular area. Designate two Sharks to be in the middle of the "ocean" without a ball. All other players (the Minnows) have a ball at one end. On the coach's signal the Minnows attempt to cross the "ocean" by dribbling without losing their ball. The Sharks try to kick everyone's balls out of the "ocean." If a Minnow loses his/her ball then he/she becomes a shark. Minnows cross on coach's signal each time. The last two Minnows surviving become Sharks in a new game.



2. **Relay Race**-Set up cones as shown below. One ball at starting line and one ball in Box #2. Divide team in half. Players must:
- Dribble the ball and stop it in Box #1
 - Run to Box #2, collect the ball and dribble it through the cones up and back (slalom-style)
 - Stop the ball in Box #2 on the way back
 - Run to Box #1, collect the ball and dribble through the start/finish line
- The first team to sit down after all players have gone wins.



Water Break/Recap

20 Minutes: Small-Sided Scrimmage-Make teams of three or four and play a couple of mini-games.

PRACTICE #2 SKILL: **Positions on the field and Formations**

10 Minutes: Warm-up/Stretch

1. **Tap Dance**-The ball should not move in this drill. Each player has a ball and they start with one foot on the ball and one foot on the ground. On the coach's signal, they start switching feet, "tapping" the top of the ball with each foot. Coach can hold up fingers and the players have to yell out the number he is holding up.
2. **Happy Feet**-The player puts the ball between their feet. The ball is knocked back and forth from the left to right in a continuous motion. The knees should be slightly bent and the ball should be hitting the area above the ball of the foot.

*These two drills are used for fast footwork and to get the players comfortable with the ball. The goal is for each player to stay under control and be comfortable not staring at the ball.

10 Minutes: Skill of the Day Instruction: **Positions on the field and Formations**

1. Forward- Primarily an attacking player whose responsibility is to create and score goals.
2. Midfielder-Both an offensive and defensive player who is primarily responsible for linking forwards and the defenders.
3. Defender-Primarily a defensive player who assists the goalkeeper in protecting the goal.
4. Goalkeeper-The last line of defense. The only player who can use his/her hands within the field of play. The goalkeeper is limited to using his/her hands within the penalty area.

***NOTE:** May need to introduce positions to those players who have not played before. At this level, formations can be introduced. For example, a **3-3-3** (3 Defenders-3 Midfielders-3 Forwards) and a **4-3-2** (4 Defenders-3 Midfielders-2 Forwards) are both good options. The most difficult concept to teach against is *swarming*, where all the players flood to the ball. One goal throughout the season is to make the players aware of their field position in relation to other's positions.

Skill Drill: Begin by lining the players on the field in a **3-3-3** formation. Explain where each position should be in relation to others and their responsibilities. Now line the players in a **4-3-2** formation. Point the differences out to the players.

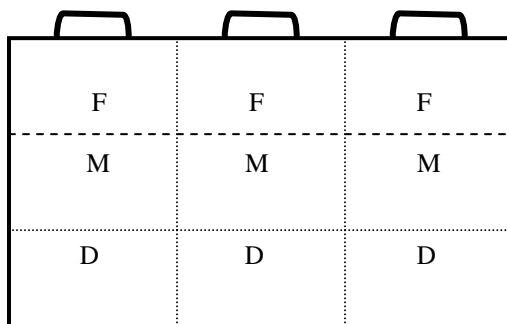
20 Minutes: Positional Game

1. **Alley Cat**-Set up cones in 3 "alleys" (horizontally and vertically) on the field (see diagram). Set a player in each zone (one forward, one midfielder and one defender). Ball starts with the defender. They must

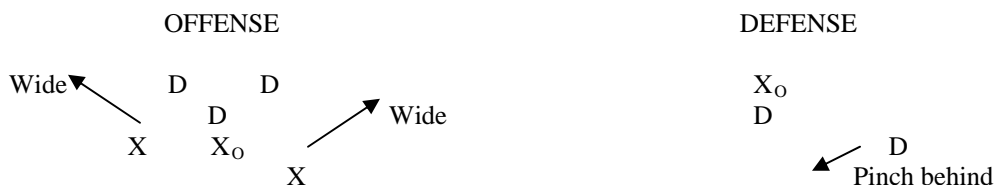
pass one ball to each other down the field and shoot a goal. Players may not crossover into each other's alley.

Variations:

1. Relay race between "alleys". Most goals in set amount of time or fastest alley to get all their balls in the goal.
2. Have only one goal and everyone on the same team. Set number of passes that must be made before a shot can be taken.
3. Add two or three defenders who can roam anywhere and/or goalkeepers to increase difficulty



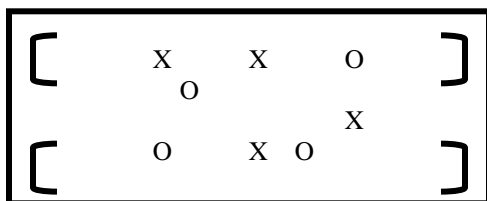
This set-up is a great place to introduce the concepts of *support* and *width* offensively and defensively. Offensively, the wing players should stay *wide* to spread out your attack. Defensively, players should provide *support* for each other by playing behind and pinched in relation to the defender on the ball.



Water Break/Recap

20 Minutes: **2-Goal Scrimmage**-Set up 2 goals at *each* end of the field, closer to the sideline than to each other. Attackers need to look up and decide which goal to attack (which one is more open).

*Bunching may still be apparent at this age. When defenders are bunched-stop the play and explain why everyone can't race to the ball. Point out where the open space is. This concept may take a while to catch on but pretty soon they will know immediately why you stopped the play.



PRACTICE #3 SKILL: **Passing and Trapping**

10 Minutes: Warm-up/Stretch

1. **Tap Dance/Happy Feet**
2. **Dribble Knock-Out**-Cone off an area large enough for all players to fit in. Each player has a ball and must dribble in the area. When the coach yells “KNOCK OUT!” each player tries to knock out another player’s ball from the area while keeping his own ball under control. If a player’s ball leaves the area, that player is out. Play until one player is left.

***See “Common Practice Problems” for alternatives in elimination games.**

10 Minutes: Skill of the Day Instruction: **Passing and Trapping**

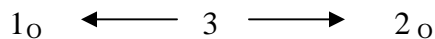
Passing Key Points:

1. Use inside of feet
2. Strike through the middle of the ball
3. Plant non-kicking foot next to the ball, pointing towards target

Trapping Key Points:

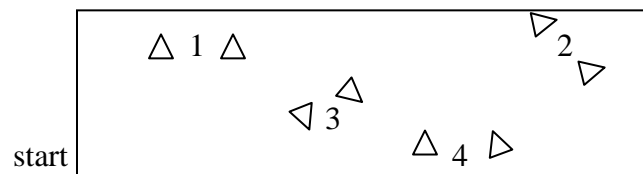
1. Cushion the ball as it comes to you (like catching an egg)
2. Keep body loose-the ball should not bounce off of you
3. Can use all body parts (except hands and arms), but the feet and thigh are the most common

Skill Drill: 3-Person Trap-Divide players into groups of three. Players 1 and 2 are spread about 30 yards apart with balls in their hands while the Player 3 is in the middle without a ball. Player 3 will run to Player 1 who tosses them the ball to either their thigh or foot. Player 3 will trap the ball and pass it back. Then Player 3 will run to Player 2 and do the same. Switch players each minute. Emphasize using both legs to trap and pass.

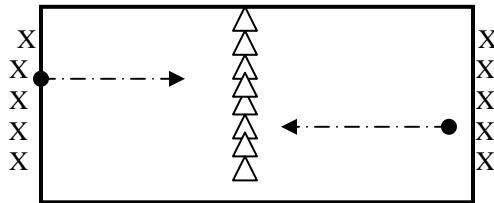


20 Minutes: Passing Games

1. **Soccer Golf**-Set up a series of cones 2 yards apart around the field. Players have to pass the ball through the cones with the least amount of touches possible. Can play in singles, doubles or teams. Keep track of touches. Lowest number wins.



2. **Storm the Castle**-Divide team in half. Each team lines up 20 yards apart facing each other (distance may be increased for more difficulty). Set cones up in a centerline between teams (10 yards away from each team). Each player tries to knock down the cones by passing the ball into them. When cone is knocked over, that player runs into middle zone and tries to bring cone to own end line before other team hits player with a passed ball (waist or lower).
- Each team must stay behind own line, unless retrieving a cone.
 - Only one player allowed to retrieve a cone at a time.
 - First team with all the cones wins OR team with most cones at end of time limit.



*Variation: Set cones on each team's end line, not the centerline. This requires greater passing accuracy and retrieving cones is more challenging.

Water Break/Recap

10 Minutes: Small Sided Scrimmage. Encourage passing!

10 Minutes: Full Scrimmage. Add restrictions. For example, must pass 3 times before allowed to shoot, or maximum number of individual touches is 5 (to encourage passing).

PRACTICE #4 SKILL:

Shooting

10 Minutes: Warm-up/Stretch

1. **Chain Tag**-2 players are IT and begin chase after the free players. A free player who is tagged must join hands with the person who tagged him or her and form a chain. Chains cannot split into smaller chains. The longest chain at the end of the game wins.
2. Stretch the legs well today for shooting!

10 Minutes: Skill of the Day Instruction: **Shooting**

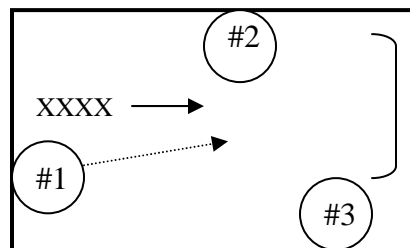
Key Points:

1. Plant non-kicking foot next to ball
2. Point toe down, lock ankle, strike with shoelaces
3. Lean slightly forward
4. Head down
5. Follow-through; land on shooting foot
6. No Toe-balls!

Skill Drill: Have coach or another adult anchor ball with foot while each player slowly walks up to the ball going through the shooting motion. Start with player walking to ball and getting their shooting foot in position. Advance to a jog up to the ball. Focus on technique; the ball should not be kicked loose from coach's foot.

20 Minutes: Shooting Games

1. Line players 15-20 yards away from goal. The coach will pass the ball from spot #1 to first player in line for a shot. Each player should retrieve own ball after shot and go back in line. After a few rounds for each player, switch to spot #2 and then #3.

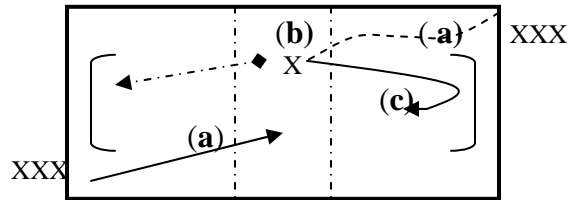


2. **Shooting Wars**- This is a fast paced game that works on shooting off the dribble and quick thinking. Divide into two teams with each player having a ball. Place goals about 30 yards apart facing each other. Each team lines up on right side of their goal. Mark a 'shooting zone' (see diagram) in the center. First player dribbles into zone and shoots. Immediately he retreats to play goalie as the first player on

opposing team dribbles and shoots. This cycle continues for set amount of time. The key rules are:

- a. Begin dribble as soon as opponents shoot
- b. As soon as you shoot, you become goalie
- c. After being goalie, go to end of line

Each team keeps track of goals scored. Most goals in set amount of time wins.



Water Break/Recap

20 Minutes: Scrimmage-Large or Small...Your Call! Make the goals bigger today to encourage goal scoring and taking shots.

PRACTICE #5 SKILL: **Defense**

10 Minutes: Warm-up/Stretch

1. **Review Footwork: Tap Dance/Happy Feet**
 - a. Introduce movement with Happy Feet-Move slightly forward each touch. Take it width of field and back. Small, quick touches.
2. **Dribble Knock-Out**

10 Minutes: Skill of the Day Instruction: **Defense**

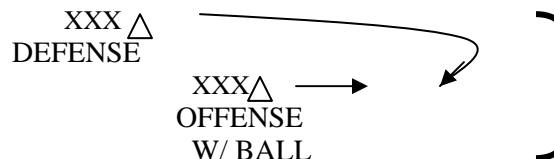
Key Points:

1. Get between opponent and goal as quickly as possible
2. Keep body low-eyes on the ball
3. Clear balls out of goal mouth to the outside as quickly as possible
4. Provide help and support by pinching behind defender who is marking the ball

Skill Drill: Divide players into two lines. Offense line starts 5 yards ahead with the ball. On Coach's signal, offense dribbles towards goal while defense tries to get between offense and the goal as quickly as possible.

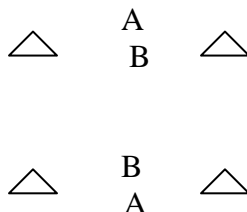
Key Points:

1. Focus on the defense-emphasize getting between the ball and the goal first, then clearing the ball to the outside
2. Don't allow offense to shoot on goal-make them dribble into the goal

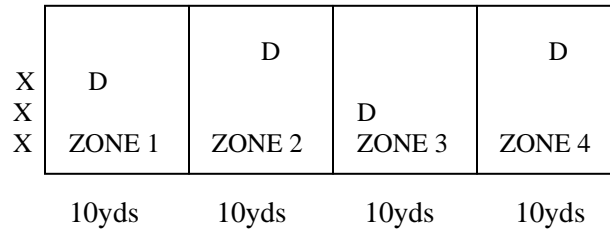


20 Minutes: Defense Games

1. **1v1**-Set up a 15x15 yard square(s) with one pair of players per side, 1 ball per pair. A and B face each other about one yard apart. A has ball and B is shadow. B is not allowed to steal ball. A must try and stop ball by one of the cones while 'losing' B. Coach can have players start without ball to get the idea of body movement. Emphasize upper body movement, change of direction and speed.



2. **Run the Gauntlet**-Mark off a 20x40 yard grid. Divide into four 10-yard zones. Place one defender into each zone. Rest of team lines up at one end line and tries to dribble to the other without losing their ball. All players leave at once. Defenders score 1-4 points depending on which zone the tackle is made. Attackers score 3 points for reaching the other side.



Water Break/Recap

20 Minutes: Small-Sided Scrimmage (3v3 or 4v4). Encourage good defense! Feel free to stop the play to compliment and/or correct defensive positioning.

PRACTICE #6 SKILL: **Juggling/Heading**

10 Minutes: Warm-up/Stretch

1. **Shadow Tag**-Pair off players, 1 ball per pair, playing shadow ball (one player with ball, the other being his shadow). On coach's command, the Shadow has 3 seconds to get away. Player has to pass ball at his shadow. Point is scored for a hit. Switch and repeat.

10 Minutes: Skill of the Day Instruction: **Juggling/Heading**

Juggling Key Points:

1. Focus on ball
2. Keep ankle solid (don't flick)
3. Bend knee to strike

Skill Drill: Have players hold ball in hands. Drop ball onto laces and try to catch. Repeat with other foot. Then kick, let it bounce, and kick again. Increase number of kicks. Move onto thigh. Emphasize using the meaty part of the leg, not the knee.

Heading Key Points:

1. Eyes open-mouths closed
2. Top of forehead (hairline)
3. Offensive headers-strike down to score
4. Defensive headers-strike up and away to clear the ball over oncoming attackers

Skill Drill: Simply have a coach or adult hold the ball at head level of the kids. Line players up and have them walk up and head the ball gently using the proper technique. They shouldn't try and knock it out of coach's hands. Coach should be looking for open eyes and closed mouths and what part of the head they are hitting the ball with. Next, raise the ball so player must jump. Same technique should be enforced.

***NOTE:** If this is new for players start with a foam ball or even a beach ball to build up their confidence. The first goal is get them comfortable with hitting the ball with their head.

10 Minutes: Juggling Game

1. **Juggle Race**-Using the method of "drop-juggle-catch", start all players on one end line and have them progress to the other side on the following conditions:
 - *1 step for each successful thigh juggle and catch.* (For example, Player 1 drops, juggles ball 2 times with thigh and catches it. Player 1 moves 2 steps forward.)

- *2 steps for each successful foot juggle and catch.* (Player 2 drops, juggles ball 2 times with foot and catches it. Player 2 moves 4 steps forward.)

10 Minutes: Heading Game

1. **Head Catch**-Arrange all the players in a tight circle around the coach who holds the ball. Coach tosses ball in air to a player and yells either “Head” or “Catch”. Player must follow instruction. Once they get this down, reverse the rules. When coach yells “Head”, players must catch the ball and when coach yells “Catch” players must head the ball.

Water Break/Recap

20 Minutes: Scrimmage

PRACTICE #7 SKILLS: **Dribbling, Passing, Shooting**

10 Minutes: Warm-up/Stretch

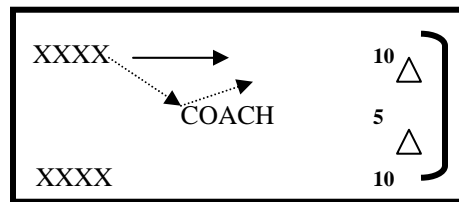
1. **Tap Dance/Happy Feet**
2. **Juggling**

10 Minutes: **Review Dribbling, Passing, Shooting Key Points**

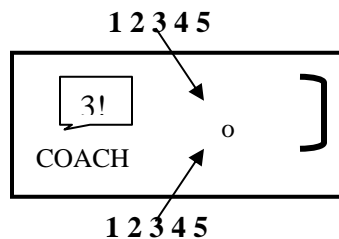
Skill Drill: Divide players into two lines. Set up a line of 3-4 cones for each line leading to the goal. Players must dribble through cones (slalom-style) and then take a shot on goal. Retrieve ball and return to line.

20 Minutes: Dribbling, Passing, and Shooting Games

1. **Pass and Shoot**-Set up two lines of players facing the goal in line with goal posts. The goal is divided into thirds by cones. Players pass to coach who passes to the side or slightly forward. Player runs and shoots on goal. Limit number of touches to 1 or 2, depending on skill level. 10 points for corners, 5 points for center. 10 points for center.



2. **Steal the Bacon**-Divide team in half and position each team on opposite sides of the area. Give each player on both teams a number (Each team will have a player #1, 2, 3, etc.). Coach rolls a ball into the middle of the area and calls out a number. Player from each team with the called number runs out to the ball and tries to score on goal. Play continues until a goal is scored or ball goes out of play. Coach may call more than one number at a time.



Water Break/Recap

20 Minutes: **Soccer Baseball**-Arrange a field with home-plate, bases, and out-of-bounds lines. Divide teams evenly and “play ball!” Have pitchers roll the ball to batters (or Coach pitches for quicker play). Batters kick the ball and attempt to reach first base before being touched by the ball, before the ball reaches the base or before the ball gets passed back to the pitcher. Fielders must play the ball with their feet (no hands!). Keep players interested by not keeping track of outs. Have each team “bat” until each player kicks.

PRACTICE #8 SKILLS: **Miscellaneous**

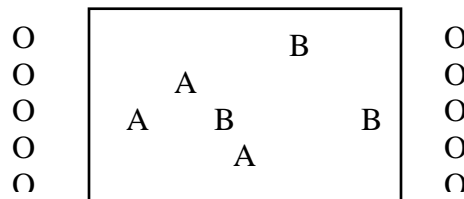
***As the season is winding down, you will know what skills your team needs to work on. This practice is a mix of everything. You can pick and choose what you think would be best for your team.**

10 Minutes: Warm-up/Stretch

1. **Tap Dance/Happy Feet**
2. **Dribble Knock-Out**
3. **Juggling**

30 Minutes: Games

1. **Red Light-Green Light**-All players on end line with a ball. Coach at finish line with back turned. Coach yells “Green Light!” All players dribble forward. Coach then yells “Red Light!” and turns around. All players must stop themselves and their balls immediately. If coach sees a moving player, he/she sends them back to the start. First player to reach the coach wins and becomes the next leader.
2. **Beat the Clock**-Divide players into two teams. Team 1 is inside grid dribbling. Team 2 is waiting outside of grid. On coach’s signal Team 2 invades Team 1 and tries to knock all the balls out. Once a player on Team 1 loses his/her ball, they can help a teammate by receiving passes and playing keep-a-way. Team 2 has a set amount of time determined by coach to clear all the balls out.
3. **Sitting Duck**-Cone off a 30x40 yard playing field. On the end lines place 4-5 balls, evenly spread out. Divide players into two teams. Start scrimmaging with another ball inside the area. The object is to hit one of the balls on the end line of your opponent. A goal is scored by hitting one of the other team’s balls. Use same rules as scrimmage.



Water Break/Recap

20 Minutes: Small-Sided Scrimmage and/or Two-Goal Scrimmage

PRACTICE #9 **Player's Practice!**

Let the players run the practice! Pick their favorite drills, activities and games.