SOCCER PRACTICE GAMES

1. "Dribble Across A Square" * * * *
(Control dribbling, speed dribbling, turning, peripheral vision
U-6 & up)

We highly recommend the "Dribble Around Cone & Pass Relay Race" Practice Game

It is difficult to explain soccer skills in print. For demonstrations that you and your players can watch to learn the skills, and that show how to teach the skills, we recommend the following DVD's. You can read detailed reviews by clicking the links: Mia Hamm Soccer Secrets, Coerver Play Great Soccer2-DVD Set, England Skills Uncovered (19 skills are demonstrated by professional players), Soccer Success One On One Coaching, Go! (Brazilian Foot Skills and Ball Control Training Program), Super Soccer Skills and Just Kickin' It.

U-6 Coaches Read This: For U-6, make the square 5 or 6 adult steps wide and have the players just dribble across and stop (don't have them turn and dribble back). As soon as they have all dribbled across, have them all face inward and dribble back across to the opposite side and stop. Continue this approach of dribbling across and stopping each time until they have crossed the square 6 to 8 times (each trip across is "one"). Don't try to teach turns and don't keep score, just encourage them all and have fun. The benefit of this for U-6 is learning to dribble in traffic. Tell them to focus on their own ball and to NOT try to kick anyone else's ball.

Comment: This is the best way to teach dribbling and how to use the bottom of the foot & the inside & outside of the foot to stop the ball and turn. Easy set-up & everyone has a ball. This is a great warm-up. It is 10 times better than dribbling through cones & is a good way to evaluate dribbling skill. This game helps children's brains to learn to process a lot of activity, to use peripheral vision, and to make correct, instinctive decisions and maintain composure when under pressure and in heavy traffic.
Teaches:
- (Control dribbling, speed dribbling, turning, peripheral vision U-6 & up)

Set-up:
- Use 4 disk cones to make a square about 10 steps wide (smaller or larger depending on age & number of players)
- Every player has a ball
- Spread players around the square, all facing inward (like below):

```
Players dribble across square & back
X = Players  C = Cones
```

The Game:
- All players start on "Go" & **each player dribbles across the square & back**. (Tell them to dribble to the imaginary line on the opposite side of the square, make a turn & dribble back to where they started. **Point out at the first of the game that the cones create an imaginary "Starting Line" and "Turning Line" for each player**).
- **Teaching Turns** Among the best ways to turn are a "Pullback", a "Stop/Turn", a "Cutback" or a "Hook Turn" to turn. Demonstrate the different ways to turn and then let each player choose the one that works best for them. When going really fast, a "Stop/Turn" is a good way to turn.... when not going so fast, any of the 3 other ways are good. The way that is best for one player may not be the best for another. If certain players are doing better on their turns, have them demonstrate while the others watch. Your players will want to be able to turn better so they can improve their scores. **You can give them "Tips" about how they can get a higher score.** Here is a brief description of several turns: Do a **Pullback**, aka a "Drag Back", by putting the bottom of the foot on top of ball to stop it & then pull it back in the direction you came from. Do a **Hook Turn** by pulling the toes up & turning the foot so the outside of the foot can "hook" the ball, stop it & pull it back. A Cutback uses the inside of the foot to hook the ball. **See photos of a Pullback (called a "Drag Back"), Hook, Cutback & Stop/Turn at [http://www.fa-soccerstar.com/](http://www.fa-soccerstar.com/) (click "Turning" on the left side and then
Tell players to look up while they dribble so they don't run into each other (don't worry, there won't be many collisions).

Each player keeps count of his or her trips across the square. The first to 12 is the winner (each time he turns is "one"). Tell players to yell "Done" when finished and ask each player his score after each game.

Play 3 games; 1st to 12, then to 10, then to 8. Play at the start of practice as a warm-up and at the end of practice until dribbling skills improve or your team gets tired of this game. For beginners, let them decide how to turn using the method they are most comfortable with. For advanced or select players, require a Pullback one game, then a Hook, then a Cutback. Let a "Stop/Turn" count for a Pullback.

Teaching Acceleration into "Open Space" and "Speed Dribbling". After your team has played this game in a few practices, make the square larger so it is less crowded (about 14 steps wide). When you do this, players will still have to "Control Dribble" when in "traffic," but they will also have to learn how to look for "Open Space" and to quickly accelerate and "Speed Dribble" when they get Open Space. Tell them that they can go faster if they kick the ball in front of them, but they MUST still keep control of the ball. If they kick it too far, they won't be able to make their turn. In most games, a player will lose the game if he or she loses control of the ball even once. The game is self-teaching, but it is helpful for the coach to be encouraging and to point out how players can improve their performance. Give your players "tips" on how they can improve their score. This approach works because the players want to improve their score and if they use your "tips" they will see immediate results and get higher scores.

Teaching Points:
- "Control Dribbling" - When in traffic, keep the ball close to your feet so you can protect it ("shield" it) and learn how to look up while dribbling by keeping the ball close to your feet so you know where it is.
- "Speed Dribbling" - When you get "open" (out of traffic), you can kick the ball using the inside of foot or the "laces" & run to it so you can go faster, but you must still keep it under control so you can turn.
• How to do a "Pullback", "Stop/Turn", "Hook Turn", and a "Cutback".

With some games such as “Dribble Across A Square”, a few players might win all the time unless the rules are adjusted. I don't think you would have that problem with the "Dribble Around Cone and Pass Relay Race" and similar games because you can balance the teams.

If the same few kids are winning a Practice Game all the time, here are some ideas to think about:

1. Use an approach sort of like a golf handicap: start the weaker players with a few points. For example: everyone but the very best kids start with "1" or "2" or even "3".
2. The best approach is to give the rewards for "individual improvement". A way to do that is similar to a bowling average. Let's say one kid's average was 7 in "Dribble Across". If that kid gets 9, they would have earned a patch based on their improvement. That way everyone could win one.
3. For the "Dribble Across A Square" game, instead of a Square, make a rectangle and have your best players dribble across the long side and the weak players dribble across the short side. Adjust the lengths of the sides so it balances things out and creates a challenge for everyone (for example, make it 10 x 12 instead of 10 x 10). Let there be 2 sets of winners: a winner among the “Best” players and a winner among the “Weak” players, both of whom get a patch. That way everyone will be motivated to do their best and feel they have a chance to win a patch, and you can monitor improvement.

Benefits Of The "Dribble Across A Square Game (Premium Version)"

1. It is the best way to teach dribbling.
2. It is 50 times better than dribbling through cones.
3. It is a good warm-up.
4. It is quick and easy for one coach to set up and manage the game.
5. It is a great way to evaluate dribbling skill.
6. Based on the results we have had, we believe playing this game helps children's brains learn to process a lot of activity, that it teaches them to use peripheral vision, and that it teaches them to make correct, instinctive decisions and maintain composure when under pressure and in heavy traffic. In addition to improved dribbling skill, we have noticed significant improvement in "field vision" and "field awareness".
7. You can monitor each player's progress by asking each player his or her score at the end of each game.
8. Playing the game teaches "Control Dribbling", "Speed Dribbling" ("Running With the Ball"), shielding the ball, to look up while dribbling and the Premium Version teaches 4 types of turns (how to do a "Pullback", aka a "Drag Back", a "Stop/Turn", a "Cutback" and a "Hook Turn"). It is a "self-teaching" game and playing the game teaches these skills.

**Monitoring Progress.** Each player keeps count of his or her trips across the square. A player gets one point each time he or she turns. Have the first player to reach the target score (e.g., 12 or 10) yell "Done". As soon as a player yells "Done", blow your whistle and have all the other players stop as soon as they get back to the closest side of the square. Then, ask each player his or her score so you can monitor each player’s progress. What I would do is start with one player and ask: "John, what was your score?" and then quickly ask each of the others. It is also an opportunity to praise anyone who has improved or to give tips such as "It is very important to keep control of the ball on your turns. If you lose the ball it will cost you several points". This only takes 2 or 3 minutes.

**Remember to praise each player’s improvement.** For Recreational teams, we suggest not comparing players to each other, but judging each player’s progress based on his or her individual improvement (it really isn't fair to compare unathletic players to athletic players). In our experience, praise is more motivating than criticism.

*From www.soccerhelp.com
Copyright 1999-2007, David and Kay Huddleston*