



4v4 & 5v5 Soccer Curriculum

Philosophy – Dribble, Dribble, Dribble + Technical Ball Skills

This program is built around a three-year development cycle: two years of 4v4 play followed by one year of 5v5. This gradual progression allows players to build a strong foundation of technical skills before layering in more advanced concepts.

During the first two years (4v4), the emphasis is on:

- Dribbling
- Individual ball confidence

In the third year (5v5), we continue to reinforce dribbling and technical skills while introducing additional elements:

- Passing and early concepts of combination play
- Individual defending skills
- Basic goalkeeper techniques and positioning

By following this cycle, players grow step-by-step in a way that builds confidence, creativity, and adaptability—ensuring they leave the program with a strong technical base and a love for the game.

Encouraging At-Home Practice

Improvement doesn't just happen at practice—it's built through regular touches on the ball, even at home. To motivate players, we use our **“secret sauce” approach: 100 touches at home equals one Starburst.** This fun reward system provides kids with an achievable goal and keeps them motivated to work on their skills.

As you teach new techniques in practice, encourage players to **teach their parents** at home. Not only does this help reinforce what they've learned, but it also builds confidence, communication, and family involvement in their soccer journey.

IMPORTANT

- Players for all three age groups do NOT need to stretch, strengthen, or warm up. Don't use your limited practice time doing these activities.
- The same practice format is utilized for all three years. Drill #1- dribbling, Drill #2- Fast footwork, Drill #3-Play a game, Drill #4-Scrimmage. Do dribbling and fast footwork at every practice. Each drill should last about 15 minutes with brief water breaks between.
- For year #1, the practices are explained below. For years thereafter, utilize the format, but change what games you play.
- Saturday games are an important part of your practice. 1. We used the games to work with the defender to move up to the halfway line. We reminded the other 3 players to dribble around the bunched crowd and not to take the ball from their teammates. 2. The game also helps you choose things to focus on during practice, especially in years 2 and 3.

Fall Year #1 4v4: Practice #1 (U5 & U6)

Each team typically has 8 players on a small field with small goals and no goalie.

Season Goal: Introduce dribbling under control and fast footwork. Perfection isn't expected—these skills develop over time as players' motor skills improve and they practice (often taking 2–3 years or more):

As players arrive at practice, encourage dribbling and shooting while waiting for the start of practice.

Drill #1: Dribble in a Grid (20 x 20)

- Start with the basics: Have players dribble using the inside of the foot.
- Add variety: Introduce inside and outside of foot dribbling.
- Focus on control: Remind players to keep their heads up and avoid running into others. Dribble to the open space in the grid.
- Coach interaction: The coach holds up fingers or a colored card, and players call out the number or color as they dribble.
- Encourage speed with control: Players should dribble quickly while maintaining control of the ball.

Drill #2: Fast footwork.

Soccer position: Start in a balanced stance, ready to move.

- Foundation: Push the ball gently back and forth between your feet.
- Side rolls: Roll the ball sideways using your right and left foot.
- Forward/back rolls: Roll the ball forward and backward while staying in place.
- Toe taps: Lightly tap the top of the ball with your toes, alternating feet.

Drill #3: Red light, green light.

- Line up players in a line, shoulder to shoulder, with a ball
- Red light: Stop the ball.
- Green light: Dribble as fast as possible under control.
- Yellow light: Dribble slowly and under control.
- Purple light: Follow the coach's instructions—e.g., toe taps, dancing around, acting silly, or other creative moves.

Drill #4 End with Scrimmage:

- Player positions (4): Wide, wide, forward, and back—forming a loose diamond.
- Terminology: Use “kickoff**” and “goal kick**” to teach game concepts.
- Boundaries: Encourage players to “stay within the lines,” but keep it flexible.
Restarting play: “Coach's ball” means give the ball to the coach to restart. Use throw-ins for the first scrimmage.
- Coaching support: Have 2 coaches, one at each end, to assist with goal kicks, kickoffs, and throw-ins.
- Game flow: Keep the play moving and maintain engagement.

After practice: Hand out starbursts for touches practiced at home. 100 touches = 1 starburst (maximum of 3 starbursts). Let the kids tell you how many touches they did. Also, have a parent meeting after the first practice.

Fall Year #1 4v4: Practice #2 (U5 & U6)

As players arrive at practice, encourage dribbling and shooting while waiting for the start of practice.

Repeat Practice #1 to reinforce skills.

- Add movement to activities—hop, skip, jump, run forward, and run backward—to any of the three drills. These help develop overall coordination while keeping practice fun and active.

Review key concepts: Before scrimmage, go over positions (wide, wide, forward, back), kickoff, goal kick, throw-in**, and corner kick**.

- **Kickoff & Goal Kick setup:**
 - Wide players and the forward line up on the kickoff/goal kick line.
 - Forward passes to one of the wide players.
 - Defenders stay back on the halfway line (goal kick) or goal line (kickoff) until the ball is played.
Note: The recessed lines allow players to receive the ball and start dribbling before defenders close in.
- **Throw-ins:**
 - To avoid arguments over turns, initially call out a player's name for the throw-in.
 - A simple method is to have the wide player on that side take the throw-in.
 - To keep the game flowing, initiate a "3-2-1" countdown and have the player throw the ball down the line.
- By practice 4, **teach throw-in positioning:**
 - Forward positions down the line.
 - One wide player takes the throw-in.
 - The other wide player moves toward the middle.
 - Defender stays back slightly to allow space for build-out**.

After practice: Hand out starbursts for touches practiced at home. Let the kids tell you how many touches they did.

Fall Year #1 4v4: Practice #3 (U5 & U6)

As players arrive at practice, encourage dribbling and shooting while waiting for the start of practice.

Drill #1: Repeat fast footwork drill.

- Introduce the pull turn**, making sure players practice with both left and right foot every time.

Drill #2: Side-to-Side Dribbling in Grid.

- Dribble from side to side of a grid, using a pull turn to change direction. Coach calls out instructions, such as fast/ slow, pull turn, left/right foot, inside/outside of foot

Drill #3: Simon says.

- Use dribbling-related commands such as dribble fast, dribble slow, toe taps, dance, dribble someone else's ball (optional), pull turn, hop, or jump.
- You can let some players take turns as "Simon," but this can run long if all eight players participate. If the coach plays Simon, the game moves much faster and keeps energy high.

Drill #4: Sharks and minnows - *Fan favorite!*

Players (the minnows) dribble from one end of the grid to the other while avoiding the sharks, who try to kick their ball out. Emphasize keeping the ball close and looking for open space to dribble into, rather than kicking it far and chasing it.

- Fall season tip: Start with the coach as the shark. Recruit a parent or assistant coach to be a second shark.
- If a ball is knocked out, players can do 4 toe taps and rejoin the game.

**See definitions page at end of document

- As players progress their skills, those who lose their ball become additional sharks.

End with Scrimmage:

- Use it to review key concepts from the Saturday game—such as throw-ins, corner kicks, kickoffs, or goal kicks.
- You may pause the scrimmage (“Freeze”) if players are trying to kick through defenders. Ask, “*Where’s the space?*” and demonstrate a pull turn or inside-of-the-foot turn** to go around. Use the cue “Go around.”
- Start the scrimmage with just the kids playing, but consider a kids vs. parents matchup—always a favorite and often requested by the players.

After practice: Hand out starbursts for touches practiced at home. Let the kids tell you how many touches they did.

Fall Year #1 4v4: Practice #4 (U5 & U6)

As players arrive at practice, encourage dribbling and shooting while waiting for the start of practice.

Drill #1: Dribble around the coach and shoot on goal.

You can start this “before” practice as kids arrive, but also use it for drill one for this practice. (Continue this as a pre-practice warmup while kids arrive for all three years. It is the best dribbling/shooting drill for this age group, and will give your players confidence to be an attacking team. This activity is Secret sauce #2.

Drill #2: Side-to-Side Dribbling in Grid—See Practice #3

Drill #3: Fast footwork—See Practice #1 & #3

Drill #4: Red light/green light — See Practice #1

- Add Monster Truck version: The coach is the “monster truck” and tries to steal the ball from players. Players must change direction to escape and look for open space to dribble into.

End with Scrimmage:

- Use it to review key concepts from the Saturday game or anything else you want to work on.

After practice: Hand out starbursts for touches practiced at home. Let the kids tell you how many touches they did.

Fall Year #1 4v4: Practice #5 (U5 & U6)

- **Dribbling & Fast Footwork**
 - Repeat favorite drills from earlier practices
 - Dribble fast/slow, both feet
 - Add pull turns**
- **Dribbling Games**
 - Pick the kids’ favorites: Red Light / Green Light, Simon Says, Sharks & Minnows
- **Scrimmage**
 - End with a fun, high-energy game
 - Play the parents

Last practice of the season - Make it fun!

**See definitions page at end of document

Spring Year #1 4v4: All Practices (U5 & U6)

Season Goal: Build on the Fall season by advancing dribbling, ball control, and coordination while introducing speed, direction changes, and decision-making under pressure.

Continue Main Focuses from Fall Season

- Continue working on dribbling under control and fast footwork
- Use the same drills as you did in the fall, since they are familiar with them, and to reinforce skills
- Keep each drill short and high-energy

As players arrive at practice, encourage dribbling and shooting while waiting for the start of practice.

Drill Variations - Variations on the Fall Drills

Drill #1: Coach Throw & Retrieve

- Each player starts with a ball
- Player hands the ball to the coach → coach tosses it overhead in any direction
- Player retrieves the ball, does a pull turn, and dribbles back to the coach
- Repeat in different directions (players love this)

Drill #2: 20x20 Grid – Parent Signals

- One parent on each sideline
- Kids dribble inside the grid
- Parents take turns holding up a hand → players dribble to that parent

Drill #3: Cookie Monster (20x25 Grid)

- Players line up on one end, coach on the opposite end, with cones (“cookies”) scattered in front
- Players: “Cookie Monster, are you hungry?” → coach turns back → all dribble to steal one cone
- Freeze when the coach turns around; if caught moving or the ball too far ahead → do quick activity (e.g., 5 jumping jacks, 6 toe touches) before rejoining
- No penalty if caught on the way back after stealing a cone
- Works on dribbling under control, looking up, and turning

After practice: Hand out starbursts for touches practiced at home. Let the kids tell you how many touches they did. Also, have a parent meeting after the first practice.

Fall & Spring Year #2 4v4 Practice Ideas (U7)

Season Goals: Continue developing the skills learned in the first Fall and Spring seasons, emphasizing heads-up dribbling, keeping the ball under control and close, and knowing when to dribble fast or slow. Focus on changing direction and speed, using both feet, and reinforcing fast footwork and coordination activities to build confident, well-rounded players.

As players arrive at practice, encourage dribbling and shooting while waiting for the start of practice.

Practice format:

For each practice, use the following format. Drill #1- dribbling, Drill #2- Fast footwork, Drill #3-Play a game, #4-Scrimmage.

Drill #1: Dribbling

Basic Grid Dribbling:

- Start with the basics: Have players dribble using the inside of the foot.
- Add variety: Introduce inside and outside of foot dribbling.
- Focus on control: Remind players to keep their heads up and avoid running into others.
- Coach interaction: The coach holds up some fingers or a colored card, and players call out the number or color as they dribble.
- Encourage speed with control: Players should dribble quickly while maintaining control of the ball.

Grid Dribbling with Gates:

- Set up several gates with two cones each (1–2 yards apart) within your 20x20 grid.
- Players dribble through gates, not repeating the same gate twice in a row.
- Repeat until comfortable, then incorporate into other dribbling activities.
- Players turn with the inside or outside of the foot to move to the next gate.
- Encourage them to look for open gates.
- Fun activity: Count the number of gates dribbled through in 30–60 seconds; repeat for a second round (add about 10 seconds the second time), aiming to beat the previous count. Avoid focusing on a “winner.” Instead ask who beat their first effort.
- Variations on gates activities:
 - Dribble back through the same gate (counts as 2). Requires person to turn.
 - Coach or parent can close a gate, forcing players to choose another. Requires the player to change direction and to look up.
 - Coach can try to steal the ball, requiring players to protect the ball while navigating gates. Adds the concept of shielding the ball.

Drill #2: Fast footwork.

Soccer position: Start in a balanced stance, ready to move.

- Foundation: Push the ball gently back and forth between your feet.
- Side rolls: Roll the ball sideways using your right and left foot.
- Forward/back rolls: Roll the ball forward and backward while staying in place.
- Toe taps: Lightly tap the top of the ball with your toes, alternating feet.
- Introduce and add some coordination activities, usually done without the ball.
 - Coordination activities: have them run backwards, shuffle sideways, step over without the ball, do a basket weave, hop sideways, landing on 1 foot, and then hop back to land on the other foot.

Drill #3: Play a game.

In the Spring season, we usually did just sharks and minnows or 1v1 with two goals. These are more advanced games than cookie monster and Red light Green Light.

Sharks and minnows - *Fan favorite!*

Players (the minnows) dribble from one end of the grid to the other while avoiding the sharks, who try to kick their ball out. Emphasize keeping the ball close and looking for open space to dribble into, rather than kicking it far and chasing it.

- Fall season: Introduce two players starting as sharks in the middle.
- If a ball is knocked out, those players become additional sharks.

Cookie Monster (20x25 Grid)

- Players line up on one end, coach on the opposite end with cones (“cookies”) scattered in front
- Players: “Cookie Monster, are you hungry?” → coach turns back → all dribble to steal one cone

- Freeze when the coach turns around; if caught moving or the ball too far ahead → do quick activity (e.g., 5 jumping jacks, 6 toe touches) before rejoining
- No penalty if caught on the way back after stealing a cone
- Works on dribbling under control, looking up, and turning

Red light, green light

- Line up players in a line, shoulder to shoulder, with a ball
- Red light: Stop the ball.
- Green light: Dribble as fast as possible under control.
- Yellow light: Dribble slowly and under control.
- Purple light: Follow the coach's instructions—e.g., toe taps, dancing around, acting silly, or other creative moves.

1v1 with 2 Goals (Grid)

- Divide the field in half to run two games simultaneously.
- The attacker starts with the ball; the coach says, "Go."
- Coaching points:
 - Look for space to dribble
 - Go fast when moving past the defender
 - Go slow when approaching the defender
- Introduce individual defending: the defender stays between the goal and the attacker.
- Tip: Early sessions focus on either attacking or defending, not both in the same practice.

Drill #4: End with Scrimmaging

Basic Scrimmaging

- Player positions: Wide, wide, forward, and back—forming a loose diamond.
- Terminology: Use "kickoff" and "goal kick" to teach game concepts.
- Boundaries: Encourage players to "stay within the lines," but keep it flexible. Restarting play: "Coach's ball" means give the ball to the coach to restart. Use throw-ins for the first scrimmage.
- Coaching support: Have 2 coaches, one at each end, to assist with goal kicks, kickoffs, and throw-ins.
- Game flow: Keep the play moving and maintain engagement.
- Use it to review key concepts from the Saturday game—such as throw-ins, corner kicks, kickoffs, or goal kicks.
- You may pause the scrimmage ("Freeze") if players are trying to kick through defenders. Ask, "*Where's the space?*" and demonstrate a pull turn or inside-of-the-foot turn to go around. Use the cue "Go around."
- Start the scrimmage with just the kids playing, but consider a kids vs. parents matchup—always a favorite and often requested by the players.

After practice: Hand out starbursts for touches practiced at home. Let the kids tell you how many touches they did. Also, have a parent meeting after the first practice.

Fall Year #3 5v5 Practice Ideas (U8)

5v5 teams; 4 field players and a goalkeeper, typically with 10 players per team. You may want four small portable goals, though alternatives like cones, water bottles, or old t-shirts can also work.

- Consider an extra pre-season practice to teach goalkeeping. Show the box, teach positioning between the ball and the goal, catching at the chest and above the

shoulder, and rolling the ball along the ground. Parents can help by rolling or tossing the ball.

- Coaches may want to buy two sets of inexpensive kids' goalie gloves. This allows one player to prepare to come on as a goalie during a game without delay. We used pinnies rather than GK shirts to make transitions go quickly during games.

Season Goals: Continue to build individual ball skills and dribbling with both feet, and introduce passing and spreading into positions (wide, wide, forward, back) as players learn to receive the ball.

Practice format:

For each practice, use the following format. Drill #1- dribbling, Drill #2- Fast footwork, Drill #3-Play a game, Drill #4-Scrimmage or play another game which focuses on skills different than #3.

Because of the many things you are working on, you can't do everything in each practice. We always included dribbling and passing in each practice. Sometimes the kids wanted to play sharks and minnows, so we would skip scrimmage. Choose 4, maybe 5 of the following drills for your practice.

As players arrive at practice, encourage passing, dribbling, and shooting while waiting for the start of practice.

Drill #1: Dribbling Grid Drill.

- Dribble from one end of the grid to the other under control
- Use a pull turn** to change direction
- Dribble:
 - One way with the inside of the right foot
 - Back with the outside of the right foot
 - Down and back with the left foot
- Place several cones midway for players to cut around, keeping the ball close
- Introduce "V" move** and cuts**; demonstrate to players
- Encourage practicing moves at home for an extra starburst
- Players demo moves to the coach at the next practice and thereafter

Drill #2: Cone dribbling.

- Dribble through a line of 5 cones using:
 - Right foot only
 - Left foot
 - Inside of foot
 - Outside of the foot
- Set up multiple lines so only 3 kids per line
- If 4 kids per line, place faster dribblers together

Drill #3: Dribbling through gates.

- Set up several gates with two cones each (1–2 yards apart) within your 20x20 grid.
- Players dribble through gates, not repeating the same gate twice in a row.
- Repeat until comfortable, then incorporate into other dribbling activities.
- Players turn with the inside or outside of the foot to move to the next gate.
- Encourage them to look for open gates.
- Count the number of gates dribbled through in 30–60 seconds; repeat for a second round, aiming to beat the previous count. Avoid focusing on a "winner."
- Variations:

**See definitions page at end of document

- Dribble back through the same gate (counts as 2).
- A coach or parent can close a gate, forcing players to choose another.
- Coach can try to steal the ball, requiring players to protect the ball while navigating gates.

Drill #4: Passing

- First two practices: Teach passing technique - inside of foot, heel down/toe up
 - Pass between partners through cones using each foot
- Practice 3:
 - Each player has two cones in front
 - The ball is passed outside the cones, trapped to the center, and passed back through the cones
 - Practice with both feet
 - Repeat throughout the Fall season
- Starting Practice 5:
 - Return to dribbling gates on the field
 - Pass to partner through a gate
 - After passing, move to a different gate
 - Count the number of gates passed through in one minute

Drill #5: Sharks and Minnows – Advanced Version

- Players dribble around the grid instead of end-to-end
- Only two sharks start and try to steal the ball from dribblers
- The player who loses the ball becomes a shark and goes after another player's ball
- Focus: shielding the ball, dribbling under pressure, and finding open space

Drill #6: Scrimmage (Position Focus)

- Work on positions: forward and wide player on the ball side, try to win the ball
- Defender moves up with their team but maintains depth
- Other wide player stay on their side of the field (doesn't cross midline)
- Focus coaching primarily on the defender initially
- Tell the forward and wide player to go get the ball
- Don't focus too much on the other wide player until the team begins passing

After practice: Hand out starbursts for touches practiced at home. Let the kids tell you how many touches they did. Also, have a parent meeting after the first practice.

Spring Year #3 5v5 Practice Ideas (U8)

Season Goals: Continue to build individual ball skills and dribbling with both feet, and introduce passing and spreading into positions (wide, wide, forward, back) as players learn to receive the ball.

Practice Format

For each practice, use the following format. Drill #1- dribbling, Drill #2- Fast footwork, Drill #3-Play a game, #4-Scrimmage or a different game with a different focus.

- You can't cover everything in one practice; always include dribbling and passing.
- Sometimes, skip the scrimmage if kids want to play Sharks and Minnows.
- Choose 4 or 5 drills for practice each week

Drill #1: Sharp Cuts

- Players perform 90-degree cuts with the top of the foot turned inward** (sharper than inside-foot cuts from Fall).

Drill #2: Cone Dribbling

**See definitions page at end of document

- Dribble using:
 - Inside only of both feet
 - Outside only of both feet
 - Inside-outside on the same foot (right then left)

Drill #3: Rondos**

- 4v0 or 3v0, focusing on movement to empty corners and one- or two-touch passing
- To make it more challenging, add a player in the middle for 4v1 or 3v1

Drill #4: 1v1 to Two Goals

- Defender passes the ball to the attacker; attacker tries to score in one of two goals
- If the defender wins the ball, they score by dribbling to attacker's line
- Practice 3: Add 2v1 to two goals; attacker dribbles until defender approaches, then can dribble or pass to attacker 2
- Great as a pregame warmup for big goals with a goalkeeper

Drill #5: Teaching Defending Principles

- Stay between the ball and your goal – Don't let the other team get past you.
- Go toward the player with the ball – Try to slow them down.
- Stay low and ready – Bend your knees and be ready to move.
- Use your body sideways – Don't run straight at them; stay balanced.
- Look at the ball – Watch the ball, not just the other player.

After practice: Hand out starbursts for touches practiced at home. Let the kids tell you how many touches they did. Also, have a parent meeting after the first practice.

Soccer Term Definitions

- **Kick off:** A start or restart of play from midfield at the beginning of a half or after a goal.
- **Goal kick:** A kick taken from inside the goal area by the defending team after the ball crosses their goal line, last touched by the attacking team.
- **Throw In:** A method of restarting play when the ball crosses the sideline, thrown in by the team that did not touch it last. The player uses both hands to hold the ball behind the head, with both feet on or behind the sideline, and throws the ball into the field of play while keeping both feet touching the ground during the throw.
- **Corner Kick:** A kick taken from the corner by the attacking team when the ball crosses the goal line, last touched by the defending team.
- **Build Out:** Moving the ball from your defensive area toward the opponent's goal using controlled passes and movement, rather than kicking it long.
- **Pull Turn:** A move where a player uses the bottom of their foot to pull the ball back toward themselves and turn in the opposite direction.
- **Inside of the Foot Turn:** A turn where the player uses the inside of their foot to pull or push the ball in the opposite direction while changing body position to shield it from defenders.
- **Outside of Foot Turn:** Quick changes of direction using the outside of the foot, turning at or near a right angle to evade a defender while maintaining control.
- **Step-Over Move:** A dribbling move where a player swings one foot around the front of the ball without touching it, faking a change of direction to deceive a defender.
- **"V" Move:** A dribbling move where the player pushes the ball diagonally with one foot, then quickly cuts it back in the opposite diagonal direction with the other foot, forming a "V" shape to evade a defender.
- **Sharp Cuts/90-Degree Cuts:** Quick changes of direction with the ball, turning at or near a right angle to evade a defender while maintaining control.
- **Rondos:** A passing drill where 3–4 players pass the ball while moving to an open cone to receive the next pass. There are more cones than players, so after passing, each player moves to a different open cone before receiving the next pass. This drill emphasizes movement after passing, awareness, and accurate passing.
- **2-3-1 Formation:** 2 defenders, 3 midfielders, 1 forward