



# How to Write a Training Session Plan

Prepared by the US Youth Soccer Coaching Education Department



# Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail

That old saying holds true for soccer coaches. To get the most out of your team's training session the coach must be prepared.

Thinking and writing are inextricably bound together – “think it and ink it.” Write out your training session plan!

Your scheduled training sessions are the opportunities for coaches and players to share knowledge. The final goal is to guide your players to improved performance in their matches.



# The Basics

1. First have a plan, a curriculum, for what you want to cover for the year.<sup>1</sup>
2. Second have a lesson plan for each training session.
3. Included in this document, you'll find guidance for preparing a training session.

## General Parameters

Do not plan too many activities in a single session

Stay focused on your topic

After each session, evaluate the activities by asking the following questions:

- Was the activity too easy, too hard or appropriate to the players' capabilities?
- Did things flow smoothly?
- Did the players learn?

“You win not by chance, but by preparation.” – Roger Maris

1. Read the US Youth Soccer Player Development Model, U.S. Soccer Best Practices and the U.S. Soccer Curriculum.



# Considerations

## Factors to Consider

- Capabilities of the players<sup>2</sup>
- Number of players
- Length of the training session
- Field space available
- Weather conditions
- Objective of each activity
- Approximate time per activity
- Weekly cycle

## Include on the Plan

- Topic
- Age group
- Training equipment
- Activity description
- Activity diagram
- Key coaching points
- Guided discovery

2. Including the Modified Laws of the Game for the Age Group



# Factors to Consider: Laws of the Game for the Age Group

In planning the training session be sure to account for the modified rules to the Laws of the Game for the age group.

During a match (scrimmage) in a session enforce the rules of play.

The coach is on the front line of teaching the rules to the players.



**Most importantly teach Fair Play!**

# Factors to Consider: Capabilities of the Players

In preparing your session plan know the age group characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

Also account for the current level of ability of the players.

Write a session plan that gives them an appropriately challenging training session.



3. Age group characteristics can be found in the US Youth Soccer Player Development Model and in U.S. Soccer's Best Practices.

## Factors to Consider: Number of Players in the Session

The number of players expected for the training session should always be a consideration in preparing the session plan.

A good coach though is flexible, as it will occasionally happen that not all of the players planned for will show up at the training session.

Be adaptable!

Consider how you can keep all of the players active in the training session.

For example if an activity calls for six players to be involved – possibly a 3v3 game. However, there are twelve players at the training session. Then set up two grids side by side. The same activity can take place in both grids. You go back and forth between the two grids coaching the players.



# Factors to Consider: Length of the Training Session

The length of the training session depends on the age group and the days of the week that you have games and training sessions (Also called your weekly cycle.<sup>4</sup>)

Here are some age group guidelines for the length of a training session:

- U6 = 45 minutes
- U8 = 45 to 60 minutes
- U10 = 60 to 75 minutes
- U12 = 75 minutes
- U14 = 75 to 90 minutes
- U16 = 90 minutes
- U19 = 90 to 120 minutes

4. Your weekly plan of training sessions and games.



## Factors to Consider: Field Space Available

The amount of space you will have for the training session will impact what can realistically be taught in the session.

- If only one half of a field is available, then a training session on pattern play in 11-a-side soccer is not possible for example.

Tailor your session plan to the training space open to you.

Once you know the training space available then consider for each training activity the size and shape of grids. Grids are sometimes needed to conduct an activity, but not always. Generally a grid is rectangular in shape – like a soccer field. Do though change the shape and dimensions of the grid based on the objective of the activity.



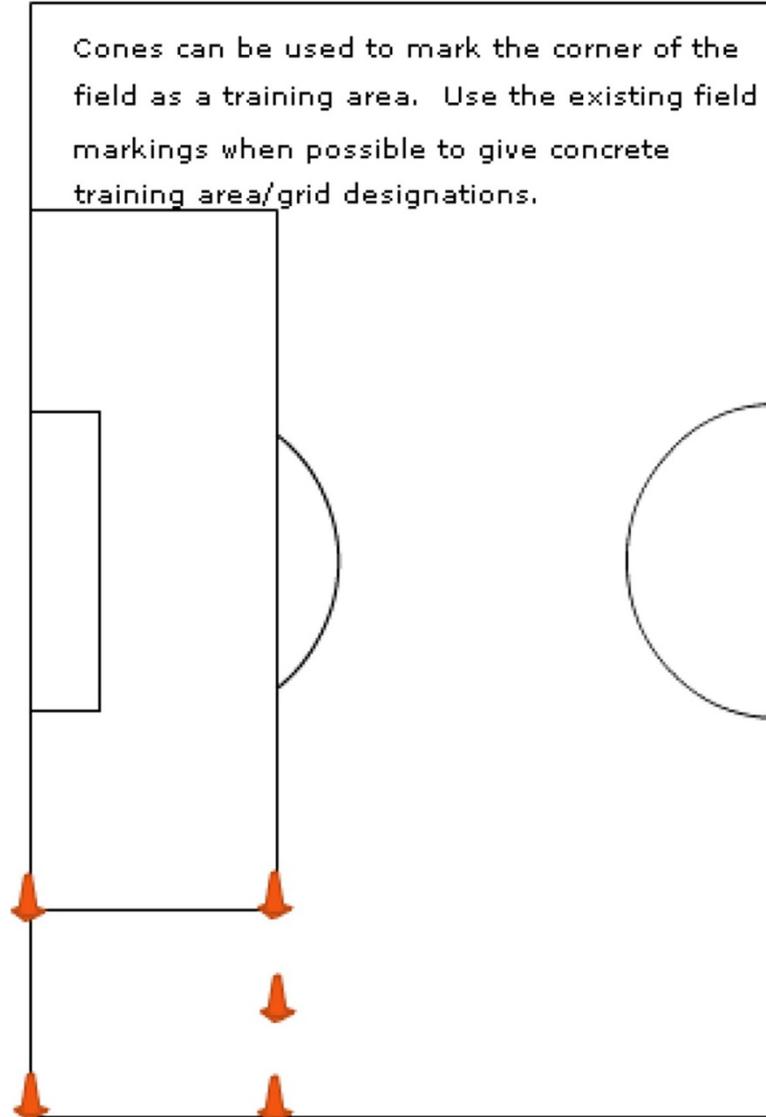
## Field Space Available

Grids can be set up in open space or use existing field markings to help distinguish the area.

Players 8-years-old and younger will need the grid to be marked off with multiple cones as the idea of imaginary lines between cones designating the corners is not fully comprehended.

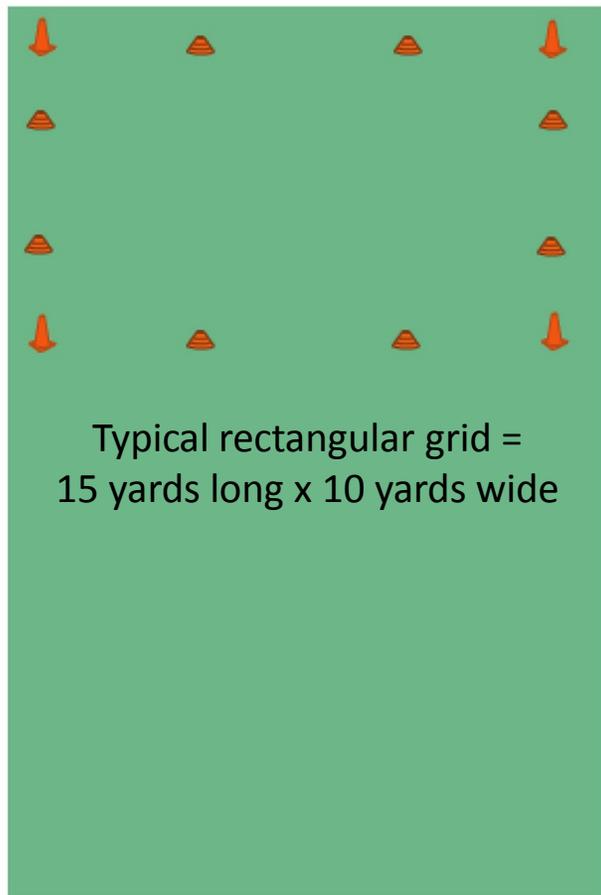
A grid is usually rectangular in shape so that it resembles a soccer field that is longer than it is wide. However, a grid could be wider than long – for example an activity on Width (Principle of Attack).

Dependent upon the activity a grid could be square, triangular or any other shape that helps the players understand what is being taught by their coach.

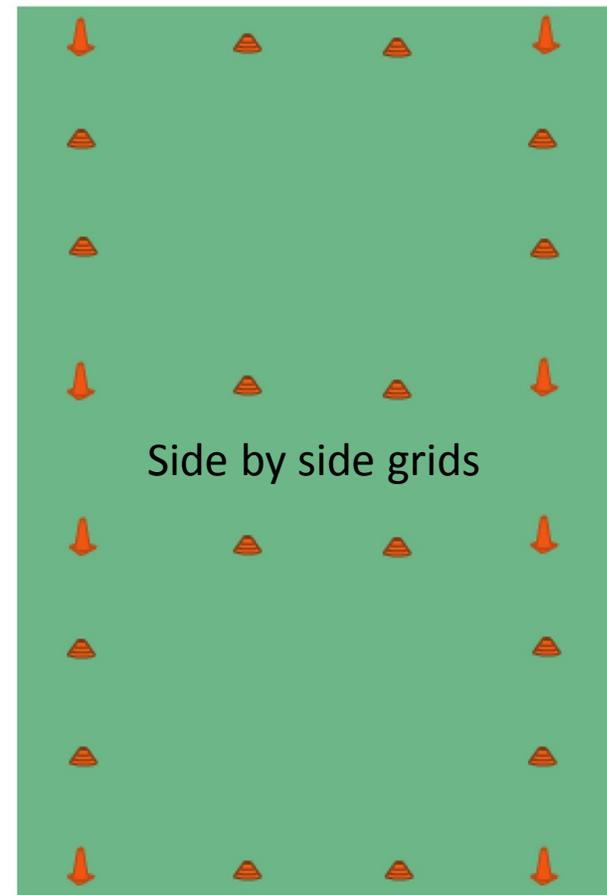


# Examples of How to Set up Grids

The coaching position is between the two grids. Stand sideways on to view both grids. You then have the option of stepping into one grid to coach those players. Ask the other players to come over and observe what you are coaching.

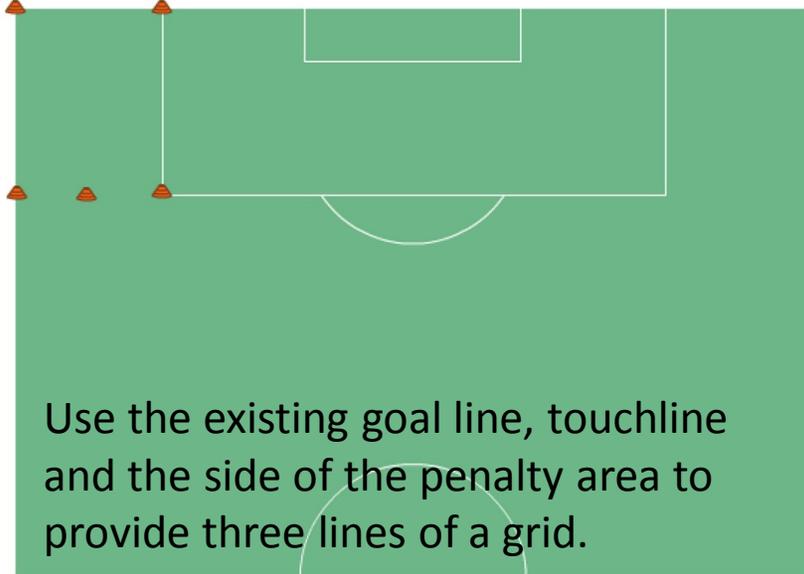


Grid  
Samples  
←→

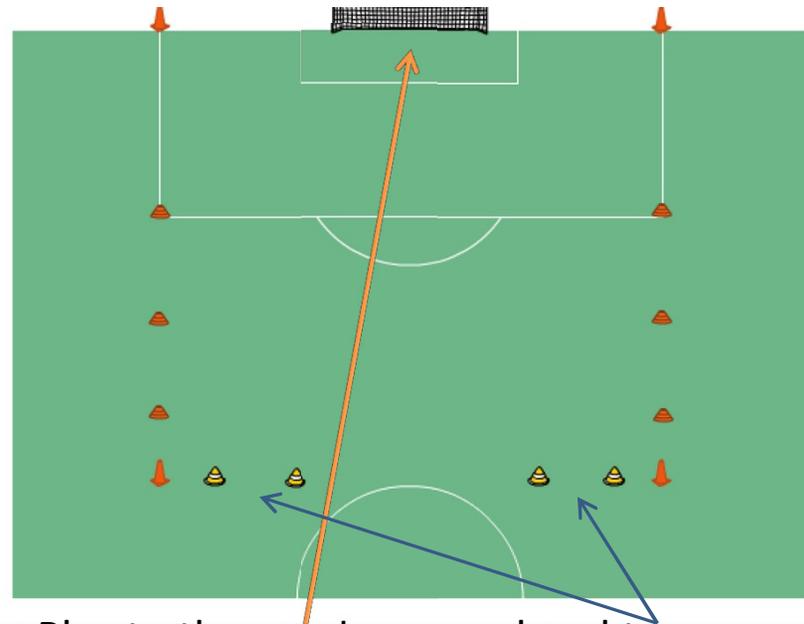


# Best Practices for Field Markings

Use field markings when possible.



Extend the penalty area twice its normal length, but use the same width.



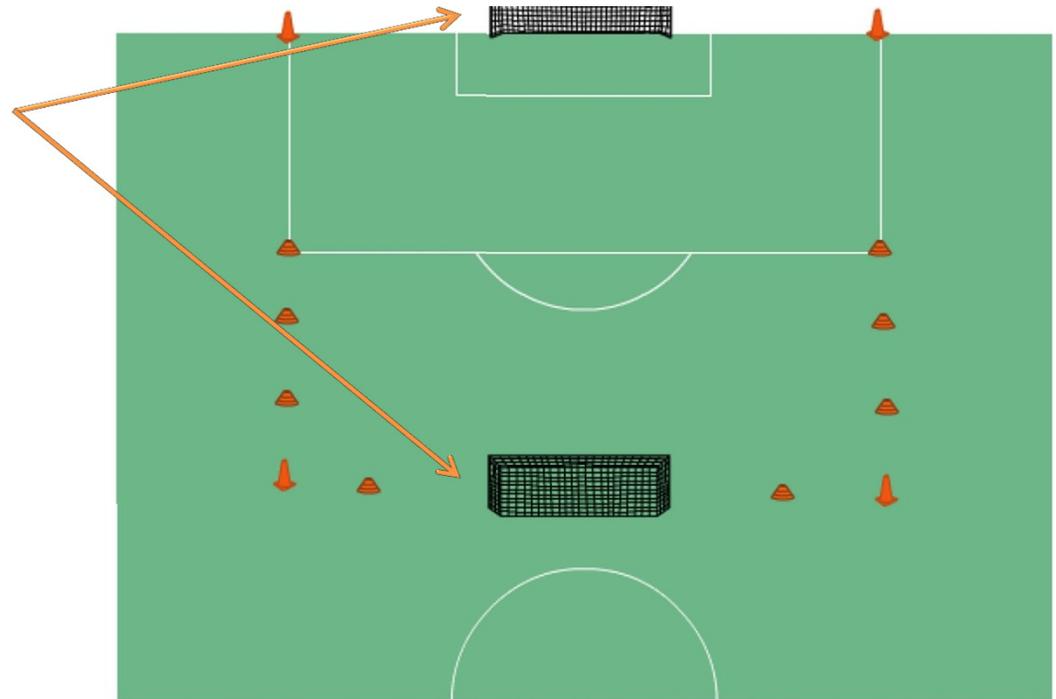
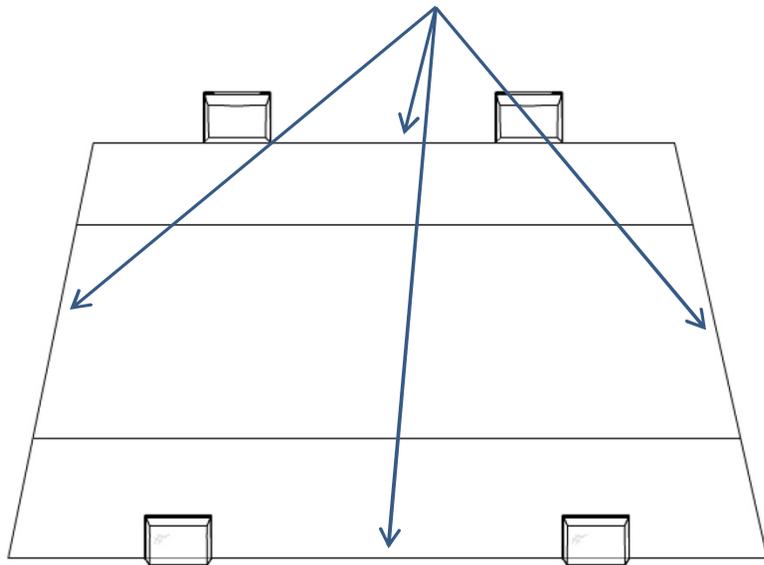
Grid samples

Play to the one large goal and two small counterattack goals.

# Set up with Goals

The small counterattack goals can be removed and then use two large goals.

Four goal games are another option. Place the all of the goals on the goal lines or one in the center of each boundary line.



# Weather Conditions



The weather conditions will affect your session plan.

If the temperatures are extremely hot or cold then a shorter training session is in order.

If the wind is blowing strongly that day then for example a training session on crossing is unlikely.

# Objective of Each Activity

The training session must have a topic. That topic could be anything within the four components of the game.

- Fitness
- Psychology
- Tactics
- Technique<sup>5</sup>

The teaching objective of each activity in the session plan must guide the players toward the topic of the training session.

You must understand the objective of each activity in order to design it properly.

- Then coach the players correctly within the activity.

5. Details on technique can be found in the US Youth Soccer Skills School Manual.



# Approximate Time per Activity

The amount of time spent on each activity in a training session is an approximation. While it is fine to note on your session plan the time allotted to each activity, do not restrict the activity to that time.

If an activity is going poorly then you may want to stop and move onto the next activity.

If an activity is going well then give it more time than what you had originally planned.



# Weekly Cycle

Coaches at every age group and level of play must have a weekly cycle planned for the team. That is the number of training sessions and matches per week.<sup>6</sup>

Consider when in the week are the matches and the training sessions.

Do not conduct a long or physically heavy training session with less than 48 hours recovery time until the next match.

A training session could be held the day before a match, but it should be relatively short and light in the workout load.



6. For more information on micro-cycles, macro-cycles and the training session to match ratio go to the US Youth Soccer Player Development Model and the U.S. Soccer Curriculum.



# Weekly Cycle – Recovery Session

The training session after a match, and especially after a tournament, festival or jamboree, must be a recovery session. A recovery session is done with light physical exercise to help the players recuperate from the physical stresses of match play.

Consider using:

- Non-contact fun games
  - Soccer marbles
  - Soccer golf
- Light exercise – with and without the ball
  - Juggling the ball
  - Slow jogging
  - Easy dynamic stretching
- Static stretching and massage for older players



**Demanding matches require a recovery training session**



# Include on the Plan

## **Topic**

The topic of a training session must first and foremost be age appropriate. What topics should be taught from U6 to U19 are available in the US Youth Soccer Player Development Model.<sup>7</sup>

A training session topic should also be based on the capabilities of the players.

A training session topic can further be discerned from match analysis.

## **Age Group**

Your session plan must be age specific.

Take into account the physical, mental and social/emotional stage of development for the age group.

Age group characteristics can be found in the US Youth Soccer Player Development Model.

7. Review also the Curriculum and Best Practices from U.S. Soccer.



# Session Plan Template

Author:

Topic:

Age:

Equipment:

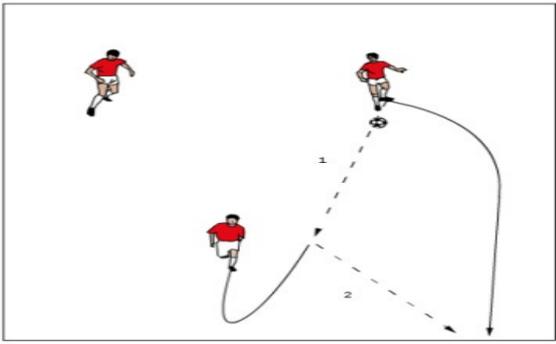
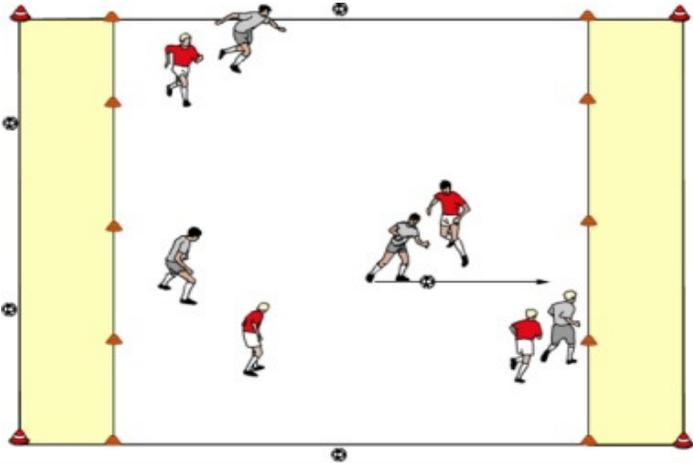
Activity Name	Description	Diagram	Coaching Points
1			
2			
3			
4			

(The following two slides are a sample training session)



# Session Plan

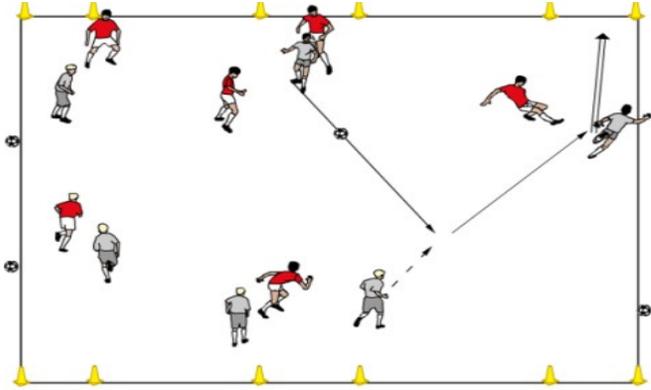
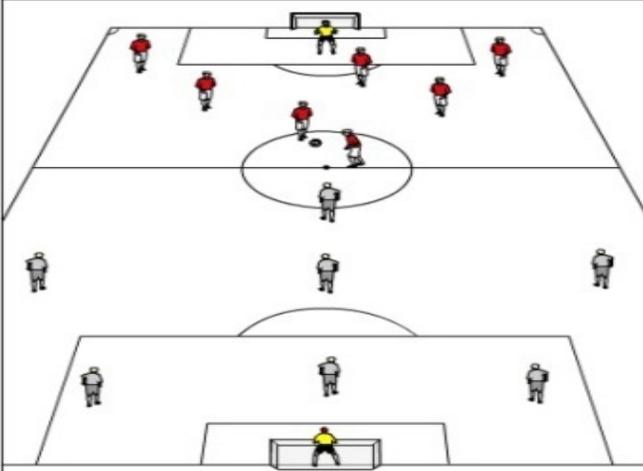
## U14 Midfield Attack

Activity	Description	Diagram	Coaching Points
<b>1 Technique - Skills (Warm-Up)</b>			
<p>In one half of the field all groups of players warm-up. Goalkeepers should warm-up separately.</p>	<p>Field players in groups of three in the shape a triangle. The high player makes a checking run and then plays a wall pass with the overlapping player. The third player stays for support. Turn around and execute again with the support player now as the high player.</p>		<p>What are the visual cues to make pass 1?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plant foot is set</li> <li>Hips rotate</li> </ul> <p>Where should pass 2 go?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diagonally forward about 1 yard ahead of the runner</li> </ul>
<b>2 Small-Sided Activity: End Zone</b>			
<p>Play 4v4 in a 40 x 20 to a 60 x 40 yard grid, dependent upon the players' abilities. Using disc cones mark off an end zone at each end of the grid. The zone can be 2-5 yards in width. Use a smaller zone for more proficient players.</p>	<p>Score by making a pass into the end zone. After a point is scored the opposing team collects the ball and attacks the opposite end zone.</p> <p>Variation: score only counts if a receiver collects the ball successfully in the end zone from an off-the-ball run.</p>		<p>Can we get a player high to make a checking run?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Triangular positioning</li> </ul> <p>When should the run to get open begin?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As the teammate in possession gets into a good passing lane.</li> </ul> <p>Where to place the forward pass?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To the forward's foot farthest from the opponent.</li> </ul>

**Equipment:** 8 balls, 2 large goals, 8 red pinnies, 8 grey pinnies, 12 tall cones, 4 large disc cones & 20 small disc cones.

# Session Plan

## U14 Midfield Attack

Activity	Description	Diagram	Coaching Points
<b>3 Expanded Small-Sided Activity: Six Goal Game</b>			
<p>Use the same grid as for the End Zone activity. Remove the end zones and use those cones or tall cones to make three small goals on each touchline.</p>	<p>Play 4v4 up to 6v6. Use possession passing to set up the chance to penetrate for a shot on goal at one of the three goals. If a goal is blocked then keep possession. The ball and players must move to create a passing lane to penetrate towards goal. Play for a set time or until a set number of goals.</p>		<p>When should you pass square or backwards?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When the opponents block a goal or passing lane.</li> </ul> <p>How do you know the chance to penetrate is on?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There's a gap between opponents or their group shape is flat.</li> </ul>
<b>4 Game: 8 vs. 8 Match</b>			
<p>Use an 80 x 55 yard grid with regulation goals at each end. Mark the corners with corner flag posts or tall cones.</p>	<p>Play for a set amount of time. Enforce the Laws of the Game. Have a few spare balls to the outside of each goal.</p>		<p>Make few if any coaching comments now. Let them play and observe their attacking decisions.</p> <p>Praise their efforts at recognizing to play possession or penetration.</p>

Cool-Down: Rehydrate, light movement, static stretching.



# Training Equipment

The equipment used in a training session ranges from one ball and a field or gym to a vast array of goals, cones, training bibs, coaching sticks, hurdles, speed ladders, etc.

Most youth soccer coaches have for training what they can keep in their car. So a string of cones and bag of training bibs is the extent of it for many coaches. Use at least two colors of cones to distinguish goals from boundary lines and at least two different colors of the training bibs.



# Training Equipment

If you are fortunate to be at a club with a variety of training equipment available then put it to good use.

No matter what your situation is, be sure that every player has a ball.

Every player must have shin guards and a water bottle.



You must have a first aid kit, a ball pump and your own water bottle.

At the top of your session plan write out the equipment that you'll need for that training session. Use only the equipment you'll need to conduct a productive training session. Manage the equipment throughout the training session.

# Activity Description

On the session plan briefly write out the rules of the activity and the equipment needed.

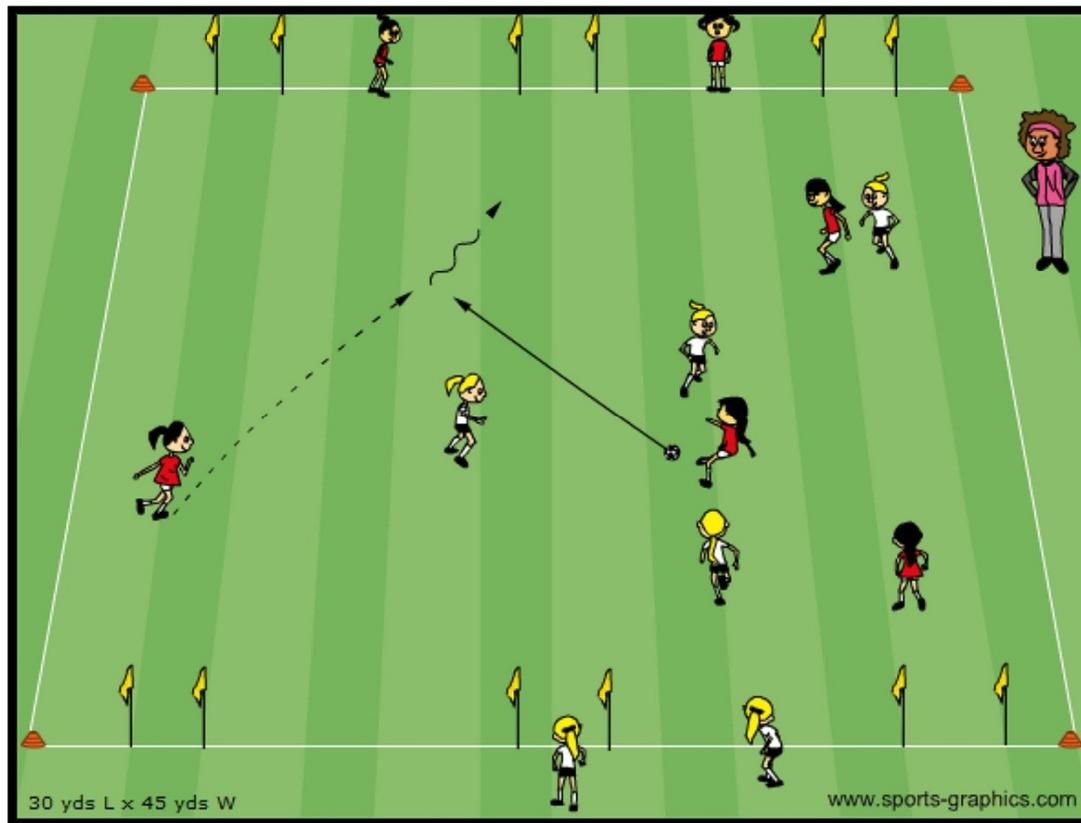
For example:

- Six-Goal Game
- 4 vs. 4 + 2 + 2
  - Use the plus two target players on your team for passing combinations
  - Score at any of the three goals
    - Variation: cannot score at the same goal consecutively
- One ball (spares with the coach)
- Four cones
- 12 corner flags
- Six white pinnies | Six red pinnies (pinnies must be of contrasting colors)



# Activity Diagram

For each activity draw a simple diagram that shows the dimensions and shape of the playing area, the location of goals (if any), location of cones (if any), placement of corner flags or other markers (if any).



# Key Coaching Points

For each activity in the session plan, note the key coaching points that you'll emphasize during the activity.

For example in the Six-Goal Game:

- Execute the Principles of Attack
  - Immediately upon gaining possession look for a shot at one of the 3 goals you are attacking
  - If no shot is possible then look for your best passing option for penetration or possession
  - If there's no passing option, then dribble to beat your immediate opponent or to possess the ball
  - Off-the-ball attackers look to support your teammate in possession or to run to create space for yourself or your teammate with the ball



# Guided Discovery

In the column for key coaching points also write out one guided discovery question for each activity.

The question must be on the main teaching objective of the activity. So for the six goal game the question will be about width.

- “How do you open up space between and behind the defenders to give you a chance to go at any of your three goals?”

A question could be asked at the beginning of the activity, during the flow of play, at a natural stoppage of the activity, such as the ball out of bounds or when you have paused (freeze) the activity.

Players need to solve soccer challenges, so between giving too much information and too little, lean toward the too little side – too many coaches talk too much.

The overall objective of guided discovery questions is to have the players solve the soccer challenge given to them by their coach in the training activity. Guided discovery will aid the players in reading the game, thus becoming “anticipation players”.<sup>8</sup>

With older players, let them know what you will cover that day. Ask for their best effort, which increases the odds of a great session.

8. “Anticipation players” see the game in a way that they are always one step ahead (mentally & physically) in the match.



# Reference Materials

**US Youth Soccer** (<http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/>)

**Player Development Model** ([http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/Recommended\\_Reading/](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/Recommended_Reading/))

**Skills School Manual (Technical Manual)**

([http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/Recommended\\_Reading/](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/Recommended_Reading/))

**Modified Laws of the Game for the Age Group**

(<http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/RulesSmallGames/>)

## U.S. Soccer

**Best Practices** (<http://www.ussoccer.com/Coaches/Resources.aspx>)

**Curriculum** (<http://www.ussoccer.com/Coaches/Coaching-Education/Coaching-Home.aspx>)



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