

Mass Youth Soccer 8v8 Specialty Clinic

As each year passes we gain a better understanding of the game of soccer. Every year that passes, we understand child development more as well. It is because of this growing knowledge that soccer and child development professionals worldwide promote small-sided games for children. United States Youth Soccer promotes that we play 8v8 with U12 players. In fact, not only does the National Director of Coaching promote this, but also every men's and women's national team coach, and every state director of coaching in our country does. Not only do the soccer leaders of our country promote this, but the soccer federations of France, England, Holland, Australia, Germany, Brazil, Canada and many more do as well. Virtually every country around the world is recognizing that small-sided games are better for children for a variety of reasons. The first reason is that children get to play more and have more fun. If that singular reason does not stand on its own to convince you that small-sided games are best for children, these other reasons will provide further rationale: enjoyment, technical development, developmentally appropriate, and builds athletic mentality. In regards to coaching considerations, it allows for more individual coaching, helps build relationships, and is easier to shape and paint pictures on the field of play.

Development at U12

This age group, where the 8v8 system is played, is often referred to as the dawn of tactics. Typically players of this age begin to understand the basic tactical situations of the game and are more aware of movement off the ball and the reasons for tactical choices. Problem-solving becomes systematic and these players tend to learn quickly. Children of this age typically are beginning to develop abstract awareness, so they can understand coaches when we talk about space and runs off of the ball. However, just because they understand these basic tactical concepts does not mean we should focus on these concepts entirely. Players are still developing technically at this age, especially as they go through growth spurts and awkward phases. Successful coaches make successful players by maintaining a balance between their individual players' tactical, technical, physical and psychological development.

Support (Width and Depth)

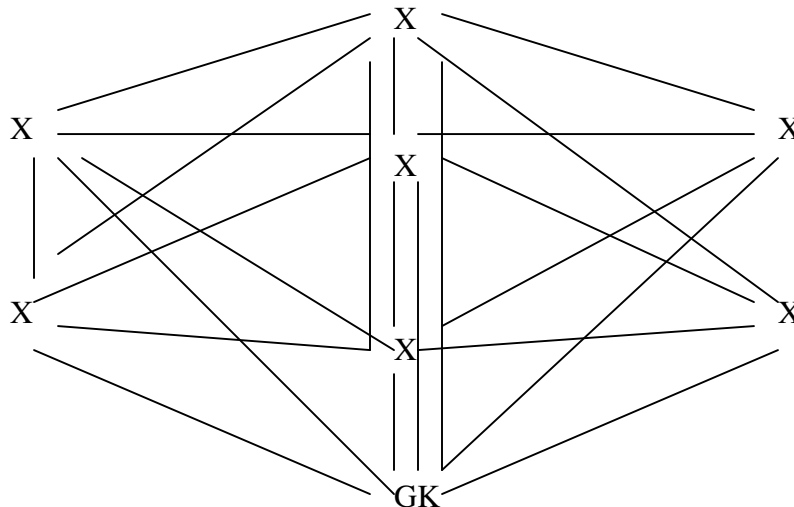
Support on and off the ball is a basic foundation premise covered in all systems of play. Regardless as to whether we are playing 3v3 or 11v11, movement on and off the ball should be the most important aspect for all players to learn. When we talk about support, we are also thinking in terms of width and depth. In an 8v8 system, just as in an 11v11 system, there are still 3 lines of support; forwards, midfielders and defenders. This allows for natural support angles for all players. We need to ask ourselves and our players about these support angles (i.e. when the forwards have the ball, where are the midfielders and defenders, etc?)

Not only are we looking at width and depth, but also angles of support. When discussing both attack and defense we have 1st, 2nd, and 3rd players (attackers and defenders) with specific roles. When we add a fourth player, making a diamond shape rather than a triangle, thus giving width on both sides of the field and depth, on both ends of the field the fourth player can have a flexible role. As you will see later, many of the activities we provided are for smaller numbered games rather than a full 8v8. The reasoning behind this is because, if players can understand their roles on and off the ball, what support means and where they should be when, then they should be able to play in different positions on the field, knowing when and how support occurs. No player is only a defender, only a forward, or only a left outside midfielder and all should know principles of support and depth. It is our job as coaches to enable our players to be able to play in

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different positions with the basic ideas of support play. Key concepts are keeping the field wide, left and right, and stretching the field high offensively with support behind defensively; all the way back to the goalkeeper. Again, this makes a diamond shape that not only occurs with a forward, two outside midfielders and a central back, but in places all over the field. Below are some examples of diamonds in an 8v8 formation of a 3-3-1.

NATURAL SUPPORT ANGLES IN A 3-3-1 FORMATION



Basic Defending Tactics

Defending is often the most ignored part of the game and yet is the area in which we can improve performance most quickly. Just as attacking is a skill, proper defending is as well. Although we often fall into the trap of thinking our defenders should “just work harder” it is not typically the case that effort is failing our players. More regularly they struggle defensively because they do not know how to defend appropriately.

Please understand it is important to teach your players how to defend 1 vs. 1 before you do anything else. It is recommended that you then build up your numbers from that point so players can learn the challenges of the defensive game at a pace that will allow them to fully understand these concepts. If we jump right in and ask our players to understand the roles of all defenders at once, they will be overwhelmed and both your team and individual defense will suffer.

Try not to stray to other topics when teaching defense. Keep the practice focused on defensive play. A basic concept of team defense is that you want your team to try to make the field as compact as possible when on defense. Before you can discuss this however, you need to talk about the roles of the individual defenders. If you follow these main coaching points, you will find your players will improve their defensive play:

- Defenders need to have the correct stance – be on their toes, with knees bent, one foot forward, one back, trying to anticipate when to close down their opponent
- 1st defender needs to bend their run to “take away” (block the path to) the goal, or force the ball in the direction of the second defender

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- The 1st defender then needs to “approach fast, arrive slow”
- 1st defender orders of priority – a) try to win ball off first touch of opponent, b) delay progress of opponent by jockeying the player with the ball, and try to force them out of play or in the direction of the 2nd defender
- Once opponent goes where the defender wants them to go, they should tackle with front foot, not back foot
- 1st defender says “I have ball” and 2nd defender says “push left/right”
- Make sure that the 1st defender gets the head of the 1st attacker down by getting close (within arms length) to the 1st attacker ASAP
- 2nd defender needs to be at approximately a 30 degree backward angle to the first defender on the side to which the 1st defender is showing the ball towards
- 2nd defender tells 1st defender which way to push attacker and gets ready to step towards the 2nd attacker if the ball is passed to her
- The defenders’ roles will sometimes reverse when the ball is passed and the previous 1st defender needs to be ready to drop off and cover (now serving as 2nd defender)
- 3rd and 4th defenders serve as communicators and players who balance the field in order that your team does not get beat on “the back side”
- It is important that you do not play your 3rd and 4th defenders too deep as that will allow the offense more space and leads to more offensive success

There is a lot of information in these bullets and it will take months if not years to train your players to do all these things well. Please be patient and at the U10 level, try to make sure all your players understand the roles of the first and second defender. By the time players leave the U12 age group they should thoroughly understand the role of the third defender as well. The fourth defender role is very similar to that of the third defender.

If your team looks to recover behind the ball immediately after a loss of possession, these defensive roles will take form quickly. However, our teams need to recover before these roles even become appropriate. If we have numbers down on defense all the time, we can only hope for the best before the bough breaks.

Once we have taught our team to recover and to slow down the other team’s attack as quickly as we can, our team can organize themselves to play strong team defense. As mentioned before, strong defensive teams typically keep the field compact (they do not let the offensive team spread out and use the entire field) in order to force the offense to play into tight spaces, which often results in giveaways. This is made quite easy if the first and second defenders are doing their jobs because the defense is then dictating what spaces the offense can play the ball into. This makes the game predictable for the rest of the defense and allows them to intercept passes much easier.

Basic Attacking Tactics

We all love to see games in which our teams score multiple goals and demonstrate creative play. It is easy to recognize our appreciation of effective attacking play, however it is not so easy to teach. Unlike defense, in which strength comes from organization and structure, strong attacking play is birthed from creativity and dynamic change. Nevertheless, there are some basics we can

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teach our team to improve our chances of seeing quality attacking play. There are a number of basic attacking concepts that are fundamental in teaching attack:

Support

One of the critical tactical elements of soccer is numerical advantage. If your team consistently has more players near the ball (and in proper support positions) than your opponent, you should be able to maintain possession.

Penetration

Penetration is the act of playing the ball behind defenders. Of course, having the ball behind the defense means you are in a very dangerous position with the ball. Penetration can be achieved by dribbling, passing or shooting.

Width

When on offense, teams should look to create width in the attack in order to spread out the defense as much possible and create holes in the defense.

Depth

For the same reason we look to create width, we also hope to stretch a defense out from top to bottom.

Creativity

Attacking teams need to avoid being predictable. If our point of attack and method of attack is constantly changing it is extremely difficult for a defensive team to anticipate and play well-organized defense.

These fundamental principles are imperative if trying to maximize offensive opportunities. However, they are general attacking concepts and not specific coaching points. Just as we said we need to teach players the fundamental roles of the first and second defender before teaching team defense, we need to teach the roles of the first and second attacker before teaching team attacking tactics. Here are some useful coaching points:

- The 1st attacker is the player with the ball at their feet
- The 1st attacker usually looks to dribble into open space
- When taking on a defender, an attacker should dribble at speed at the defender
- The 2nd attacker should make a run in support of the 1st attacker
- This could be a straight run, a bent run, an overlapping run, a run in order to execute a take-over, a run to set up a wall pass, or many other options
- 2nd attackers should be allowed to be creative and explore various runs to see what works in various situations
- The 1st and 2nd attackers need to communicate either verbally or nonverbally
- The 3rd attacker is trying to make a run to unbalance or disorganize the defense

These straightforward coaching points do not need to be made more intricate or elaborate for our players. We need to make the game simple for our players offensively and allow them the freedom to see what works and does not work. It is reasonable to expect your U10 players to

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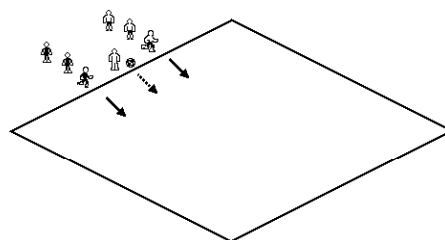
understand the roles of the first and second attacker and also reasonable for U12 players to thoroughly understand the role of the third attacker.

If your players know these roles, your attacking play will flow much more smoothly. In contrast to when playing defense, we will have more success offensively if we spread the field both wide and long to create gaps in the defense. We also need to recognize if the defense is not recovering quickly and try to attack with pace in order to take advantage of having a numbers up situation. As stated earlier, if we can get our players with the ball at their feet behind the defense, good things usually happen.

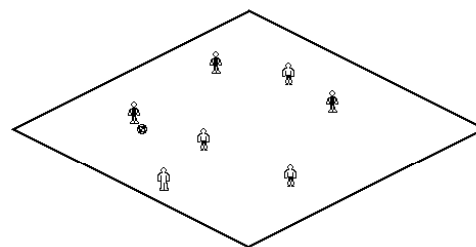
Activities:

1) Channel Game---2v2 in a 25x15 grid. Each pair is trying to dribble to the opposite end line. There is a vertical line down the middle of the grid, and the two defenders cannot cross that line. The attackers can cross that line, but cannot have two players on one side for more than a split second. If defender wins ball, they counter to other end line.

2) Force em' back---In a 15 x 10 grid-all players are on one of the 10 yard endlines. Two players are next to each other with server in between them with the balls. Server plays ball into area and players play 1 v 1 with each attacking the endline they left. Defender works on getting attackers head down, forcing away from endline and preventing turn (can simply get ball of attackers foot or kick out of bounds. Rotate positions. *Variation:* Defender now tries to win ball and cross opposite endline. *Note:* rotate through players so all players are serving at some time



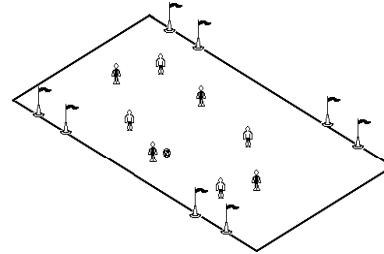
3) 3 v 3 + 1 keepaway---Teams keep ball away from each other with the +1 player being a neutral player that plays with the team in possession of the ball. This always provides one extra attacker and should allow the team in possession to always keep possession if in proper support angles. Play 6 passes equals a goal. Can also do this with 2 v 2 +1.



4) 3v3 to a line---3 defend one end line and 3 defend opposite end line. Try to score by dribbling across opposing end line. Focus on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. Pressure on ball, cover behind, and balance to pick up any other players and/or passes coming through.

5) 4 v 3 (-1)---Two teams are playing 4 v 4 to two goals on each end line. The attacking team is playing with four players, but the defending team must drop one player back to the end line while under attack. This prevents the defending team from playing man to man and must solve the problem with zonal play. When the defense wins the ball they must first play the ball back to their teammate on the end line while the other team removes a player from the field.

6) 4v4 To Four Small Goals---The 1st attacker (ball), 2nd and 3rd attackers (support/ width and/or depth) and a 4th attacker



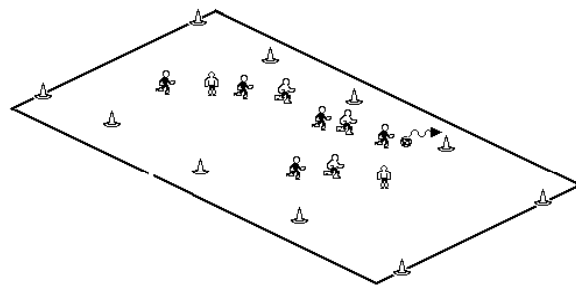
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(target/depth) who gives length or width to the attack. The attacking shape is now a diamond. This game can be played to lines, goals with keepers, four square or targets.

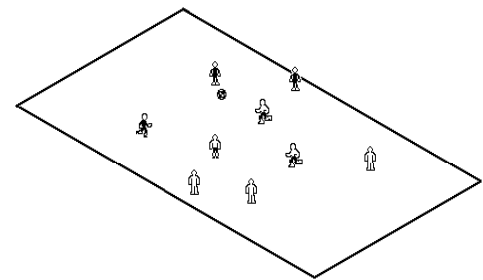
7) 4 v 4 + GK's---A typical three goal game that emphasizes pressure, cover and balance. The activity includes goalkeepers who play behind the goals. If the 'keeper can play the ball before it passes them, then the goal is negated. When the ball is in the 'keeper's hands they can either play the ball to their team or volley it at the opposition's goal. It may be necessary to help the attack see the opportunities to switch the play in order to force the defense to balance the field.

8) 4v4+4 to goal---The game is 4 v 4, with 4 "plus" players, who play only for the offensive team. Pitch would be approximately 30x35 yards. Players concentrate on using correct technique, and receiving side-on, facing where they wish to play. May restrict the players to 2/3 touch to force quicker decisions, and better body position before the ball arrives. Works on angles of support as well.

9) Endzone Dribbling Game---Teams comprised of 4-6 players depending on numbers and space. To score you must dribble into the opponent's endzone while under control (created with discs). Passing in will not count. Stress recognizing opportunities and bursting into space while under control of ball.

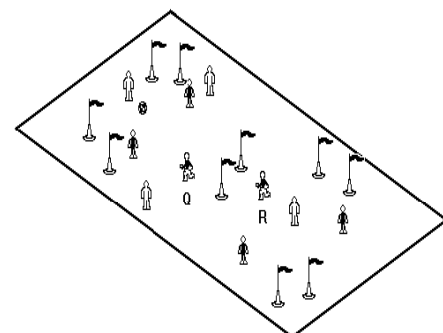


10) 2v2+2 or 3v3+3---Three distinct teams in colors (red, green, white), one team starts as defenders and the other 2 teams play together to keep the ball away from the defense (so it is actually 4v2 or 6v3). When the ball is taken by the defense, the color (two/three players) they stole it from becomes the new defenders. Players must pay close attention to who the defenders are, to score the teams in possession must pass the ball into an end zone (one on each end of the field)—the one in the opposite half of the side they won the ball in.



11) 2v2 with 2+2---In a grid 15x15 yards, each team has two players in the grid and two on the outside, on opposite sides from each other. The teams score by either making six passes (with teammate inside the grid or support players) or by executing a 1-2 (wall pass) with a support player. After 3 minutes switch inside and outside players.

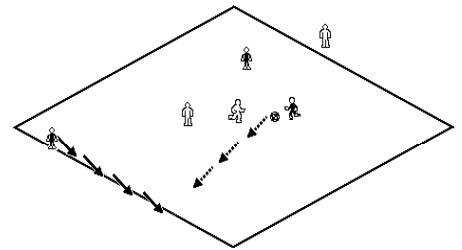
12) 5 Goal Game---4v4+2 in 35x40 yard grid. Five 2-yard goals are spread out throughout the grid. The plus 2 players are always on the attacking team. The teams score by passing through any of the goals to a teammate. Must receive with inside of foot, then outside, weak foot inside/outside are different expectations that can be put on the players. First team to 10 points wins. Players need to be



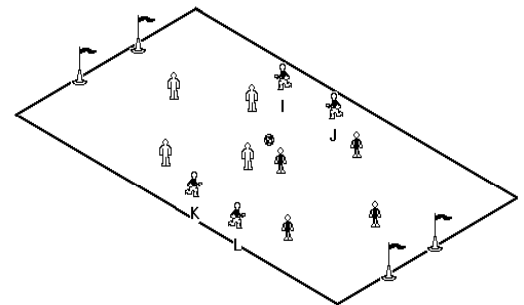
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able to see where the open goals are, and receive with a “picture” of what is around them. With this in mind, if the players are advanced enough, the player receiving through the goal must play 1 touch. Coach could require receiving player to perform a feint before touching ball.

13) 2v2+2---In a 20x20 yard grid, two teams look to play to a target player on opposite sides of the grid. If they play to the target and receive the ball back, they look to switch directions and play to the other target player. If they just play to one target it counts as 1 point. If they play to two consecutive targets without losing possession it counts as 3 points. Target players must constantly move along their line to show for the ball. Every three minutes rotate the players.



14) Bread and Butter---Typical 4 vs. 4 but with an additional 4 players who stand on outside of field and can be used by either team as outlets (with only 2 touches). If a team gets scored upon, they become the team on the outside and the outside team plays on the field. Use approximately a 20x25 yard area. Stress correct technique, receiving sideways on, and facing where they wish to play. May restrict the players to 2/3 touch to force quicker decisions, and better body position before the ball arrives. Keep score and make the game competitive.



15) 6v6 team touch---Play a normal 6v6 game except for the fact that every player on a team must touch the ball before their team can score. This forces players to show for the ball, to communicate, and to spread out the field. Version 2: If players are advanced, you can enforce a 3 or 2 touch limit on players.

16) 8v8 dual sided goal---Using a coerver goal or setting up a goal in which the goalie must protect both sides of the goal, play 8 against 8. Both teams can score from either side of the goal. If a goalie makes a save she just punts the ball out. Teams must learn to change the point of attack and must give support to each other and communicate constantly. This will help teach teams to make the field big when on offense and to try to compact the field on defense.

Formation Options

There are many different ways to set your team up on the field of play. But the questions many people ask are: what really are the differences between them, and if we want to teach the players the game, how can we do that with fewer players? Simple, we adjust the formations in 8v8 to match the formations in an 11v11 game. By this simple change, we still have the game of soccer and all it entails, physically, technically, tactically and mentally, just on a smaller field and one which is appropriate for the particular age level at a level that is commensurate with their mental and physical abilities.

So, how do we adjust the formation? We take one player away from each line in an 11v11 set-up, except for the goalkeeper. Below you will see some of the more common 11v11 formations and their adjustments to 8v8.

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11v11 Formation

GK-4-4-2 - - -
GK-4-3-3 - - -
GK-3-4-3 - - -
GK-3-5-2 - - -

8v8 Formation

GK-3-3-1
GK-3-2-2
GK-2-3-2
GK-2-4-1

What Each Formation Teaches:

3-3-1

Offensively

*attack the width and move forward as a team

*crosses and finishing from crosses

*switch the point of attack

*forwards should be able to play well with their back to goal

*maintain team balance in width and depth (should be easy from this formation)

*midfielders need to support forward quickly

Defensively

*defend as a team in a tight unit and clarifies roles of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd defenders

*more #'s behind the ball and important to transition forward quickly when ball is won to help out in the attacking 1/3

*forwards try to force opposing team to build up one side (close down other side)

3-2-2

Offensively

*creates 1v1's with forwards in the attacking 1/3

*combo play between mids and forwards

*allows for outside backs to get involved in attack through overlapping runs

Defensively

*forwards drop behind ball and force to one side

*attackers may need to help mid in defense

2-3-2

Offensively

*strength is in the middle (attacking through central or switching point of the attack)

*forwards create 1v1's in the attacking 1/3

Defensively

*fast backs who must work together

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*forwards force ball to middle where the #'s are

*mids may need to serve as third defender

2-4-1

Offensively

*strength in the middle of field

*forwards should be able to play with back to goal and good distribution

*midfielders are able to attack the flanks (width) or centrally

*mids must support forward quickly

Defensively

*fast backs who must work together

*forwards force ball to middle where the #'s are

*mids serve as third defender