

Practicing Techniques

The key to improvement is repetition: lots of ball contacts, events, situations – to build muscle memory.

Karl Dewazian says: "If it happens in the game, practice it; if it doesn't happen in the game, don't practice it."

Frans Hoek: "The distance between practice and the game should be as small as possible."

And, "We practice to play better in the game, not in the practice."

The beauty of small sided games:

- Smaller numbers and smaller fields lead to more contacts. The ball is closer, situations are more frequent, the visual environment is more simple, and chances to score are constant.

Coaches should collect and refine technical points:

For example, for an inside of the foot pass –

- Kicking foot turned right across the line of the pass.
- Toes high, heel down, knee of the kicking leg slightly bent,.
- Ankle tightened.
- Eyes on the ball, head steady.
- Get 'up on' – over the ball.
- Swing your kicking foot freely from the hip, striking the ball just over the mid-line.
- Strike the ball with the part of your foot near your ankle – not up by your toes.
- Follow through low and toward the target. That motion can be the first step of your running.

We can also bring in technical analogies from other sports that we know: basketball, hockey, tennis, lacrosse.

Some Objectives over the Years

U6

As many ball touches as possible: guiding the ball, stopping it, turning it.

Learning how it rolls.

Kicking it straight.

Gaining balance.

U8

Guiding and moving and stopping the ball with the insides and the outsides and the bottoms of the feet.

Beginning to understand how to protect the ball.

Controlling rolling balls with the insides and outsides of both feet.

Accurate kicks (passes?) or shots of 10 to 15 yards.

U10

Guiding and turning the ball with the insides and outsides and bottoms of the feet.

Learning several ways to turn: cutting the ball back, using the sole of the foot, pulling the ball back behind the standing leg.

Changes of speed and direction with the ball, moves to beat an opponent.

Accurate ground passes over 15 to 20 yards with the insides of the feet and the laces.

Receiving balls while moving and setting up the next action (dribble, pass, or shot) with a good 'first touch'.

Protecting the ball – shielding – effectively.

Shooting with the insides of the feet and the laces and keeping the ball inside the frame of the goal.

Learning to tackle and to use the shoulders.

Learning the fundamentals of heading – but not practicing much.

U12

Turning cleverly and quickly.

Refining moves to beat defenders: changing speed and direction and being deceptive.

Shielding well and using the shoulders – and the whole body – to win and keep the ball.

Accurate ground passes and air balls over 20 yards; learning to chip and to use the outsides of the feet to pass.

Playing a good first touch consistently after receiving a ground ball.

Receiving and shooting air balls, shooting balls off the dribble inside the near and far posts.

Tackling well.

Heading well up and down.

U14

Stable, fluid receiving of ground and air balls.

Sharp, quick turns; a few dependable moves to beat defenders; strong and stable shielding techniques.

Solid tackling.

Heading up and down after jumping.

Passing accurately over 20 yards on the ground, over 25 yards in the air.

Shooting is consistently on target, aimed just inside the posts, off the dribble, from ground passes, and from flighted crosses.

Thanks for all that you do for the kids and the beautiful game.

Dean Conway