

Under 9s – under 13s

Quick! Win the ball!

This is a quick and fun game that will get your players scrambling to reach the ball first before controlling it and taking a shot.

Objective:

To encourage your players to be first to the ball, and to improve decision making and shooting ability.

Set up:

Create a 40ms by 30ms playing area with a 15ms-wide goal at both ends. Divide your players into two teams. Goalkeepers are optional.

How to play:

You serve a high ball into the playing area and the two teams compete to get to the ball first. Whichever team gets the ball can score in either goal.

The small playing area and big goals make it easy to score. You should encourage players to get to the ball first and fire off a quick shot.

Coaching notes:

- If you want your players to win more high balls, make it a condition of the game that if the ball hits the ground from the serve, it is out of play and the game restarts with another high ball.
- Encourage risk taking (quick shots) and good finishing (follow up shots).
- The first team to 5 or 10 goals wins the game.

Side Supports!

This game encourages your players to pass the ball out wide and look to receive return passes from wide players. It also builds on other skills such as keeping possession and using vocal communication.

Objective:

To improve possession and to use the full width of the pitch.

Set up:

Use a 60ms by 40ms playing area with 4m wide goals on the end lines. Divide your squad into three equally matched teams, wearing bibs.

How to play:

Two teams play 'normal' football. The third team are side supports. They are spread along both side lines and can receive passes from both teams on the pitch. When they do, they cannot be tackled and must pass back to the team that passed to them. They should move up and down the line, calling for the ball if the player in possession is running out of options.

You can encourage give and go's (wall passes) by restricting the side supports to one touch. Switch the teams around regularly or play 'one goal, winner stays on'.

Progression:

- Side support players must return passes in less than four seconds.
- Restrict the players on the pitch to two or three touches.
- Goals only count if the move includes a pass to a side support player.

Split the defenders

This is a simple but effective game that encourages your attacking players to play through balls in tight situations. It also allows your defensive players to work as a partnership.

Objective:

To improve passing and decision making.

Number of players: 6 per game.

Set up:

This game is ideally played by three teams of two. Place three teams in an 12m by 12m grid. You will need one grid for every six players and a ball for each grid.

How to play:

Two teams (the attackers) are spread around each side of the outside of the grid. They play keep away while the third team (the defenders) try to intercept the ball from inside the grid. An attacking team gets a point if they can split the defenders by passing the ball between them.

If the ball is intercepted by the defenders before they are split by a through ball, the attacking team that made the mistake swap over and become the new defenders.

Progression:

- Make the game competitive. Which team of attackers can split the defense most in five minutes?
- As your players get used to the game, limit the attackers to two or three touches.
- Enlarge the grid and put the attackers inside with the defenders.

Squeeze!

Objective:

This is a small-sided game that encourages your players to push up and attack as a team. The exercise is designed to:

- Improve players' concentration levels.
- Improve the forwards' ability to keep the ball until support arrives.
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Set up:

Play on a small-sided football pitch or create a 40m by 25m playing area with flat cones. Place a goal at each end of the pitch and mark out a centre line.

How to play:

Play normal football with the condition that any goal scored only counts if all the attacking team's players are in the opposition half when the ball crosses the line.

Coaching points:

- You can choose whether or not to require the goalkeeper to be in the opposition half. It encourages my goalkeepers to play as sweeper when their team is attacking, a tactic that works well in matches.
- Make the game competitive by playing to a set number of goals, or for a specified time.
- Make the game more challenging for older players by adding a two- or three-touch condition.

The box game

Objective:

To improve passing, vision, movement off the ball, communication and transition from defence to attack.

Number of players: Whole squad divided into two teams of four or five (if you have more than ten players, make four teams and play two games).

Set up:

Create a 40x30 playing area with flat cones. Mark out a five metre square box at each end.

How to play:

One player from each team (the target player) goes into an end box. The rest of the players try to get a pass to their target player. To score a point, the target player must one-touch the ball back to one of their teammates.

Progression:

When a point is scored, both target players sprint to the other box and their team attacks that end.

Hit the target

Objective:

To improve ball control, passing, support play and communication.

Number of players: Whole team.

Equipment:

Flat cones to mark the playing area, one football.

Set up:

Mark out a 40x30m grid with a 2x3m grid in the centre of the larger grid. Divide your squad into two teams.

How to play:

Team A puts a player in the small centre grid. They score a goal every time they can play the ball into the centre grid player and back out again to a Team A teammate (ground passes, volleys, headers all count as goals if successfully played back out to a Team A player). Team B tries to keep Team A from scoring. Team B scores a goal if it completes five consecutive passes. Team A tries to disrupt Team B and intercept passes. Reverse the teams regularly.

Progressions:

If your players find this game difficult, award team A a goal for simply getting a

pass into the centre grid player (who now doesn't need to return it to a teammate) and team B get a goal for three consecutive passes. If your players find the game easy, make the space smaller to put more pressure on the ball carrier and make them take quicker decisions.

Four-goal game.

Objective:

To improve decision making, transition and high pressure defence.

Set up:

Play this game on a normal, 40x20m, small-sided football pitch. Place four small goals about 5m in from each corner. Divide your squad into two small teams with no goalkeepers.

Coaching note:

Play 4v4 if possible. If you have more than eight players consider playing two games.

How to play:

Play 'ordinary' football. Each team defends two goals at one end and attacks the other two at the opposite end.

Coaching point:

The key to winning the game is to 'pull' the bulk of the defenders over to one goal before switching the ball towards the less well-guarded goal and trying to score there.

Progression:

- Limit the number of touches your players are allowed. Younger players can play three or four touch. Older players can play two or even one touch, depending on their ability.
- Award extra points for goals that come directly from the team switching play.

1-0 game

Objective:

The 1-0 game is designed to improve all the skills required to keep possession: shielding the ball, support play, a good first touch, decision making and

communication.

Set up:

Play this game on a normal small-sided football pitch complete with goals. Divide your squad into two teams (goalkeepers are optional).

How to play:

Play normal football for a set time with one condition: you can only win by one goal. So when a goal is scored, the team that scored must just try to keep possession; they can't score until the other team equalises. If the other team does equalise, then both teams can then try to score again.

Coaching notes:

This is keepaway with a real 'football-like' purpose. Consequently, it's more useful and popular than normal keepaway - a game that is often seen as pointless by young football players. I play a series of five-minute games and the team that wins the most is the overall winner.

Will the team who are a goal down realise they don't need to play with a goalkeeper? They should take advantage of the situation to bring their goalkeeper out and create a 'numbers up' situation.

'Don't let the ball stop!'

Objective:

To improve your players' first touch, ball control and passing.

Set up:

Mark out a short, wide pitch with big (10m-wide) goals at either end and a centre line. Divide your squad into teams of 2 or 3. If you have more than two teams, play more than one game. Each team defends a goal. There are no goalkeepers.

How to play:

The game starts with each team spread out in their half of the pitch. The coach stands on the centre line and rolls a ball to one of the teams. Their objective is to score a goal by shooting from within their own half.

Rules:

Players must stay in their own half of the pitch. Each player on a team must touch the ball at least once before a shot can be taken. The ball must not be allowed to stop - if it does, possession is passed to the other team.

Progression:

- Restrict players to three, two or one touch.
- Ask them to shoot with their 'wrong' foot.

Coaching notes:

Can your players:

- Work the ball up to the halfway line without letting it stop, only having 1, 2 or 3 touches each?
- Lay off a good ball into the path of the shooter?
- Block shots with their body and gain immediate control of the ball?
- Will the players stand on the halfway line and get in the way of their opponents' shots?