



Football Coaching Guide

2021





WELCOME TO SPECIAL OLYMPICS FOOTBALL COACHING

GUIDE

2021 EDITION

This guide will aim to provide coaches with valuable information to get them started as coaches within Special Olympics (SO) Football. Throughout this guide you will find information relating to what football is, the role of a football coach, how coaches interact with players, and a variety of other information relating to coaching the sport, such as safety, preparation and sportsmanship.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Special Olympics [Football Sport Rules](#) document and the Special Olympics [Sports Rules Article 1](#).

Keep in mind, that this guide is just one resource which may be useful to you as you progress through your career as a coach. As you develop your own style of coaching, you will find other books, websites, magazines and coaches, who will help to shape your approach to coaching. Always be curious! Always be open to new ideas! Always keep your athletes at the heart of your coaching!



Acknowledgements

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They have helped fulfill the mission of Special Olympics: to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for people 8 years of age and older with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Special Olympics is proud to acknowledge the support of [Gallagher](#), official sponsor of Special Olympics International Sport and Coaching programming.

Special Olympics athletics welcomes your ideas and comments for future revisions of this guide. We apologize if, for any reason, an acknowledgement has been inadvertently omitted.

2021 REVIEW

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What is Football?

Football is considered the World's most popular sport. Introduced to the Special Olympics in 1986, it is currently the second largest participated Special Olympics sport by athlete number, with participation rapidly growing. The team competition involves two teams attacking, defending and transitioning generates interest, excitement and enjoyment for athletes, coaches, spectators and volunteers. At the forefront of the game are the players who participate on the pitch, but in the background are the coaches, staff, volunteers, family and friends who create and maintain a support network for players to continually improve their on-field performance.

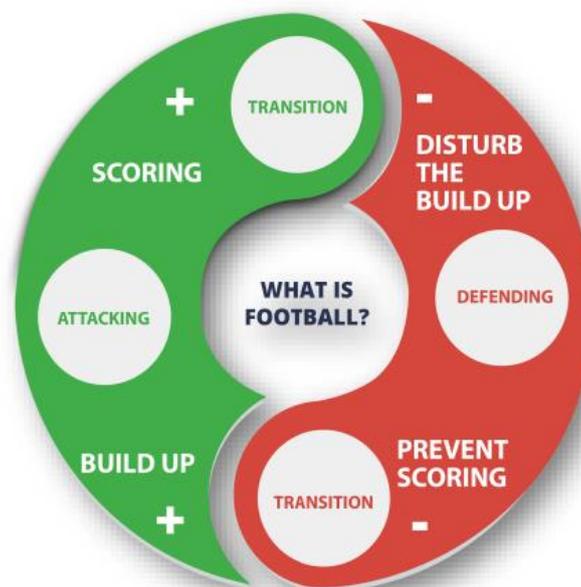


Figure 1: Four Functions of Football

What is Football?

Football is the process of four key components: Attacking, Transitioning to Defence; Defending and Transitioning to Attack. Attacking is carried out with the intention of scoring goals, if the ball is turned over it requires teams to regain their defensive shape i.e. transition to defence. With this it is necessary for the now defending team to disturb the build-up of the now attacking team and prevent them from scoring i.e. defending. Once defending has been carried out efficiently and possession has been regained the now attacking team will transition from defending to attacking and look to build up to score.

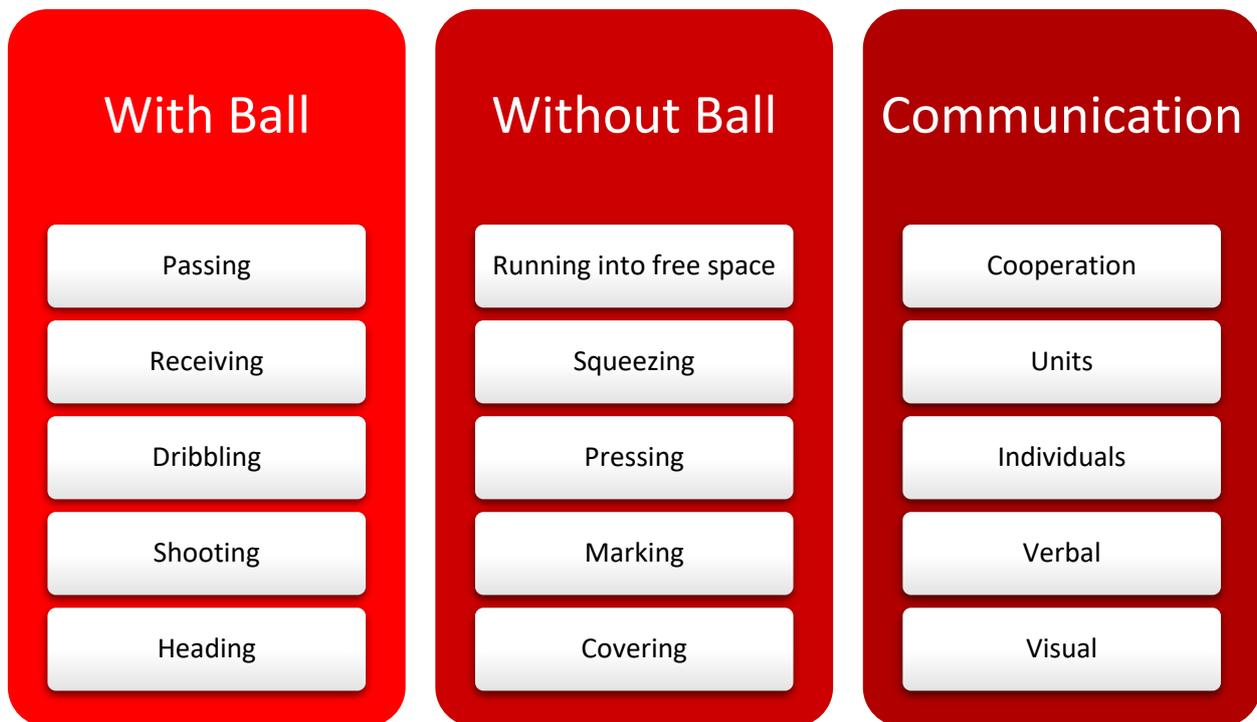


Figure 2: Football Actions

What are Football Actions?

Football Actions are the components of football that all players will experience throughout a football match or training session. The above graphic organizes football actions into three key ranges: *With the Ball*; *Without the Ball*; and *Communication*. *With Ball* determines the actions carried out by players when they are personally engaged with the ball. *Without Ball* defines the movements required by players when they do not have the ball during a game/training session (98% of the time in most cases!). The *Communication* section of the chart explores the types of communication (Verbal = Speaking; Visual = Pointing, Running, General Movement) and who communication will take place between i.e. units (Attackers, Midfielders and Defenders) and individuals.



The Benefits of Football:

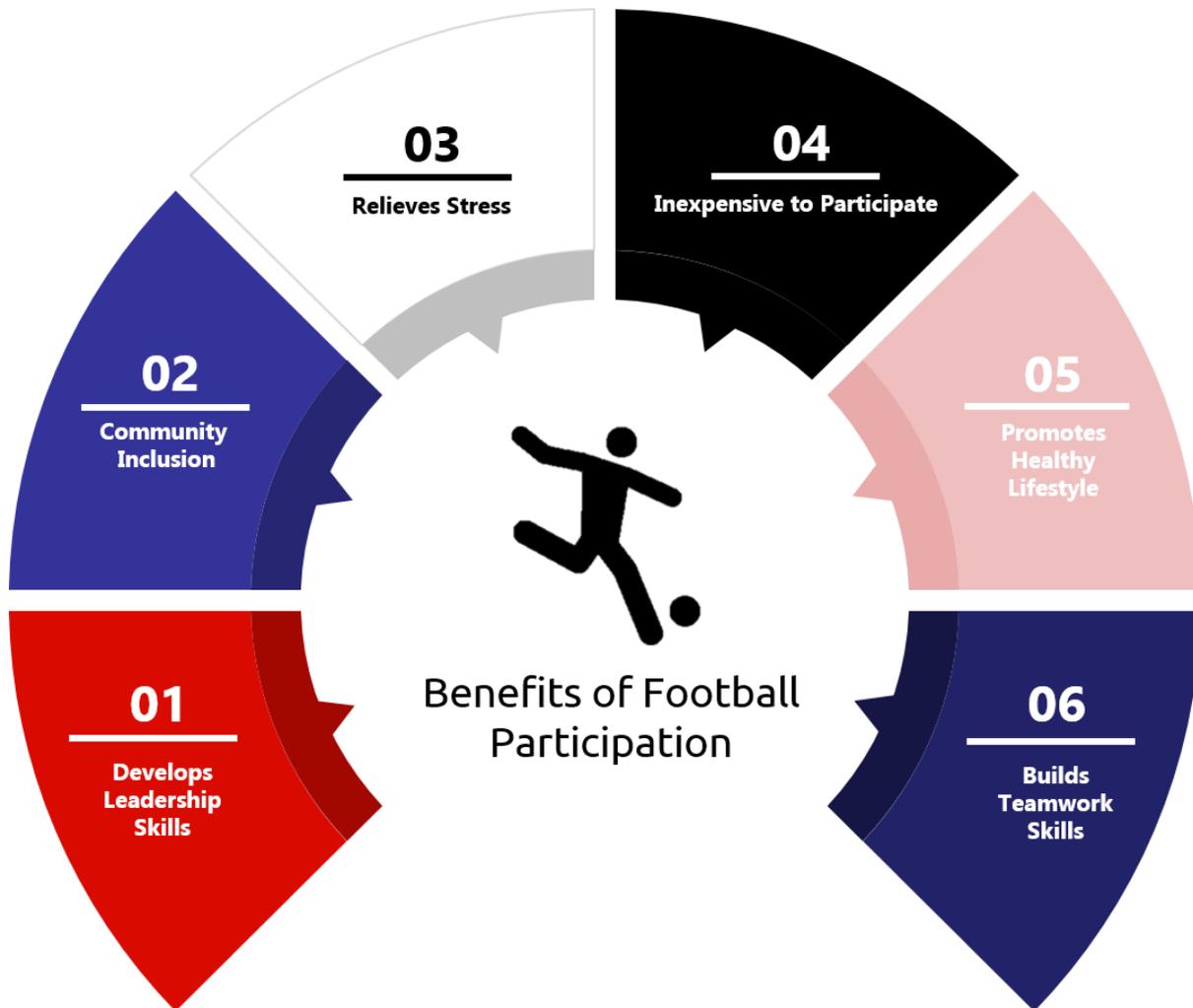


Figure 3: The Benefits of Football Participation

Participation in football provides endless opportunities for players to progress, not only their football skills and physical fitness, but also their life skills. There are an indefinite amount of other benefits to participating in football, and sport in general, predominantly based around improved diet, lifestyle, physical and mental health. In addition to this, sport is a fantastic way of creating friendships, improving and building teamwork skills and getting involved in local community initiatives.

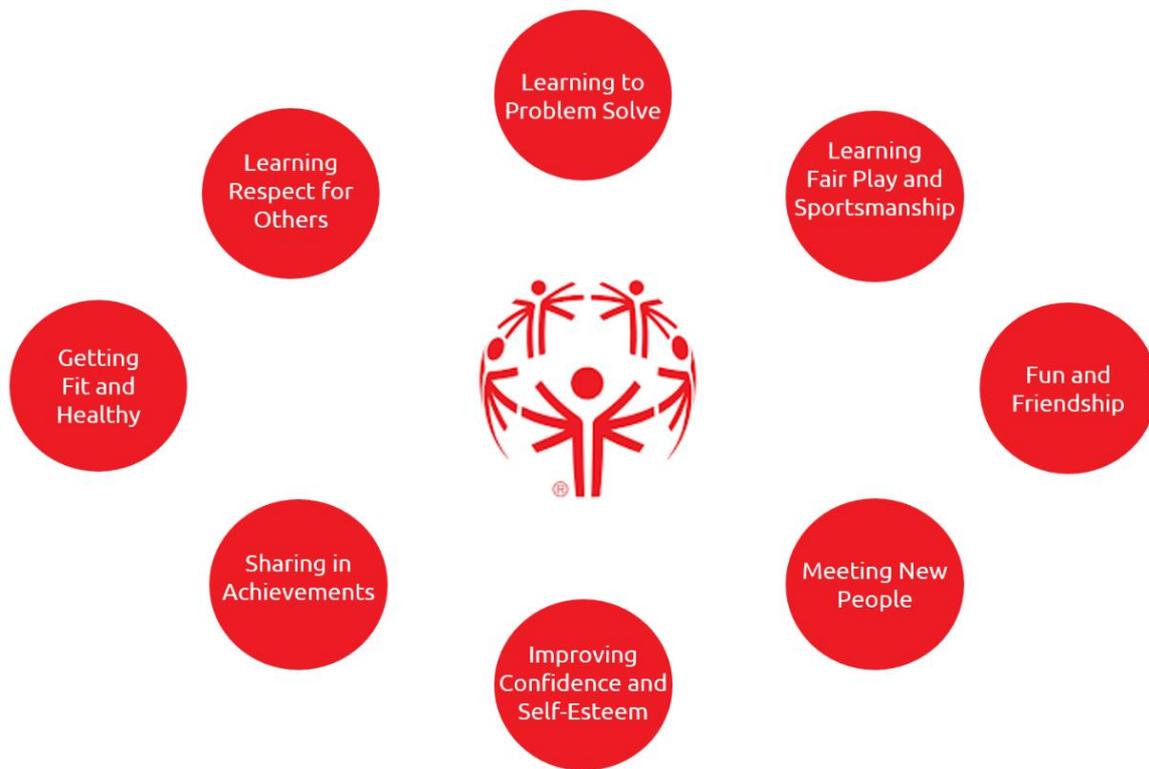


Figure 4: Benefits of Special Olympics

There are endless benefits of being a part of Special Olympics sports and events. The benefits listed in Figure 4 show a small selection of benefits to not only athletes but those around them also, like friends and family.

Coaching Tips: Use the benefits listed in Figure 4 as a guide when planning your training sessions.

Think – Are your players solving problems on the pitch? Are they demonstrating fair play and sportsmanship? Is the training session fun for them?



Unified Football:

Creating Meaningful Involvement in Unified Sports

Unified Sports embraces the philosophy and principles of Special Olympics. When selecting your Unified Sports team you want to achieve meaningful involvement at the beginning, during and end of your sport season. Unified Sports teams are organized to provide meaningful involvement for all athletes and partners. Every teammate should play a role and have the opportunity to contribute to the team. Meaningful involvement also refers to the quality of interaction and competition within a Unified Sports team. Achieving meaningful involvement by all teammates on the team ensures a positive and rewarding experience for everyone.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

- Teammates compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- Teammates compete according to the rules of competition.
- Teammates have the ability and opportunity to contribute to the performance of the team.
- Teammates understand how to blend their skills with those of other athletes, resulting in improved performance by athletes with lesser ability.

Meaningful Involvement Is Not Achieved When Team Members

- Have superior sports skills in comparison to their fellow team members.
- Act as on-field coaches rather than teammates.
- Control most aspects of the competition during critical periods of the game.
- Do not train or practice regularly and only show up on the day of competition.
- Lower their level of ability dramatically, so that they do not hurt others or control the entire game.



SO Football and Events Offered:

The official [Special Olympics Football Rules](#) shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics has created these rules based upon Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) [rules](#) for football. FIFA or National Governing Body (NGB) rules shall be employed except when they are in conflict with the official [Special Olympics Football Rules](#) or [Article I](#). In such cases, the official [Special Olympics Football Rules](#) shall apply.

Special Olympics 11-a-side and Futsal football matches follow FIFA [rules](#). However, the length of halves, substitution and overtime rules are independently defined by each Special Olympics program.

In 5-a-side and 7/8-a-side football matches, some rule variations are in place:

- Kick-in from the side line (instead of throw-in)
- Throw-ins by the goalkeeper (no kicking from the hands)
 - A throw-in by the goalkeeper cannot enter the other half of the pitch until it is touched by another player.
- No off-side rule in place.

An athlete (usually with Down syndrome) who has been diagnosed with Spinal Cord Compression including Atlanto-axial Instability may not participate in football events. For more information pertaining to Codes of Conduct, Training Standards, Medical and Safety Requirements, Divisioning, Awards, Criteria for Advancement to Higher Levels of Competition, and Unified Sports, please refer to <https://resources.specialolympics.org/sports-essentials/sports-and-coaching> and be guided to the Special Olympics Football (Soccer) section.



Events Offered:

Currently Special Olympics offers football events in four different formats of the game and additionally with Unified Sports Teams.

Event	Offered at World Games*
5-a-side	x
7/8-a-side	✓
11-a-side	x
Futsal	✓
Unified Sports 5-a-side	x
Unified Sports 7/8-a-side	✓
Unified Sports 11-a-side	x
Unified Sports Futsal	✓

*This is valid for Special Olympics World Games 2023.

Events offered differ in each program. If you are unsure about what format of football is available in your program/region please [contact](#) your sports coordinator or local program for more information.



Coaching:

The Role of the Coach:

The role of the coach is multidimensional, complex and challenging. It is also one of the most rewarding aspects of being involved in sport. The coach facilitates the athletes to engage in sport, with peers, opponents, supporters, and to encourage themselves to improve. Coaches must take on numerous roles as they engage with athletes, family members, officials and other stakeholders. Roles can range from teacher to advisor, mentor to motivator - all of which are important roles supporting athlete development.

- | | | | |
|---|--------------|---|--------------|
| 1 | Teacher | 5 | Mentor |
| 2 | Demonstrator | 6 | Psychologist |
| 3 | Assessor | 7 | Planner |
| 4 | Advisor | | |

Figure 5: Some roles of a coach



All Special Olympics coaches should familiarize themselves with [Article 1 – Sports Rules](#). This document notes the roles and responsibilities of coaches, players, officials and other stakeholders, as well as noting codes of conduct for each respective role.

McKensie (2013) described coaching as “A constant rollercoaster”, but Horton (2014) feels it is more of ‘fun fair’ full of rides – some scary, some exciting and many rather ordinary.

Coaches have a responsibility to continually improve their knowledge, maintain best practice and keep up with developments and innovations in their sport to fully meet the needs of their athletes.



COACHES CONTINUUM FRAMEWORK:

The Coaches Continuum Framework (CCF) shows the constructive coaching process that SO encourages coaches to use. The CCF focuses on 4 key components of coaching that will assist coaches in carrying-out best practice while ensuring the athletes are at the center of their coaching.



Figure 6: Coaching Continuum Curriculum

PREPARE – All training sessions should be planned prior to arrival. This reduces on the spot pressure on the coach, results in a better training session for the athletes, and allows for better progressions of trainings as sessions go on.

How?

- Set out a strategy (for your next session and upcoming block/season - Periodization);
- The topic of the session;
- Determine what you will deliver to your athletes;
- The key deliverables (points);
- Potential progressions and regressions (if necessary for groups of individuals).

FACILITATE ATHLETES – All sessions should be *athlete-centred* and should consider the individual needs of each athlete when it comes to progressions.

How?

- Identify and cater for the individual needs and differences of your athletes;
- Build relationships with your athletes;
- Go at each athlete's own pace;
 - This includes continuously challenging each athlete to improve.
- Match/Pair them up with athletes of a similar ability level;
- Praise efforts

ADAPT – Session structure should **not** be rigidly followed. Coaching is dynamic, meaning that it must be adjustable in the case of something unplanned happening. This means that your



plans should always include several options. You should be prepared with a back-up activity, a progression or a simplified activity if you find it is simply not working as planned. That is ok! It happens to all coaches, the difference is that, effective coaches, are prepared for it!

How?

- Observe how athletes are performing the designated task;
- Demonstrate best practice/technique;
- If required, adapt/change components of the session to suit the athletes;
- Assist athletes with difficult components when needed;
- Offer feedback to assist athletes;

Note: If an activity is not working, even after you have tried to modify it, then stop! Move on to something else that has previously worked and afterwards have a debrief session with your athletes to try and solve why it did not work. If you can identify that it is not working so can the athletes!

REFLECT – Reflection is a key component of the coaching process. It presents coaches with the opportunity to self-analyse and self-improve after a training session.

How?

- Evaluate how the session went;
 - Time management; Content; How you spoke to athletes; The delivery of key points;
 - Were you *Clear, Concise* and *Consistent*? (3 C's)
 - What went well?; What could improve?
- Reflect at multiple points during your training block/season
 - Are you meeting your set strategy?
 - What has been going well?; What could improve going forward?
- Adjust
 - Post-reflection, identify what you would change to improve your next session.
- Be critical, constructive and honest with yourself.
- Use a 'critical friend'
 - Ask another coach, sport assistant or a friend to observe your session and to give honest feedback.
 - Have an open-mindset; be open to other people's ideas.

When reflecting on a session it is so important to look at yourself, your actions, the language you used, the directions you gave and the environment you created.

If the athletes execute an activity well, what was it you did as a coach to support that happening, or not happening if they did not execute the activity well?

How are your actions and behaviours impacting the athlete's actions and behaviours?

We have a tendency to focus on how athletes perform the skills or activities, but not how we made it possible or created the correct environment for them to perform.

Consider if you:

- Gave clear instructions about the activity
- Demonstrated the activity to a high standard
- Gave the athletes an opportunity to practice and settle into the activity
- Provided feedback to those who required it
- Gave further opportunity to practice and implement the feedback





Responsibilities of a Coach:

You are responsible for facilitating athletes playing sport, learning and having fun.

Very important to remember that it is about the athletes!

Responsibility to safeguard and protect athletes.

Carry out Safeguarding courses as required by local law.

Create an environment where athletes can become the best they can be.

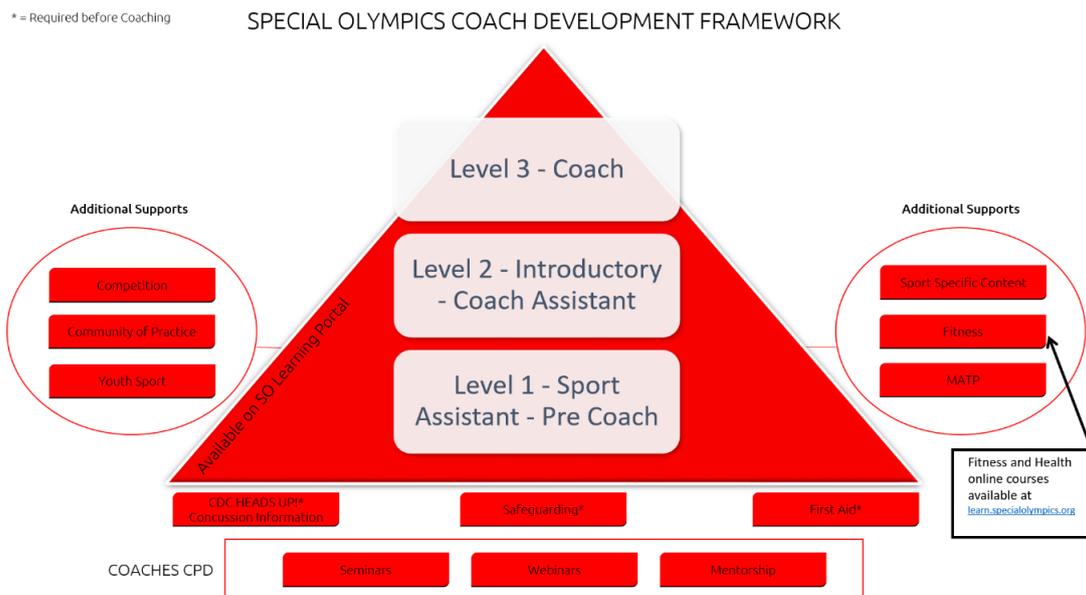
Always look for improvement (this can be sport-related ability or knowledge/understanding).

Challenge your athletes!

A strong understanding of the sport you are coaching.

A strong interest and commitment to creating positive sport environments and to the development of people, through sport.

Continually improve your knowledge and understanding of best practice.





Qualities and Skills of an inclusive coach¹

PATIENCE: Recognising some participants will take longer to develop skills or make progress than others

RESPECT: Acknowledging difference and treating all participants as individuals

ADAPTABILITY: Having a flexible approach to coaching and communication that recognises individual differences

ORGANISATION: Recognising the importance of preparation and planning

SAFE PRACTICES: Ensuring every session, whether with groups or individuals, is carried out with the participants' safety in mind

KNOWLEDGE: Utilising knowledge of training activities and how to modify them in order to maximise the potential of every participant

- Use a range of coaching styles, including lots of visual demonstrations and visual cues.
- Praise when success is achieved, encourage when not.
- As you get to know your athletes, learn what coaching styles and approaches help them to learn best. Each person is unique!
- Build routine and familiarity into your sessions.
- This can be especially helpful for athletes with autism spectrum disorder and they can feel prepared for what is to come. Changes to schedules, plans and expectations can be especially challenging.
- Plan and allow for additional time to offer support or to adjust the plans as needed.
- Give clear concise instructions and repeat them frequently. Use trigger words to condense instruction and be consistent with terminology.
- Demonstrate specific coaching activities one element at a time, and progress at a pace that your athletes can manage.
- Where applicable pair up your participant with a supportive fellow participant who has the ability to explain concepts clearly, concisely, and patiently.

¹ SportAUS, Becoming an Inclusive Coach, https://www.sportaus.gov.au/coaches_and_officials/coaches/coaching_specific_groups#inclusive_coaching.



Coaching Models to assist coaches:

CHANGE IT	TREE ²
<p>Coaching Style – demonstrations, use of questions, role models and verbal instructions.</p> <p>How to score or win</p> <p>Area – e.g. size, shape or surface of the playing environment</p> <p>Number of participants involved in the activity</p> <p>Game Rules – e.g. number of bounces or passes before scoring attempt</p> <p>Equipment – e.g. softer or larger balls, or lighter/smaller bats/racquets</p> <p>Inclusion – e.g. everyone has to touch the ball before the team can score</p> <p>Time – e.g. How many... can you score in 30 seconds</p>	<p>Teaching/Coaching Style</p> <p>Adapt the way you communicate with your athletes</p> <p>Rules/Regulations</p> <p>Simplify/Change the rules and regulations to make your activities more inclusive</p> <p>Equipment</p> <p>Modify the equipment you use so that participants can access your activities</p> <p>Environment</p> <p>Adjust where the activities happen and how they are structured to accommodate all ability levels</p>

STEP³

Space – Increasing or decreasing the size of the playing area or increasing or decreasing the distance between targets.

Task – Varying methods of completing a task, e.g. throwing a ball underarm, overarm or with both hands.

Equipment – Modifying the equipment used, e.g. using different sized balls, but allowing the athlete to use the ball that best suits them.

People – Match athletes of similar abilities together for a task.

² Cara.ie, The Tree model, https://caracentre.ie/sdm_downloads/tree-model/.

³ The Inclusion Club, STEP Model, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Clq&J0tmZZA;>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30FiiPyaJ3s>



Coaches Education Process / Minimum Requirements

Per the rules, for competition activities, the coach to athlete ratio is required to be 1:4. In applying this rule there must be at least one certified sport-specific coach for each sport, and the remaining quota may be determined between coach roles. Additionally, this ratio should be applied so that each female athlete accommodation has a female coach available on premise and each male athlete accommodation has a male coach on premise. In the event of a delegation having a single team participating, there must be at least one staff member per gender represented on the team

Head coaches are required to complete concussion awareness training, available at [CDC Concussion Training](#) and submit the certificate of completion to their state Program.

All coaches – head coaches and team managers are required to hold valid certifications from following courses, most of which are available on the [Special Olympics Online Learning Portal](#)

Course	Head Coach	Team Manager
Level 1 Sport Assistant	*	*
Level 2 Coaching Assistant	*	*
Unified Sports Coaching	*	*
Heads Up Concussion in Youth Sports	*	*
Level 3 Coach (Online Module)	*	
National Football Federation Coach Certification**	*	

** Not available on Special Olympics Online Learning Portal

[Special Olympics Learning Portal](#) provides a single place to access variety of coach education courses in English, Spanish, French, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Japanese or Greek.

To gain access to a range of courses, please create a free account at <https://learn.specialolympics.org>

For further information on [how to create an account](#) and learn more about the range of courses available, please click [here](#) or visit <https://resources.specialolympics.org/online-learning-portal>



Special Olympics provides a range of coaching education courses available to all coaches with the goal to provide safe and high quality coaching to athletes with and without intellectual disabilities. SOI aims to provide coaches of all levels, across all sports, with the skills, knowledge and confidence to provide their athletes with the best possible opportunities to experience the joy, challenge and growth opportunities that sport can provide.

The implementation of a Global Coach Education System began in 2018. The Special Olympics online learning portal provides coaches around the world with a single place to go to access their Special Olympics Coach Education. Special Olympics has therefore established a set of minimum education requirements that a coach must have achieved, prior to entering Special Olympics competitions. They must possess required skills, knowledge and confidence to provide their athletes with the best possible opportunities to experience the joy, challenge and growth opportunities in a safe environment.

Within each team, there must be one head coach, a certified sport-specific coach by respective National Governing Body per sport per team. The remaining coaches quota may be assigned to other roles, e.g. assistant coach or team managers (help players in non-sport daily routines).

Each SO region falls under different football governance due to their member associations. Below is a list of which regions fall under which governing body. There may be some cross over of governance between regions, such as SO MENA includes countries in the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF).

SO Region	Football Governing Body
SO North America	CONCACAF
SO East Asia	AFC
SO Asia Pacific	OFC
SO Latin America	CONMEBOL
SO Europe Eurasia	UEFA
SO Middle East/North Africa	AFC (WAFF) + CAF (UNAF)
SO Africa	CAF

We encourage SO football coaches to obtain association certification and qualifications from their respective football association, for example if your program is based in the USA you



would follow the US Soccer coaching pathway. Association qualifications alongside SO Coach Education courses will help you, as a coach, to create the best training and competition environment for your players.

For more information on the role of a coach, coaching styles and practices, as well as coaching models and information about coaching philosophies, download our [Role of The Coach](#) document.



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Psychology Section:

Understanding and Utilizing Sport Psychology:

Psychological Considerations

Effective coaching goes beyond teaching fundamental skills. After the athlete has learned the basic skills of the game, coaches must help them learn how to apply their skills. Coaches must also ensure athletes have a knowledge of the rules and etiquette of the game in preparation for competition.

Before any of this can happen, the athlete must enjoy the sport and want to play it. This will give the coach a basis for learning and motivation. When athletes become discouraged or frustrated, the coach can use this love of the sport to remind athletes that training is meant to be challenging and prepare them for competition. Without this foundation, the possibility of quitting becomes an option — the worst possible scenario in sport.



Special Olympics athletes are taught tasks or elements (controlling the ball with their feet) required to perform a skill. Skills are the fundamental abilities (controlling the ball while moving, dribbling) required to play a sport. Once athletes develop a combination of skills (dribbling, passing and shooting) they are ready to apply them in practice. After completing these steps athletes are ready for competition.

Athletes develop confidence by moving from simple to more complex tasks and skills during training. Training should progress in a way that allows the athlete to experience successful athletic achievement through repetition and in settings similar to the competitive environment (Dribbling the ball, dribbling the ball through cones to dribbling the ball in drills).

Athlete Readiness

Readiness of the athlete means being focused and it must be determined in preparation for competition.

- **Mental Readiness:** Being a participant in the sport, showing confidence and an understanding strategy.
- **Physical Readiness:** Being physically conditioned and trained in the skills required for competition.



Physical Readiness + Mental Readiness = Competition Readiness



Athletes/teams must be placed in a level of competition that will challenge their skills and motivate them to surpass their personal bests. They must also be placed in events they like and enjoy. This will increase positive motivation and participation at the appropriate level, which can inspire the athlete to excel and gain confidence in themselves and their sport.

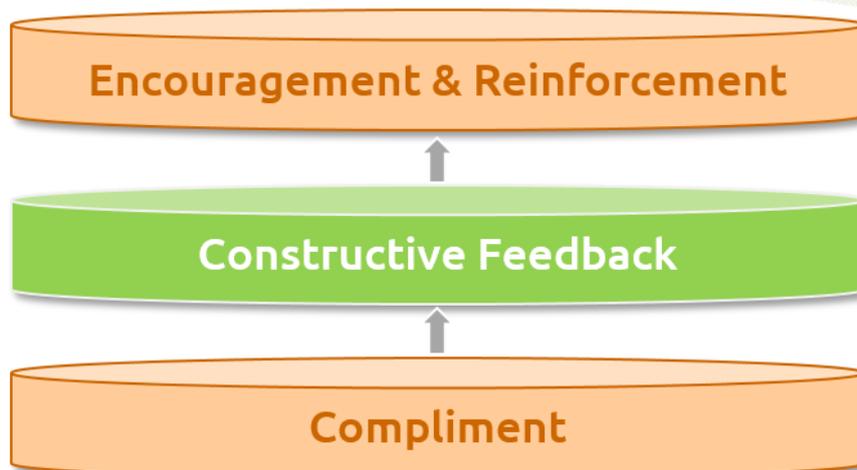
Positive Reinforcement and Rewards

When used appropriately, reinforcement is one of the primary tool of a successful coach. Reinforcement is used to praise an athlete when he/she does well or to get an athlete to stop undesirable behavior. For reinforcement to work, a coach must be consistent and systematic in its use. If not consistent, athletes follow your example and behave erratically. If you are not systematic, the message you send may confuse your athletes.

Communicating and Correcting Errors

1. **One skill at a time.** Correct only one behavior or movement at a time.
2. **Ask before giving correction.** Allow the chance to explain what they believe they did. This lets them feel they are a part of the process.
3. **Find the cause.** The cause of an error may be something that you may not see. Again, ask the athlete what they believe they are doing.
4. **Provide constructive instruction.** Avoid too much of “what’s not right” by focusing on “how to do it right.” Always build up the athlete; do not tear them down.
5. **Praise before correction.** Begin with a positive comment about something that the athlete well. Now they are attuned to you. You have gained their attention and trust. Follow up with constructive instruction. Be concise and to the point. Remember to send another message of praise and encouragement.

The “Sandwich approach” is an effective way to provide both positive reinforcement and corrective feedback. Start off with a compliment such as “Great effort on the dribbling challenge and then identify what they need to improve on such as, “but when performing a turn, try to use the foot furthest away from your opponent, so you have your whole body between them and the ball” followed by encouragement and a positive outcome, “Keeping your body between your opponent and the ball will make it much more difficult for them to take possession from you, great job!”



Using Rewards

Coaches should observe and know their athletes to determine why they participate in Special Olympics and reward them accordingly. Effectively rewarding athletes is not always as easy as it sounds. Below are a few tips on rewarding athletes.

- Reward the performance, not the outcome.
- Reward athletes just as much for their effort as you do for the desired outcome.
- Reward little accomplishments on the way to learning an entire skill.
- Reward the learning and performance of desired emotional and social skills too.
- Reward frequently, especially when new skills are being learned.
- Reward as soon as possible when new skills are learned.
- Reward an athlete when they have earned it.

Types of Rewards

- **Intrinsic:** Athlete competes for the thrill and joy of the sport
- **Extrinsic:** Athlete competes for the reward

Motivation

According to Burton, Damon and Thomas Raedeke in *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (2008), motivation is reflected in three behaviors:

- **Choice:** Motivation shows in the choices athletes make—choosing to play sport, to practice, to set challenging goals, and to train even in the off-season.
- **Effort:** Motivation is also reflected in how much effort athletes give—how intensely they train, compete, and strive to achieve their goals.
- **Persistence:** Motivation level can be seen in how long athletes persist at striving to attain their goals, even in the face of adversity and obstacles



Motivation is better understood by debunking some myths.

Motivation Myth 1:

Athletes are either motivated or not motivated

Some coaches believe that motivation is simply a personality trait, a static internal characteristic. They believe that an athlete either has motivation or doesn't. They don't believe motivation is something coaches can develop. For these coaches, the key to having a motivated team is to find and recruit athletes who have the right personality. However, while some athletes are, in fact, more motivated than others, this view does not provide any direction or guidance on how coaches can help develop and sustain athletes' motivation. The fact is, coaches can help athletes develop motivation.

Motivation Myth 2:

Coaches give athletes motivation

Other coaches view motivation as something they can inject into their athletes on demand, like a flu shot, by means of inspirational pep talks or gimmicks. They may use slogans, posters, and bulletin board quotes from upcoming opponents. These strategies may be helpful, but they are only a small piece of the motivation puzzle. There is much more to the story—motivation is not something coaches can simply give their athletes.



Motivation Myth 3:

Motivation means sticks and carrots

Some experts suggest that effective motivation means using carrots (rewards) and sticks (punishments) to drive athletes to do things they would not do on their own. This may seem innocuous, but think about it on a deeper level. It assumes that athletes don't want to do something, so the coach will provide motivation to make them do it through punishments or rewards. Coaches who emphasize the stick, in the form of chastising, criticizing, yelling, coercing, and creating guilt, often find themselves swimming upstream. No matter what they try, they meet resistance and negative attitudes. Not only is this approach ineffective, it saps the enjoyment out of sport. Coaches must understand athletes' needs in order to create a team culture that naturally motivates them.

Athletes' needs and intrinsic motivation

According to Burton and Raedeke in *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (2008), great coaches know that they don't give athletes motivation. Rather, they create the conditions or team climate in which athletes motivate themselves. Coaches do this by recognizing the importance of **intrinsic motivation**, which stems from the sheer pleasure and inner satisfaction athletes experience from participating in sport. Intrinsically motivated athletes participate for the love of the sport. They enjoy the process of learning and mastering difficult sport skills and play for the pride they feel when working hard toward accomplishing a challenging goal. They also find sport stimulating and feel exhilarated when engaged in it.

The secret to cultivate athletes' intrinsic motivation is to understand what athletes need from the sport. Structuring sport in a way that meets athletes' needs fosters intrinsic motivation, and failure to meet athletes' needs lowers it. What do athletes need from sport? Evidence from a variety of sources suggests that athletes seek to fulfill four primary needs

1. The need for fun and stimulation

In a survey done to 10,000 former athletes (Ewing & Seefeldt 1990; Seefeldt, Ewing, & Walk 1992), was found that having fun and developing skills were the most common reason why athletes participate in sports, even more important than winning

When they were asked why they quit, they typically answered something along these lines:



- “I found other activities more interesting.”
- “I would rather do other things than play sport.”
- “Sport was no longer fun.”
- “I burnt out on sport.”

It was found that the connection between the reasons athletes play sport and the reasons they drop out was motivation, which comes naturally and easily when athletes are having fun. Lack of fun makes sport seem like a boring job, lowers motivation, and even causes athletes to drop out. If sport is not fun, coaches find that motivating athletes is difficult, if not impossible. Sport is much more enjoyable when athletes find practice activities stimulating, challenging, and exciting.

One of the greatest challenges as a coach is to avoid destroying the athletes’ intrinsic motivation to participate in sport. Some coaches erroneously believe that fun means easy workouts, frivolous games, and countless team parties. But challenging practices, intense workouts, and focusing on skill development can be fun. In fact, fun is maximized when athletes experience optimal stimulation and excitement. No one finds it fun to lose or fail constantly, so build in some success. Most athletes are also bored by being under-challenged while performing tedious drills. Thus coaches should strive to fit the difficulty of the skill to the ability of the athletes. Coached this way, athletes feel challenged but not overwhelmed, because they have the ability to meet the challenge.

Coaching Tip

Coaches must understand athletes’ needs in order to create a team culture that naturally motivates them.

Effective coaches have long known that meeting athletes’ need for fun enhances motivation. Yet they also know that athletes must practice to learn and improve skills. The creative coach can find ways to facilitate skill development in a way that is fun for athletes. Here are a few examples:

- Use developmental progressions to create an optimal skill–challenge balance.
- Keep practices stimulating by varying the activities.
- Teach fundamentals by means of action-packed, game-like activities that use the targeted skills.
- Keep everyone active. Don’t give footballers time to get bored by having them stand in long lines
- Set aside time in each practice when athletes can just play the game, without receiving evaluation or feedback from the coach.



Structuring sport to be fun is key not only to motivation but also to helping athletes develop their skills. If athletes enjoy a sport, they become more motivated and are less likely to drop out. If they are more motivated, they improve. As they improve, they enjoy sport more. And so it goes. Athletes who are motivated primarily by their need to have fun may present discipline problems for coaches who have sapped the fun out of sport. As these athletes try to find creative ways to have fun, they may be seen as goof-offs or discipline problems. Some coaches assume that athletes are not motivated when they hesitate at doing everything the coach's way. In reality, these athletes are often highly motivated to participate — just not according to the structure and methods dictated by the coach.

2. The need for acceptance and belonging

The second basic need athletes strive to fill through sport is for acceptance and belonging. This need can be met if athletes feel they fit in and are accepted by others on the team. In fact, some athletes participate in sport primarily because they enjoy being with their friends and being part of a team, and coaches can use this need as a powerful motivator. Here are some guidelines: Many children with various disabilities are often teased or ignored. Being a member of team that includes peers with similar disabilities can be a tremendously gratifying social experience. Coaches should not underestimate the value of the social benefits athletes will derive from their sports experience. In fact, being with their friends may be a more powerful motivation than playing the sport.

- Recognize athletes are usually responsive to team goals. Although performing well and winning may not be as significant to them as is identifying with the team, they will internalize team goals because of their desire to be part of the group.
- Arrange activities to allow athletes to get to know each other and spend time together. Social activities are a good way to help fulfill the need for acceptance and belonging.
- Include team building activities to help build cohesion. By working together toward a common goal that is not directly related to sport, athletes can learn to appreciate previously overlooked strengths in themselves and their teammates.
- Create an atmosphere on the team where athletes feel they are playing with each other rather than against one another.
- Have returning athletes serve as mentors to new athletes
- Ensure that all athletes feel they are important members of the team and that their roles are important and valued.

3. The need for control and autonomy.

These needs are important and can be easily overlooked. The need to develop autonomy is one of the most basic human needs. This is especially true among adolescents on their journey to adulthood. Filling this need requires athletes have control over their own lives and determine their own course of behavior. Once they choose to participate in a sport, they need to have ownership and feel they have a say in decisions affecting their involvement. Otherwise, they feel pressured or obligated to act, think, or feel a certain way. High levels of autonomy encourages athletes to want to participate, whereas low autonomy means having to participate.



You can use several strategies to help athletes develop a sense of ownership and responsibility. When appropriate, involve athletes in decision making, provide choice, and request their input. You can do this, for example, by giving them a say in their training regimen. You can teach athletes how to develop their own training program, giving them more and more responsibility as they learn more about effective training principles. Encourage athletes to take as much responsibility as you judge they have the maturity to handle. Provide structure and guidance, giving more control to athletes as they demonstrate responsibility. When athletes are reluctant in using their responsibility, constructively help them better understand how to act responsibly. Athletes should neither expect nor be given free rein, but they should be given choices within a structured environment.

The coach who facilitates this type of graduated responsibility development is not necessarily a democratic coach in every respect. Not all decisions are voted on — many are the sole responsibility of the coach. By shifting some control to athletes, it is possible to develop a disciplined team where athletes feel a strong sense of ownership during competition.

In summary, to meet athletes' need for control and autonomy, you should make sure they feel a sense of ownership over their sport involvement. Ways to do this include the following:

- Provide a rationale for your decisions.
- Ensure that athletes feel they are responsible for their own fate and are not merely pawns.
- Solicit athletes' input and provide choices whenever possible.
- Involve athletes in developing practice plans and game strategies, evaluating practices and competitions, developing team rules and a team covenant or mission, and selecting captains.

4. The need to feel competent and successful

The need to feel competent is one of the most important components of motivation. Perceived competence means having positive perceptions of one's skills and abilities and feeling capable of succeeding in sport. It is doubtful that athletes will work hard, or even stay in sport, if they feel like failures. Athletes use many sources to judge their skill and success at sport. Even the simple act of choosing up sides can influence athletes' feelings of competence. Always getting picked first by one's peers contributes to feeling competent, thus enhancing motivation, whereas routinely getting picked last may cause an athlete to feel incompetent and walk away from sport.

Athletes' perceived competence can be raised through success at challenging tasks, positive feedback from a coach, and approval from parents. Effective coaches spend a lot of time and energy structuring sport in a way that makes each athlete feel competent. Although experiencing success is central to feeling competent, experiencing failure is inevitable in the sport world, as in life. All athletes, no matter how talented, experience failure, adversity, and setbacks at some point. How athletes respond to failure has a huge effect on long-term motivation.



Many athletes will equate winning and losing with success and failure. This is often a self-defeating perspective as athletes only partly control the outcome of competition and often winning is unrealistic.

Coaches should almost always focus on individual effort, self-improvement and learning as barometers of success.

Developing Sport Confidence

Sport confidence is gained through experiencing success, time and time again, in the same or similar situation. Sport confidence is one of the most important predictors of athletic achievement. Your coaching strategies should be devised around repetition in settings similar to the competitive environment.

1. Developing sport confidence in athletes helps to make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation.
2. A considerable amount of anxiety is eliminated when athletes know what is expected of them and when they have to be prepared.
3. Mental preparation is just as important as skills training.
4. Progressing to more difficult skills increases the challenge.
5. Dropping back into easier skills increases one's confidence.

Place emphasis on the importance of improving a personal best and giving maximum effort at all times during training and competition.

- Reward the athletes when goals are achieved (verbal, nonverbal, and tangible).
- Motivate and challenge the athlete through well-planned training sessions.
- Establish guidelines for acceptable behavior and expectations by creating positive cues and reinforcements.

Coaching Tip

The only things an athlete can control are: Attitude and Effort

Developing Self-Confidence through Goal Setting

Realistic yet challenging goals for each athlete are important for the motivation of the athlete, during both training and competition. Accomplishing goals at practice through repetition in settings that replicate the competition environment instill confidence. Sport confidence in athletes helps make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation. Setting goals is a joint effort between athletes and coaches.

The main features of goal setting are:



1. Goals need to be structured as short-term, intermediate and long-term.
2. Goals need to be viewed as stepping stones to success.
3. Goals must be accepted by the athlete.
4. Goals need to vary in difficulty— from easily attainable to challenging.
5. Goals must be measurable.
6. Goals need to be used to establish the athlete’s training and competition plan.
7. Goals need to be flexible
8. Goals need to be written down
9. Goals need to be identified as either performance goals or practice goals
10. Sometimes athletes will need to seek support to accomplish their goals

Athletes with or without an intellectual disability may be more motivated by accomplishing short-term goals than long-term goals; this should not stop you from challenging athletes. Include athletes in setting their personal goals. For example, ask the footballer, “How many goals do you want to score today? Let’s see how many you scored at the last practice. What is your personal best? What do YOU think you can do?” Awareness of why the athlete is participating is also important when setting goals. There are participation factors, which may influence motivation and goal setting:

- Age appropriateness
- Readiness level
- Family influence
- Athlete preference
- Ability level
- Athlete performance
- Peer influence

Performance Goals versus Outcome Goals

Effective goals focus on performance, not outcome. Performance is what the athlete controls. Outcomes are influenced by opposing athletes. An athlete may have an outstanding performance and not win a contest because opposing athletes performed even better. Conversely, an athlete may perform poorly and still win if opposing athletes perform at a lower level. If a footballer’s goal is to complete 10 successful passes in the 1st half, the footballer has greater control in achieving this goal than winning. However, the athlete has even greater control of achieving a goal if the goal is to pass using the correct technique. This performance goal ultimately gives the footballer more control over their performance.

Performance Goal

Make 10 successful passes using the correct technique during the 1st half.

Outcome Goal

Make two assists in the next two games.

Motivation through Goal Setting

Goal setting is one of the most effective and simple motivational devices developed for sports. The concept is not new, today the techniques for effective goal setting are clearly refined. Motivation is all about having needs and striving to have those needs met. How can you enhance an athlete’s motivation?



1. Provide more time and attention to an athlete when he/she is having difficulty learning a skill.
2. Reward small gains of achievement in skill level
3. Develop other measures of achievement outside of winning
4. Show your athletes that they are important to you
5. Show your athletes that you are proud of them and excited about what they are doing
6. Fill your athletes with self-worth

Goals give direction. They tell us what needs to be accomplished. They increase effort, persistence and the quality of performance. Establishing goals also requires that the athlete and coach determine techniques for how to achieve those goals.

Measurable and Specific

Effective goals are very specific and measurable. Goals stated in the form of “I want to be the best that I can be!” or “I want to improve my performance!” are vague and difficult to measure. It is positive sounding but difficult, if not impossible, to assess whether they have been reached. Measurable goals must establish a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks for them to be realistic.

Difficult, but Realistic

Effective goals are perceived as challenging, not threatening. A challenging goal is one perceived as difficult but attainable within a reasonable amount of time and with a reasonable amount of effort or ability. A threatening goal is one perceived as being beyond one’s current capacity. Realistic implies that judgment is involved. Goals based upon a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks are likely to be realistic.

Long- versus Short-Term Goals

Both long and short-term goals provide direction, but short-term goals appear to have the greatest motivational effects. Short-term goals are more readily attainable and are stepping stones to more distant long-term goals. Unrealistic short-term goals are easier to recognize than unrealistic long-term goals. Unrealistic goals can then be modified before valuable practice time has been lost.

Positive versus Negative Goal Setting

Positive goals direct what to do rather than what not to do. Negative goals direct our attention to the errors we wish to avoid or eliminate. Positive goals also require coaches and athletes to decide how they will reach those specific goals. Once the goal is decided, the athlete and coach must determine specific strategies and techniques which allow that goal to be successfully attained.



Set Priorities

Effective goals are limited in number and meaningful to the athlete. Setting a limited number of goals requires that athletes and coaches decide what is important and fundamental for continued development. Establishing a few, carefully selected goals allows athletes and coaches to keep accurate records without becoming overwhelmed with record keeping.

Mutual Goal Setting

Goal setting becomes an effective motivational device when athletes are committed to achieving those goals. When goals are imposed or established without significant input from the athletes, motivation is unlikely to be enhanced.

Set Specific Time Lines

Target dates provide urgency to an athlete's efforts. Specific target dates tend to eliminate wishful thinking and clarify what goals are realistic and which are not. Timelines are especially valuable in high-risk sports where fear often promotes procrastination in learning new skills.

Formal versus Informal Goal Setting

Some coaches and athletes think that goals must be set in formal meetings outside of practice and require long periods of thoughtful evaluation before they are decided upon. Goals are literally progressions which coaches have been using for years but are now expressed in measurable, performance terms rather than as vague, generalized outcomes.

Goal Setting Domains

When asked to set goals, athletes typically focus on the learning of new skills or performances in competitions. A major role of the coach is to broaden the athlete's perception of those areas, and goal setting can be an effective tool. Goals can be set to enhance fitness, improve attendance, increase intensity, promote sportsmanship, develop team spirit, find more free time, or establish consistency.

Coaching Tip

Ask yourself "What motivates me to be the best coach that I can be."

Winning and Losing

Many coaches focus on the subject of winning when developing their coaching objectives. A holistic approach places a focus on building character and developing leadership skills. You, the coach, must resist trying to win and encouraging your athletes to win at all costs. A better balance is achieved by not evaluating yourself or your athletes on the win-loss record but by placing your athletes first — athletes first at practice and at competition.



Striving to Win

Placing athletes first does not mean that winning is not important. Striving to win within the rules of sport and the competition is an important objective for both athlete and coach. Striving to win is essential for an enjoyable competition. The emphasis should not be on winning itself but on striving to win. ***"Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."***

Keeping Winning in Perspective

Striving to win is important in sport. The process of winning can bring out the best in people—performance, attitude and approach to life. As coach, it is imperative that you not lose sight of the long-term objectives: helping athletes to develop and improve sports skills, have fun, and do well in sport competition — to win. Winning or striving to win is never more important than your athletes' well-being. Keep winning in perspective - there is room for fun too.

Coaches and athletes must remind themselves that winning is measured by how well they apply all their effort and maintain self-control in pressure situations. Winning means more than where you place at the finish line. An athlete is never a loser if he/she gives maximum effort.

To that end, the first question a coach needs to ask before a competition is

- "Are you ready to give it everything you've got?"

The first questions after a competition needs to be

- "How did that feel?"
- "Do you feel like you did your best?"

Coaching Tip

Remember, positive thoughts yield positive results.

Well-prepared athletes will handle their performance and the performance of their competitors in a positive and sportsmanlike manner in accordance to the [Athlete's Code of Conduct](#) and the [Official Sports Rules](#) for football. A losing outcome does not negatively impact the athletes' confidence if the coach and athletes have been successful in developing a winning attitude.

The athlete's effort, attitude and personal skills attainment must be rewarded and positively reinforced.



It is also important to remind athletes that the point of competing in Special Olympics is to prove to themselves and to the rest of the world what they can do. The award ceremony is a chance for the world to see a group of skilled athletes celebrating their sport skills and enjoyment of competition.

Athletes of all ages, regardless of intellectual ability, enter competitions to do their best and hopefully to win. Is it all right to be disappointed when you do not win? Of course it is, it is human nature. But also, it is a chance to evaluate your performance and make a training commitment that will help you perform better next time.

Handling Grief

Communication strategies by the coach, fellow athletes, families and friends will help an athlete handle grief or disappointment. Listen to what the athlete says and why they may be experiencing the grief. Offer positive switches – positive comment – correction – positive comment to take the athlete’s attention away from his/her disappointment. Again, the athlete’s effort, attitude and preparation should be emphasized, not the result of the competition.

It is important to not discount feelings of disappointment. It is appropriate to be disappointed when we lose a game or match. The challenge for the coach is to redirect that disappointment into a renewed commitment to training for the next competition or season. Becoming obsessed with losing is not a healthy or natural reaction for anyone.

Anxiety and Stress Management

Anxiety and stress can be controlled through proper preparation. A winning attitude and confidence will equip an athlete with coping skills to handle his/her emotions when confronted with a stressful or anxious moment. Below are a few hints a well-prepared coach might consider to better prepare his athlete for competition.

- Repetition in a familiar environment can help alleviate a lot of stress when preparing the athlete for competition. Include mini matches in practice that simulate the competition.
- Provide athletes with additional competition opportunities at as many local-level tournaments as possible.
- Have athletes perform in front of spectators and peers.
- Make sure athletes are in proper events that they like and can display their talents and skills.
- Also, to reinterpret “arousal” as excitement and not anxiety.
- Visit the track or stadium prior to competition. When possible, practice on the track or in the stadium before competition.
- Teach your athletes visual imagery to help them practice the event in their mind before competition.
- Review the rules of competition and event calls and strategies with your athletes.



Positive self-talk and imagery

Self-talk represents the things you say in your head about yourself and is often negative (e.g., that team is much better than ours). Positive self-talk involves repeating a helpful and positive word or phrase such as

“I am fit and ready to play” Imagery or visualization is using the “mind’s eye” to recreate a past great performance or to create a future correct play or movement. Imagery is also much more than seeing yourself as it also involves “feeling” a correct movement and incorporating all of the senses (i.e., smell, sound, even taste) to most accurately capture reality in your head.

Positive self-talk and imagery promotes confidence and success. Coaches should help educate their athletes on the value of positive self-talk and imagery. One thing coaches can do is help athletes establish a pre-performance routine. At the start of a competition athletes can very briefly (10-15 seconds) do four helpful behaviors: Close their eyes, take a few deep calming breathes, repeat a positive phrase “I am ready” and picture themselves successfully making a perfect start, or finishing strongly.

Taking Athletes to Competition

It is the coach’s responsibility to have the athletes prepared physically and mentally for the competition. This involves ensuring that all uniforms are ready, all athletes have proper footwear, all equipment is present, meals and transportation are available and all entries are correct.

Athlete Flow at Competitions

Coaches do not determine flow of athletes during competition. Coaches must know the athlete/team flow of a specific competition to ensure their athletes are where they need to be at the time that they need to be there.

Coaching Tip

Athlete flow process is designed to make the athlete experience as smooth as possible from arriving at the competition to receiving awards to leaving the competition

Before the Match

- Make final check of all equipment and athlete needs.
- Be confident and relaxed.
- Be sure your players are warmed up, stretched and ready to compete.
- Be sure to have the correct equipment for the match.
- Be positive and upbeat but do not over excited.
- Make sure that the athletes have plenty of fluids.



At the Match

- Encourage and support your athletes, do not yell and scream. Keep calm and offer positive reinforcement at the competition.
- Restrict coaching from the bench to positive comments that athletes can use at the time of competition.
- Tell parents to be supportive and not to coach athletes.
- Keep substitutions simple. Have substitutes ready in case of injuries or no-shows.
- Commit yourself to equal participation throughout the season.
- Give different athletes the chance to compete in new events for which they have trained. Be a coach who allows the athlete to progress to new levels.
- Make sure that the athletes have plenty of fluids.

After the Match

- Say “well done” or “good effort” to all your athletes when appropriate and reference the action that you are praising.
 - “Good effort on your finish, it was really strong”.
- Feedback is usually best (not always) done right after the behavior.
- Be sure to collect all the equipment from each athlete.
- Cool down after competition to prevent soreness.
- Spend time reviewing the athletes’ performances and prepare some useful comments for the beginning of the next practice.
- Somewhere a mention of keeping a training log for a) to build confidence by revisiting good workouts and b) to know what workouts were effective at getting athletes in really good condition.
- Make sure that the athletes have plenty of fluids.





Fitness Section:

Fit 5 + Other SO Resources

Special Olympics provides a range of fantastic fitness resources that coaches and athletes can use to educate themselves on best practice around physical activity, nutrition and hydration.

There are many health-related and performance-related benefits of fitness for SO athletes.

Benefits of Fitness for Athletes

- Enhanced sport performance through improved
 - Endurance/stamina.
 - Speed and agility.
 - Strength and power.
 - Flexibility.
 - Healthy weight.
- Increased energy level, improved focus, and better recovery after practices & games.
- Reduced risk for sport-related injuries.
- Decreased risk for illnesses and chronic diseases.
- Improved quality of life.

Physical Activity Outside of SO

It is vital that Special Olympics programs are not the only source of physical activity and exercise for athletes. As a coach, you should be encouraging your athletes to exercise every day and educate them on ways to stay active outside of organized sport practice.

There are numerous ways that athletes can exercise to stay healthy when they are at home. Walking, running, skipping are simple ways an athlete can exercise on their own and work on their cardiovascular fitness. Fitness classes like yoga, core strength, HIIT and many others are great ways for athlete to work on their fitness and physical health outside of organized sports practice.



Special Olympics offers the Fit 5 Guide for athletes and coaches to use. As a coach it is a great resource to use when educating your athletes on the benefits of physical activity to their overall health and to their sports performance.

Fit 5

The [Fit 5 Guide](#) is a plan for physical activity, nutrition and hydration that can help to improve athletes' health and fitness and make them the best athlete they can be. It provides a fantastic collection of exercises that athletes should do to assist them to improve the skills needed for their sport. The exercises included focus on Endurance, Strength, Flexibility and Balance.



Figure 7: Fit 5 Fitness Cards

In addition to these resources, there are a number of videos available [here](#) for athletes and coaches to view and use when performing these exercises as part of their training plans.

Nutrition

Eating right is important to your health and your sports performance. Nutrition and Hydration are key points of athlete preparation and recovery for all forms of exercise. However, most athletes don't understand the connection between nutrition/hydration and sports performance. As a coach, it is important that you emphasize this connection and educate your athletes on correct habits. This is especially important for Special Olympics athletes, as they are at a higher risk for obesity.

It is vital to educate footballers about the importance of timing their meals or snacks prior to training or competition. Inform your athletes of the risk of eating too close to the time they are to train/ play a match and educate them on the best times to eat and the best foods to ensure they are efficiently fuelled to perform.

It is recommended to have your last meal or snack at least 90 minutes before completing any exercise. This ensures the athlete can digest the food and it will be available as a fuel source for them when training/competing.



You can utilize the nutrition and hydration section in the [Fit 5 Guide](#) to educate your athletes on basic principles. The nutrition, hydration and activity tracker can help your athletes to pay more attention to these elements at home.

Coaching Task

Consider taking 5 minutes at the end of practice to cover nutrition and hydration tips. Educate parents and carers on the information that's shared with athletes so they can help athletes eat healthy at home.



Figure 9: Nutrition Section - Fit 5 Guide



Figure 8: Hydration Section - Fit 5 Guide

Hydration

Water is another important fuel for sports and for life. Drinking the right amount of water is important for your health and can also help your athletic performance. Coaches should be educating their athletes about the benefits of drinking enough water every day.

The [Fit 5 Guide](#) has a hydration section which provides information for coaches about quantities of water that athletes should be consuming, signs of dehydration in athletes, and the best choice athletes can make when looking for a drink.

Coaches should encourage athletes to take responsibility for their own hydration before arriving at training, and after leaving training. Follow this simple guide below on how you and your athletes can keep hydrated before, during and after training sessions.



As a football coach it is so important to help you athletes keep on track with their hydration. Encourage athletes to drink one bottle of water (16-20oz/500-600ml) an hour or two before practice so they show up fully hydrated. Remember to pause for drinks breaks during a training session. We would recommend **pausing every 15-20 minutes** to give your athletes the chance to rehydrate as they are losing water while exercising. Encourage your **athletes to drink one bottle of water** (16-20oz/500-600ml) during a training session to make sure they do not get dehydrated. When drinking, athletes should take many small sips of water instead of gulping it down as this can sit in their stomachs and cause discomfort when exercising! Encourage athletes to drink water after practice to help them recover from their workout.





Football Warm-Ups/Cool-Downs (Injury Prevention)

Warm-Up:

Before beginning any form of physical activity you should always carry out a warm-up. A warm-up should be designed to prepare the body and mind for physical activity and reduces the risk of injuries occurring.

Purpose of a warm-up

- Gradual increase in body temperature
- Gradual increase in heart rate
- Gradual increase in breathing rate
- Increase in blood flow to working muscles
- Increase in range of motion of primary muscle groups for their sport
- Mental preparation

As you can see, warm-ups are extremely important for athletes' preparation for physical activity. Increasing body temperature and blood flow to working muscles is key for athletes to prevent them sustaining injuries while exercising. A gradual increase in body temperature reduces the chance of an athlete sustaining muscle and tendon injuries while an increase in blood flow to working muscles ensures a delivery of important fuels that are required for energy production. In addition to this, warming up helps athletes increase the range of motion they have in their muscles. This adequately prepares athletes' working muscles for the movements they will be performing (stretching, generating power, stabilizing the body, etc.). Finally, an adequate warm-up will mentally prepare the athlete for exercise, this includes increased focus at practice or in competition, positive self-talk, or improved motivation knowing they are physically prepared to exercise.

It is recommended to carry out a **comprehensive, sport specific** warm-up for **at-least 15 minutes** prior to starting training activities or competition.

Comprehensive would involve warming up all parts of the body. Focus especially on the main muscle groups involved in football. Try starting from the top and working your way down!

Sport Specific would involve performing movements your athlete will carry out during performance. For football, you might include kicking movements, changes of direction, accelerations and decelerations.



Warm-ups should include three specific components:

1. Aerobic activity to raise heart rate

- This can be walking, jogging, cycling or skipping.

2. Dynamic Stretching

- Dynamic stretching involves active, controlled movements that bring the body-parts through a full range of motion.

3. Sport Specific Movements

- Skills or movements which are core to your sport.
- Movements that the athlete will complete in training or competition.

See our [Warm-Up and Cool-Down Supplement](#) to see more information on the components of a warm-up.

Training Warm Ups:

Sample Warm-Up 1: 20mx25m area

Aerobic Activity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Light multidirectional jog – 2mins ○ Heel Flicks ○ High Knees ○ Jumping Jacks
Dynamic Stretching:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Squats/Jump Squats ○ Hamstring Kicks (keep balance against the wall or partner) <p>(Strength Level 1 – Fitness Cards)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shoulder + Arm Swings while skipping ○ Walking on tippy toes (stretch calves) ○ Groin dips



<p>Sport Specific Movements:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Passing in pairs – short, medium, long passes. ○ Pass to partner + close down using correct technique. ○ Short 5-10m sprints
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Sample Warm-Up 2: 25mx30m area

<p>Aerobic Activity:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dribbling with the ball around area (1 ball per player) ○ Low intensity – encourage players to use different surfaces of the foot to dribble the ball with e.g. sole, inside/outside, laces.
<p>Dynamic Stretching:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Squat down onto the ball (or as close as you can go) ○ ‘Practice swings’ – kicking technique beside the ball (like a golfer would do) ○ High knees for 5 seconds + groin dips – alternate sides for dips. ○ Calf pumps (‘Downward Facing Dog’ position: bring heels to the ground, lift up, move to ground, repeat).
<p>Sport Specific Movements:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Split group into two – red and blue team ○ Red can only pass to red; blue to blue ○ Players must mix and move around while passing



Match Day Warm Ups:

Sample Warm-Up 1:

Aerobic Activity:

- Players passing to each other – 2 balls going at the same time.
- Cannot receive the ball from the player you passed it to.
- Skipping + Backwards movements when player does not have the ball.

Dynamic Stretching:

- Calf stretch (walking on tip toes)
- Hamstring stretch – kicking movements (start off with low, light kicks and gradually build up to higher, game specific technique kicks)
- Quad stretch – Squats with 5 steps in between each rep
- Groin stretch – groin dips (high knees in-between each rep)
- Hip stretch – lateral leg swings
- Upper body stretching – arm swings while skipping (mix of across the body and arm circles)

Sport Specific Movements:

- Passing to teammate and closing down
- Passing while dribbling and sprint to create space/receive the ball back

**Sample Warm-Up 2: 2 Lines - 10m long (3m apart)****Aerobic Activity:**

- Light jog
- High knees
- Heel flicks
- Skipping

Dynamic Stretching:

- Arm swings & circles
- Walking Lunges
- Squat jumps
- Groin dips
- Walking on tip toes
- Front and lateral kicks

Sport Specific Movements:

- 10m sprints
- 5m backwards run with turn and 5m sprint
- 'Jockey' defending position vs partner



Cool-Down:

When your training, practice or sport session is complete, you should always cool-down. It is just as important to have a good cool-down as it is to have a good warm-up. A good cool-down allows the body to gradually return to a state of rest.

Purpose of a cool-down:

- Decrease heart rate.
- Decrease breathing rate.
- Decrease body and muscle temperature.
- Returns rate of blood flow from the active muscles to resting level.
- Decrease muscle soreness.
- Improve flexibility.
- Increases the rate of recovery from exercise.

A typical cool-down includes light aerobic activity followed by stretching. The aerobic activity should gradually decrease in intensity/difficulty. It could be a short jog/walk at 50% intensity with some stretches, lead by the players, at the end.

Cool-downs are perfect opportunities for coaches to carry-out a debrief session with their athletes and review the session they have just had. Ask your athletes some **open, informative** questions that will make them think about the session and what they would have learned. In addition to the athletes reinforcing the coaching points you have given them, it also gives you, as a coach, the opportunity to see what works for each athlete as an individual.

Open Questions – Questions that cannot be answered with ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, for example:

“What part of the training session did you find challenging today?”

Informative Questions – Questions that provide useful information for you, as a coach, and for the athlete.

“What part (if any) of the training session did you enjoy most today?”



Sample Cool-Down 1:

Low Intensity:

- Starting from the end line, jog halfway up the pitch at a low intensity <50%.

Stretching:

(30 seconds each)

- Side Stretch
- Calf Stretch (Flexibility Level 1 – Fitness Cards)
- Child’s Pose (Flexibility Level 1 – Fitness Cards)
- Quadriceps Stretch (Flexibility Level 2 – Fitness Cards)
- Modified Hurdler’s Stretch (Flexibility Level 2 – Fitness Cards)
- Butterfly Stretch (Flexibility Level 3 – Fitness Cards)
- Tricep Stretch (Flexibility Level 3 – Fitness Cards)
- Seated Rotation Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards)
- Shoulder Rotation Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards)



Sample Cool-Down 2:

Low Intensity:

- Players split into two groups and walk the perimeter of the pitch in opposite directions.
- Encourage the players to pick up any equipment (cones, balls, etc.) they see on their way and return it to the coaches.

Stretching:

(30 seconds each)

- Side Stretch
- Calf Stretch (Flexibility Level 1 – Fitness Cards)
- Kneeling Hip Stretch
- Quadriceps Stretch (Flexibility Level 2 – Fitness Cards)
- Butterfly Stretch (Flexibility Level 3 – Fitness Cards)
- Seated Rotation Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards)
- Shoulder Rotation Stretch (Flexibility Level 5 – Fitness Cards)

Coaches' Notes:

- *Think about the stretches that might be easier to do in your particular setting. There are modifications to most stretches in order to do them standing, seated or laying down.*
- *Develop a standard routine for your cool-down. Not only will it provide an opportunity for you to review the session or provide suggestions leading into the next practice, it will also create a routine you can suggest your athletes to do at home.*
- *Observe how your athletes are stretching. Ballistic or 'bouncing' movements while stretching can cause injury. Stretching may feel a bit uncomfortable but should not be painful.*
- *Use the time at the end of practice to encourage healthy habits at home.*



Common Injuries in Football

Injuries are problems for athletes in all sports, at all levels. It is beneficial for coaches to be aware of common injuries that athletes could experience in their sport.

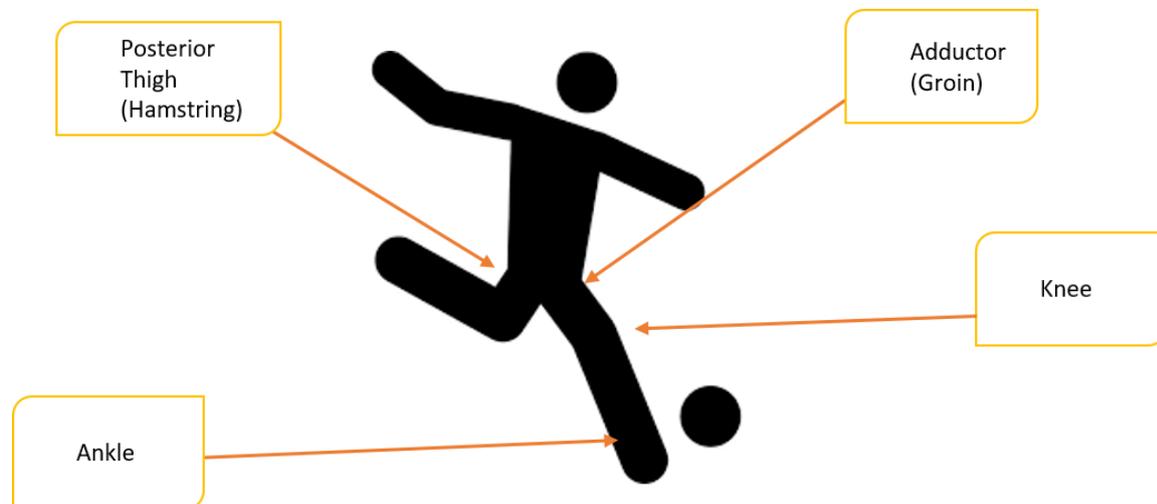


Figure 10: Common Football Injuries

The graphic above highlights five of the most common injury sites for football players. Of these injury sites, the hamstring is likely to be the most common site. **Any injuries that athletes happen to obtain during SO training should be immediately tended to by a healthcare professional** (doctor, nurse, and physiotherapist). If an athlete reports to you with signs or symptoms of any form of injury it is recommended to send them to a healthcare professional.

Appropriate warm-ups and cool-downs can help to reduce the risk of both acute and overuse injuries specific to football. Additionally, strength and flexibility training either in practice or at home can further prevent injuries and improve performance. Specifically, hamstring strength and robustness should be a main focus when trying to prevent injuries.



Football Specific Physical Conditioning

Physical conditioning is the improvement of physical health through programmed exercises. Football specific conditioning is the use of exercises specifically related to the movements used by players to develop football specific fitness. The main components of physical conditioning are cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and skill development. Conditioning training can be completed using just the athlete's bodyweight or by adding additional resistance through bands, weights, or any other resistance-based equipment.

In football, these components can be developed **with the ball** or **without the ball** through various exercises, activities and drills. In the past, coaches would have focused on *without the ball* conditioning in an effort to improve their player's fitness through long-distance running or varying short distance, high intensity runs. We now know that a combination of *with the ball* and *without the ball* conditioning is optimal for footballers' performance.

With the Ball Conditioning:

With the ball or *On the ball* conditioning is one conditioning option for coaches for their players as replicates what players will do while in possession of the ball. Examples of *On the Ball* conditioning are:

- Small Sided Games (SSG)
- High Speed Running (HSR) with football (e.g. Intervals with football)
- Dribbling relay races/obstacle course

Without the Ball Conditioning:

Without the ball or *Off the Ball* conditioning involves building up strength, endurance and flexibility in the muscles that will be used the most while playing football. This can be done through a variety of methods using bodyweight exercises, those with added resistance, or specific running patterns that resemble intermittent game-play. Examples of *Off the Ball* conditioning are:



Resistance band exercises	Core strength exercise	Bodyweight strength exercises	Off the Ball actions
Resisted sprints	Front plank/side plank	Pull ups	Closing down movements
Muscle activation work (using mini-bands)	Leg raises	Push ups	Short, reactive, repetitive sprints
Mobility work	Medicine ball twists	Squats	Extended HSR (>50m)





Fitness Resources

Fitness for coaches [link](#).

In addition to the [Fit 5 Guide](#) and content available online, Special Olympics also offers online Fitness specific courses where coaches can learn more about Fitness, SO athletes, and how the two work together!

The courses include:

- Fitness Coach Online Training
- Fitness for the Sport Coach
- Inclusive Fitness Online Training

Head coaches could consider bringing in a coach to work specifically on fitness relevant to their sport (fitness coach), or they could utilize their assistant coach and have them trained up on the online courses to gain a greater knowledge of fitness and take the lead on fitness training for their athletes. Either way, we would encourage head coaches to use the online learning modules as a way of improving their knowledge and understanding of fitness.

Check out learn.specialolympics.org to find these courses, along with many other available courses, and get learning today!





Basics of Football:

Getting Started:

Safety

Safety is an essential component of all SO activities. This section of the guide will outline safety measures for coaches to consider when preparing for training sessions with their teams.

Before deciding on a training or competition venue you should carry out a *facility assessment* to ensure all aspects of the venue are accessible and appropriate for your players.

Basics to consider:

- Appropriate toilet/changing facilities.
- Access to and from the facilities (be that clubhouse facilities or the pitch being used).
 - Access can include appropriate doorways and emergency exits.
 - Appropriate access to the venue itself i.e. parking in or near the facility or safe drop-off/pick-up location, public transport if required, access for emergency vehicles.
- Playing/Training area quality
 - If on grass – is the field clear of dangerous objects/hazards that may cause injury or harm to players or coaches?
 - If on grass/artificial turf – is the surface appropriate for training/competition?
 - Free from holes in the grass/divots in the turf.
 - If indoor – is the surface appropriate for training/competition?
 - No concrete surfaces should be used for any SO football activities.
 - The surface is of smooth, good quality material with no holes or protruding sections that may cause injury or harm to players or coaches.
- Coach: Athlete Ratio – 1:4
 - This is a safeguarding requirement and must be adhered to by all programs.
 - ‘Coach’ may include chaperone/volunteer, coach assistant, coach, fitness coach, or head coach.
 - Anyone involved with an SO program in any of the above roles must complete the *Protective Behaviors* course on the [SO Online Learning Portal](#).



Player Equipment:

Once the venue has been assessed and is deemed appropriate it is essential to inform and educate your players on the importance of wearing appropriate equipment for training and competition purposes.

Equipment	Image	Description	Required for Training	Required for Competition
Jersey		Must have identifiable player number on the back of the jersey. All team jerseys must be the same with exception of the goalkeeper jersey which must be distinguishable from all other players on the pitch.	x	✓
Shorts		Shorts should be slightly above knee length to reduce the restriction of movement.	x	✓
Socks/Stockings		Socks/Stockings should reach the knee and cover the player's shinguards.	x	✓
Footwear		Footwear will depend on the surface used. For grass or artificial turf – moulded studs/cleats are recommended. For indoor surfaces gum/rubber soles are recommended.	✓	✓
Shinguards		Must be worn by all players (incl. goalkeepers) on both legs, placed between the ankles and knees, and covered by socks/stockings.	✓	✓

Notes:

- All items of jewelry (necklaces, rings, bracelets, earrings, leather, rubber bands etc.) are strictly forbidden and must be removed.
 - Medical alert bracelet or necklace are allowed but must be taped to avoid movement with medical alert information visible.



- Additionally, medical supports are permitted once they do not contain hard surfaces and present no hazard to other players. E.g. Concussion prevention head gear.
- During competition, the Technical Committee could accept any other article of clothing, taking into consideration religious or cultural aspects of the team. The request for acceptance must be submitted in advance, together with a detailed description of the article.

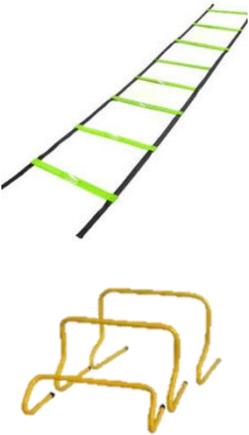
Coaching Equipment:

Some coaches may wish to use different types of equipment when coaching football. This can be impacted by equipment availability or personal preference. It is important to ensure that all equipment is safe to use and will not cause any harm or injury to players or coaches.

Some pieces of equipment coaches may wish to use:

Equipment	Image	Description
Footballs		Footballs are the core piece of equipment required for a football training session. Footballs can vary in size, weight and texture.
Cones		Cones are a coach’s best friend when it comes to organizing areas for a training session.
		Cones or markers can be used to mark out the area being used by the players, to distinguish your playing area from another team’s, and can be used for creating goals/scoring zones.
		Cones are available in a variety of shapes and sizes that can be used to be suit your athletes or training session set-up.



		
Vests/Bibs		Vests or bibs can be used to distinguish players from each other during training sessions or scrimmage games.
Goals		If available and applicable to your strand of football, full-sized goals are the perfect addition to training sessions to make them feel like competition. Ensure goals are correctly secured before using them.
Mini		Mini-goals are a fantastic alternative to 5-a-side/7-a-side and 11-a-side goals when space or large goals are not available.
7-a-side/5-a-side		5-a-side/7-a-side goals are another great alternative to mini goals or 11-a-side goals. Ensure goals are correctly secured before using them.
Ladders & Hurdles		Ladders and hurdles are popular pieces of equipment for coaches in warming-up players, working on footwork and creating fun/challenging activities for players.



Whistle	 A silver whistle with a black cord.	A whistle is a useful tool for coaches to use, particularly in open spaces that you would use for outdoor football training. Whistles can help players to know when to stop, start and can help the coach to have more effective communication with the athletes.
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Preparing for a Training Session:

Many Special Olympics football players will train in shared playing facilities, public parks, or indoor locations such as halls and gyms. With this, it is essential that you are adequately prepared for whatever location you are training in. This includes:

- Knowing all emergency exits and exit procedures.
- Ensuring the facility is safe for all athletes and coaches.
- Ensure there is adequate lighting for the duration you are going to train/compete (be that sunlight or indoor/outdoor lighting).
- If training outdoors, be aware of incoming weather conditions (heavy rain, extreme cold/heat, strong winds) that may be dangerous to train or compete in.
- Be aware of the location of safety equipment for emergency use (e.g. first aid kit).
- Be aware of other users of the facility and identify your designated training/competition location to your players before starting.
- Have a charged mobile phone with reception in the case of an emergency.

Always be ready to make adaptations and modifications in both your program and facility if necessary. Remember, it is always better to adapt the program to the facility than not to offer any training or competition at all.



HOW TO INCLUDE PEOPLE WITH AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN YOUR COACHING SESSIONS

-
- The level of support an athlete requires may vary depending on their ability level.
-
- Use a range of coaching styles, including lots of visual demonstrations and visual cues.
-
- Praise when success is achieved, encourage when not.
(As you get to know your athletes, learn what coaching styles and approaches help them to learn best. Each person is unique!)
-
- Build routine and familiarity into your sessions.
(This can be especially helpful for athletes with autism spectrum disorder and they can feel prepared for what is to come. Changes to schedules, plans and expectations can be especially challenging)
-
- Plan and allow for additional time to offer support or to adjust the plans as needed.
-
- Give clear, concise and consistent instructions and repeat them frequently.
-
- Demonstrate specific coaching drills one element at a time, and progress at a pace that your athletes can manage.
-
- Use trigger words to condense instruction and be consistent with terminology.
-
- Communicate directly with your athletes. Use those who support them to gain an understanding of how to best communicate directly with the athlete.
(They will help you to understand their best way to communicate with them)
-
- Where relevant, provide accessible and easy-to read information, and consider other non-verbal communication techniques such as videos, pictures and demonstrations.
-
- Where applicable pair up your participant with a supportive fellow participant who has the ability to explain concepts clearly, concisely, and patiently.
-

Coaching S.O. Athletes



Special Olympics offers a number of resources to assist new and current coaches with improving their knowledge of coaching S.O. athletes. Coaches can use these proven and effective strategies to improve athletes' learning as well as their overall experience in Special Olympics sports. Remember, our athletes are unique individuals with unique interests, likes and dislikes, and varying ways of expression. Being flexible and open to new insights will ensure that, working together, everyone has a valuable and rewarding experience. This S.O. [Quick Reference Guide](#) to Coaching S.O. Athletes is one of many resources available to coaches on our website containing [Special Olympics Resources](#).



Your role as an SO football coach is to create a fun, friendly, facilitating environment for all athletes that wish to attend. The characteristics of a successful football coach are all *athlete focused*. Important things to note as a coach in any sport are:

- **Create a relationship with your athlete** – the coach-athlete relationship is essential in obtaining buy-in from athletes, gaining trust, and creating a relationship that will last long in your athlete's (and your) mind.
- **Start from the beginning** – It is so important to teach your athletes the foundations of football first. Once these have been mastered then you can begin to introduce progressions (remember – not all athletes will progress the same).



- **Repetition is essential in learning new skills** – what is essential in teaching new skills is to have varying ways of coaching/training/educating athletes. This keeps things fresh, exciting and fun for the athletes.
- **Know your destination before you start the journey** – before starting to help an athlete you must know where you want to get them, be that with a small helpful tip on their turning, or the breakdown of striking a ball, it is so important to know what the point you are trying to make is instead of 'freewheeling' it.
- When giving instructions/feedback, follow the **3 C's**:
 - Be clear (in your phrasing),
 - Be concise (keep it short and simple) and,
 - Be consistent (don't give mixed messages).

Football Principles:

Four Functions:

Football is separated into four main functions,

- Attacking
- Transition to Defense
- Defending
- Transition to Attack

Attacking – This is the team in possession's build up with the intention of scoring. Once a team is in controlled possession of the ball they can be considered to be attacking. *Each team will have their own style of attacking. Some build up, some prefer to go direct, and some use a mix between the two. Each team's principles are different, an example of a team's attacking principle would be to attack with 'width and depth' i.e. players in wide positions of the pitch and high up the pitch to create space for attacking movements.* Immediately when possession is lost, the whole team must react and transition to a defensive shape.

Transition to Defense – The aim of transitioning to defense is to regain defensive structure as quickly as possible in order to deny the opposition the opportunity of forward play and prevent goal-scoring opportunities. Once the defending team regain their set defensive shape, they are considered to be defending.



Defending – Defending is the act of disturbing the opposition’s build up and preventing them from creating scoring opportunities. *Similar to Attacking, each team will have their own defending principles. An example of defensive principles are Pressure, Cover, Balance – This relates to pressure on the ball from one or multiple players, cover from other players to ensure the gap left by the pressing player is not exploited by the opposition, and balance across all areas of the pitch if the ball is quickly moved to another area by the opposition.* Once possession is regained, the team will look to transition to attack.

Transition to Attack – The aim of transitioning to attack is to quickly exploit the opposition’s (potential) lack of organization and defensive structure and to create goal scoring opportunities.

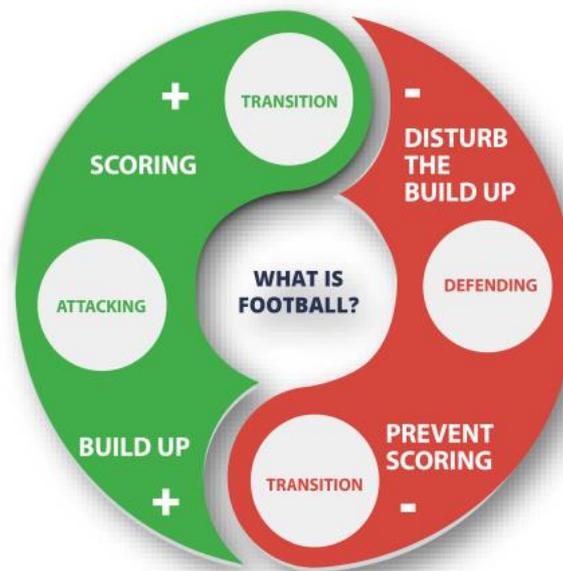


Figure 11: What is Football? 4 Functions of the game - Attacking; Transition to Defense; Defending; Transition to Attack.

Each coach has their own preferred style of playing football. This can be seen week-in-week-out in parks and stadia across the world. We can see this when teams play with different formations, with differing styles of defense, and different methods of attack. Coaches will establish their own preferred through experience and experimentation. Often, a coach has to adapt their style of play to suit their player’s abilities.

For example: Liverpool’s style is a ‘high-press’ defense and look to attack with speed and constant movement of the ball to create gaps in the opposition defense.



The Pitch:

The dimensions of the playing pitch will vary depending on the discipline of the game you are participating in (5 vs. 5, 7 vs. 7, 8 vs. 8, 9 vs. 9, 11 vs. 11, and Futsal) and the size of the pitch available in the facility. The definitions used to describe the pitch (listed in the diagram below) should be consistently used in all programs to help with communication between athletes, coaches, and officials.

The abilities of the athletes is a primary consideration for the size of the pitch.

Younger athletes, those with basic skills or limited conditioning should practice/scrimmage/play on a pitch made-up of smaller distances.

Older or more skilled athletes with better conditioning should practice/play on a pitch with the maximum distances.



Figure 12: Football Pitch Layout and Definitions



5 vs. 5 Pitch Dimensions:

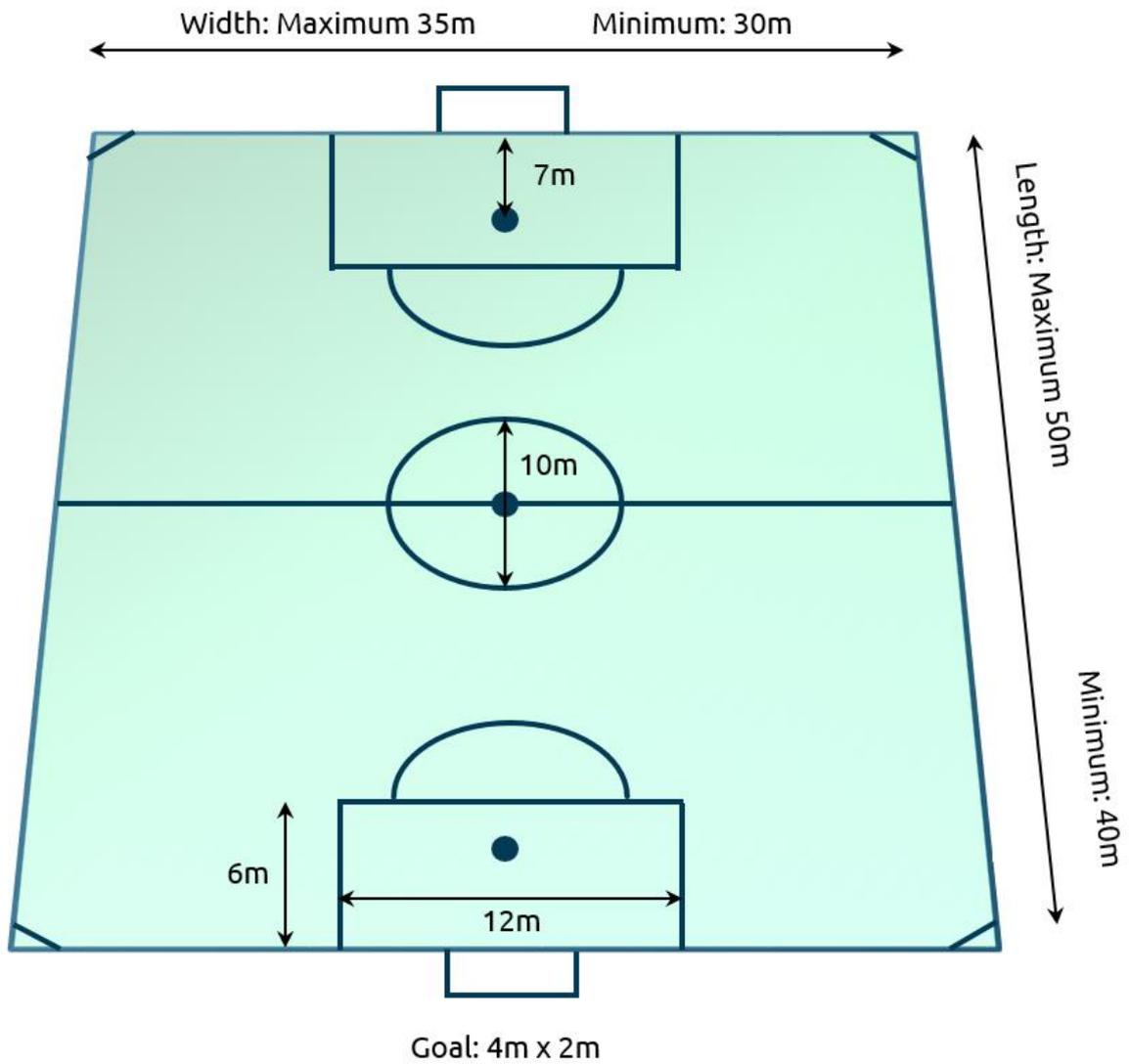


Figure 13: 5-a-side Pitch Metric Dimensions



7 vs. 7 & 8 vs. 8 Pitch Dimensions:

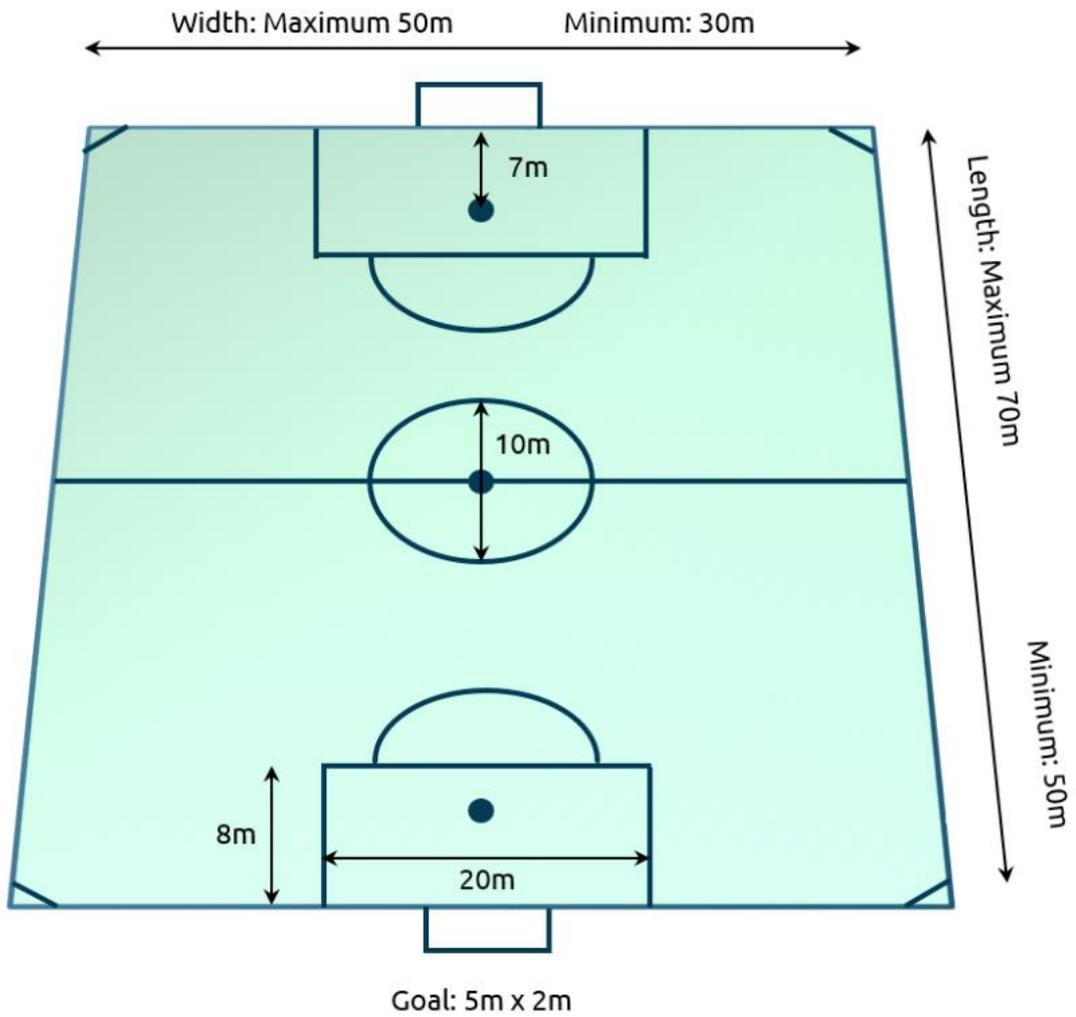


Figure 14: 7/8-a-side Pitch Metric Measurements



11 vs. 11 Pitch Dimensions:

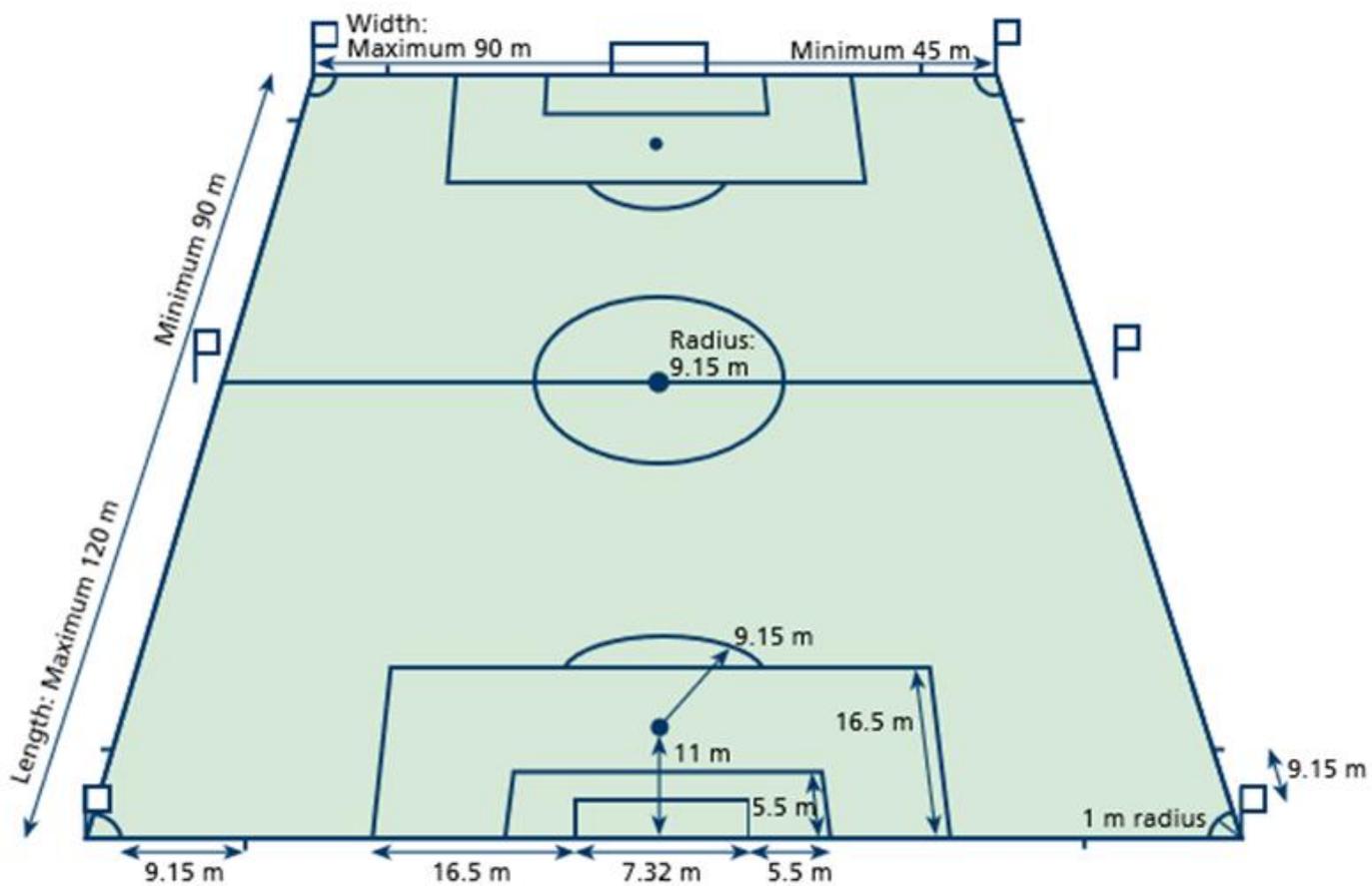


Figure 15: 11-a-side Pitch Metric Measurements



Futsal Pitch Dimensions:

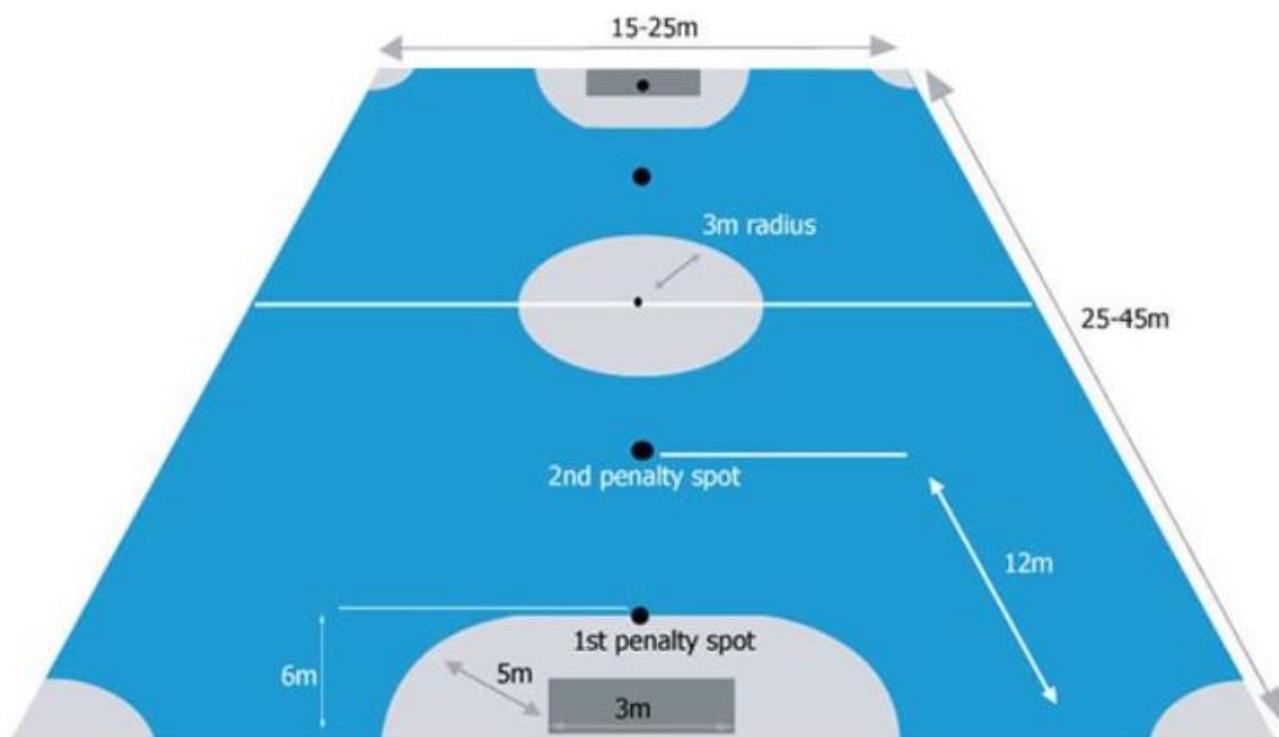


Figure 16: Futsal Pitch Metric Dimensions



Formations and Units:

Units:

Goalkeeper – The goalkeeper is an essential member of every team. They are the only position on the pitch that is required by the [rules](#). The goalkeeper is the last line of defense of the goal and has a number of different responsibilities to outfield players. The goalkeeper may use their hands to block, punch, catch, and throw the ball (provided it is not passed to them by their own teammate using their foot).



Figure 17: Goalkeeper positioning

Refer to [SO Football Rules](#) for all rules related to goalkeepers.

Defenders – Defenders are the line of defense before the goalkeeper. Normally defenders are categorized into either center backs or full backs. Center backs operate centrally on the pitch and are usually in twos or threes. Full backs operate in the wide area of the pitch on the left and right. Full backs can also operate higher up the pitch in a more attacking capacity, these are known as Wing Backs.

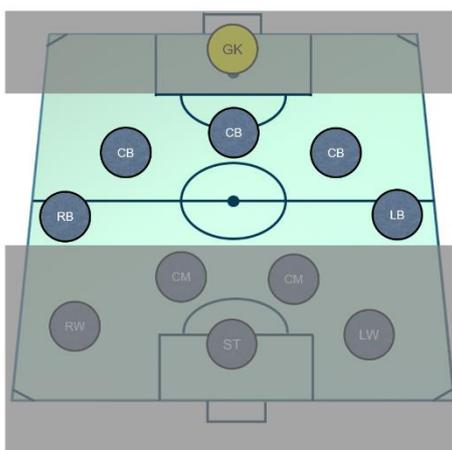


Figure 19: Defenders positioning with Wing Backs

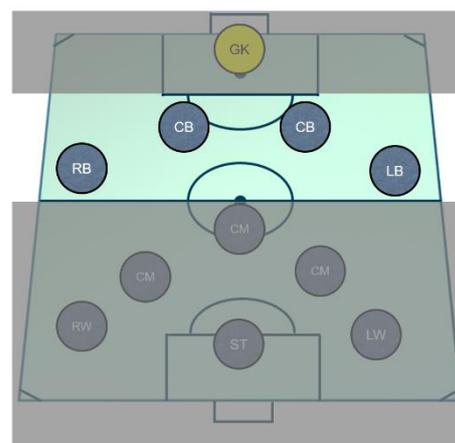


Figure 18: Defenders positioning with Full Backs



Midfielders – Midfielders are the players located in-between the defensive unit and the most forward attacking players. The number of midfielders can vary depending on the formation chosen by the head coach. Most often, the midfield unit will have three, four, or five players. Similarly to the defensive unit, the midfield unit will contain players in central and wide areas. The midfield unit's role is to link play between the defensive and attacking units during attacking play, to provide defensive cover and, maintain discipline in both attacking and defensive play.

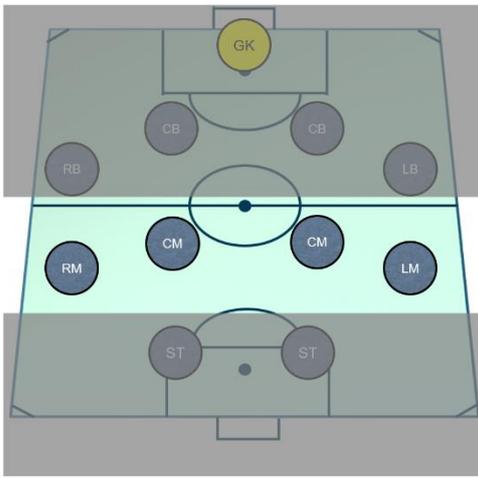


Figure 21: Midfield Unit with 4 players

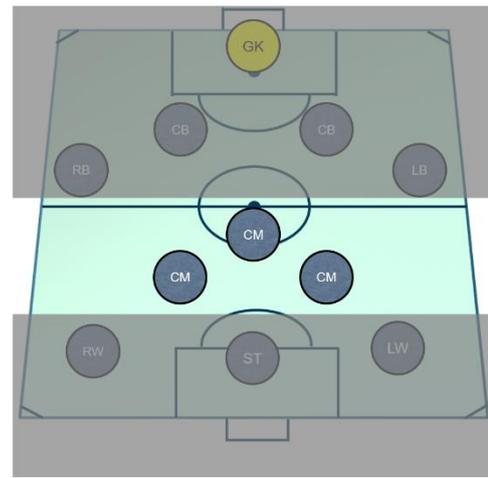


Figure 20: Midfield Unit with 3 players

Attackers – The attacking players are the most advanced players on the pitch. Players in the attacking unit are usually trusted with scoring goals or having a significant contribution to scoring goals (key passes, assists, hold-up play, etc.). The attacking unit are also the first line of defense when the opposition's goalkeeper or defensive players have the ball. This again requires great discipline in their role and with the team's game plan.

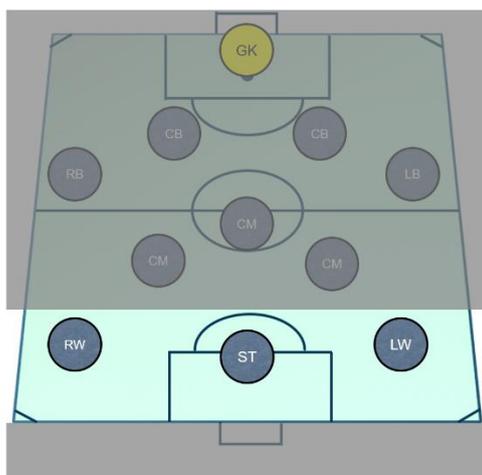


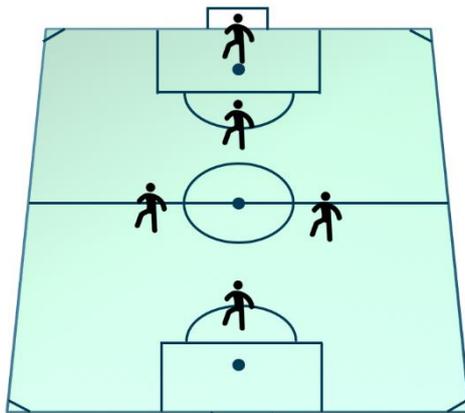
Figure 23: Attacking Unit with 3 Forwards (Left and Right Winger + central Striker)



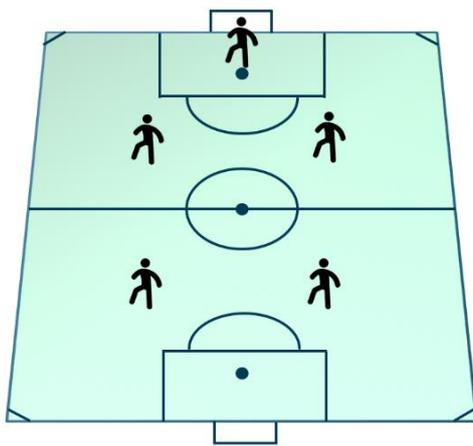
Figure 22: Attacking Unit with 2 Forwards (Two central Strikers)



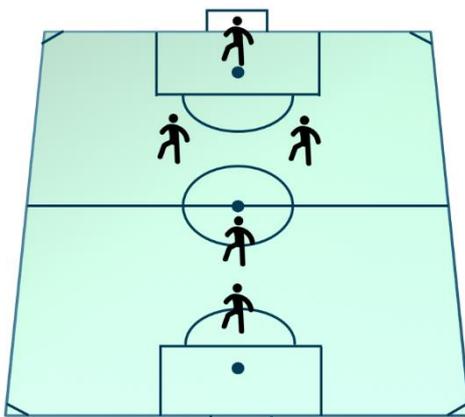
5-a-side/Futsal Formations



1-1-2-1



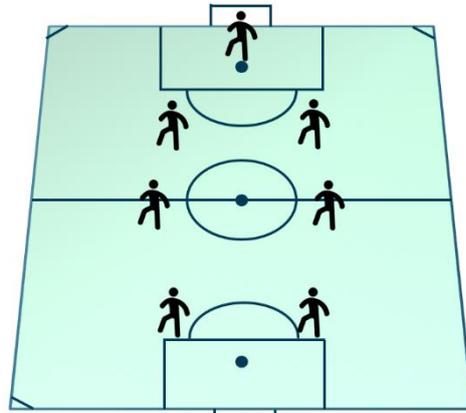
1-2-2



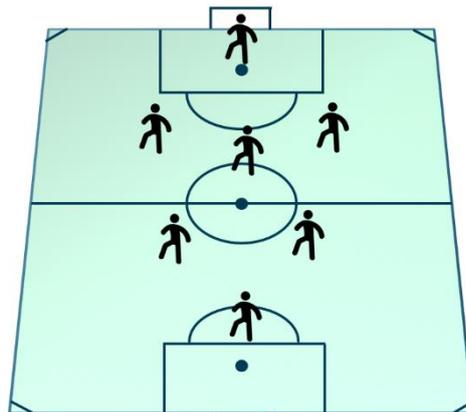
1-2-1-1



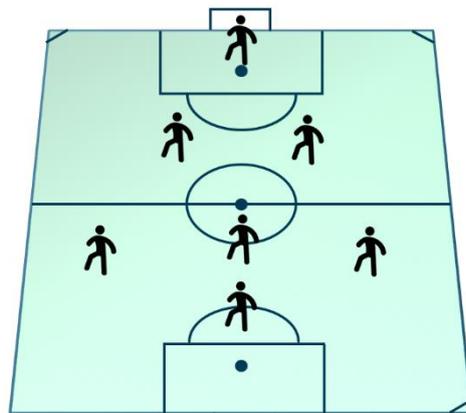
7-a-side Formations



1-2-2-2



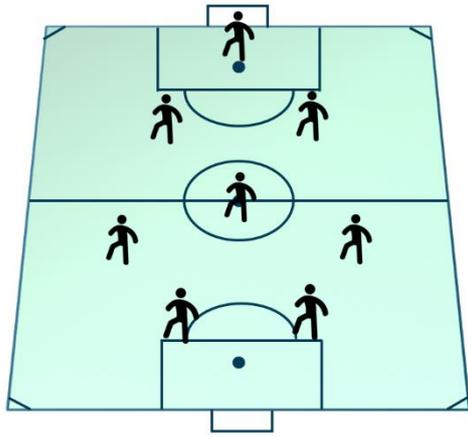
1-3-2-1



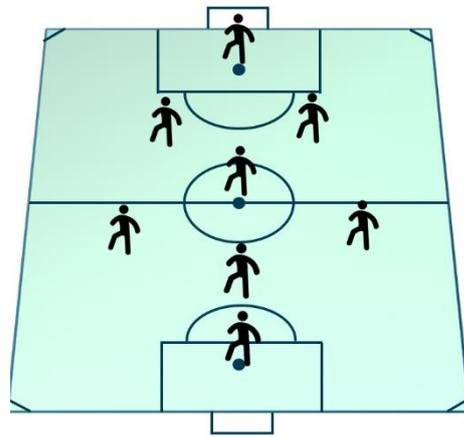
1-2-3-1



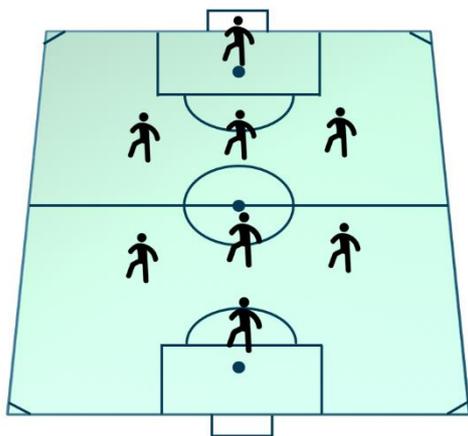
8-a-side Formations



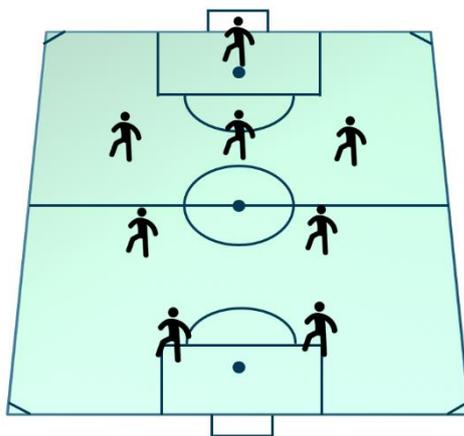
1-2-3-2



1-2-4-1



1-3-3-1



1-3-2-2



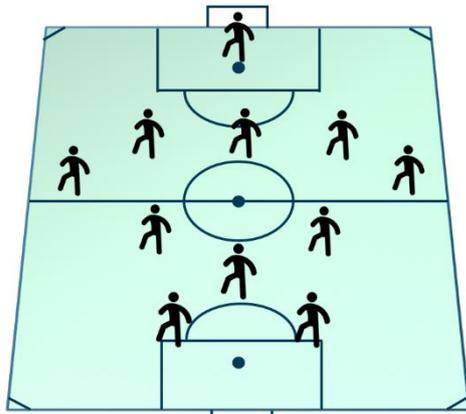
11-a-side Formations



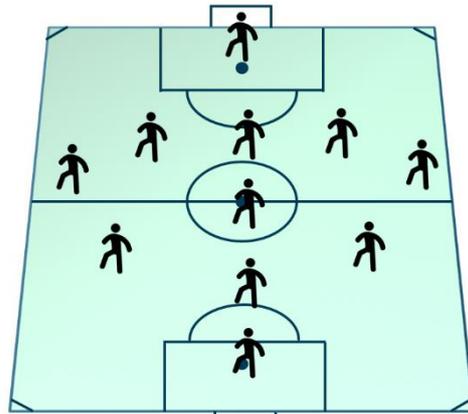
1-3-4-3



1-3-5-2



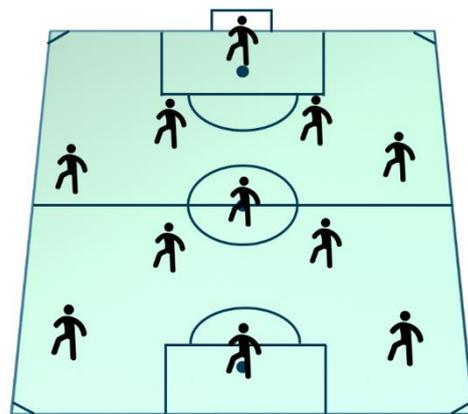
1-5-3-2



1-5-4-1



1-4-4-2



1-4-3-3



Restarts:

Restarts are an essential part of every strand of football offered by Special Olympics. Restarts occur at the start of each half and throughout match-play. It is important for coaches to educate their players on the correct methods to restart play to ensure they do not give away a foul against them.

Kick Off – To begin the first and second halves, and to restart play after a goal has been scored, one of the teams must take ‘kick off’.

The ball is placed on the center mark (spot). One player from the attacking team stand next to the ball. The defending team must move back at least to the edge of the center circle until the ball is played. The player must pass the ball to another player on their team for the game to commence. The ball is in play once it is touched and clearly moves.

Goalkeeper Restart – When the ball goes out of play across the defending team’s goal line the goalkeeper can restart the game with a pass to their teammate from within the box.

- **11-a-side:** The ball is placed on the goal area line (6-yard line). The goalkeeper must kick the ball to their teammate. Their teammate may be within the penalty box, but the opposition player may not enter until the ball has been kicked.
- **5/7/8-a-side/Futsal:** The goalkeeper restarts play by throwing the ball out to a teammate. The ball cannot travel further than the halfway line. If the ball is thrown further than the halfway line without touching any player, an indirect free kick is awarded to the opposing team anywhere on the halfway line.

Corner Kick - When the ball goes across the goal (end) line, having been last touched by a defending team player, a corner kick is awarded to the attacking team.

The play is restarted by a player on the attacking team kicking the ball from inside the corner arc on the side of the field where the ball went out. This can be a short pass or a cross into the box where a number of attacking players will look to score. Defenders must be at least 9 metres (10 yards) from the ball (4.5 metres/ 5 yards in 5/7/8-a-side).

Free Kick - When a foul is committed, a free kick is awarded. Serious fouls (i.e., tripping, pushing and hand ball) result in a direct free kick, where the player taking the kick can score directly from the free kick. Lesser fouls (i.e., obstruction, dangerous play) result in an indirect free kick where the ball must be touched by more than one player before a goal is scored. Defenders must be at least 9 metres (10 yards) from the ball (4.5 metres/ 5 yards in 5/7/8-a-side).



Consult the [Official Special Olympics Football Rules](#) to get a detailed breakdown of what is considered an indirect or a direct free kick.

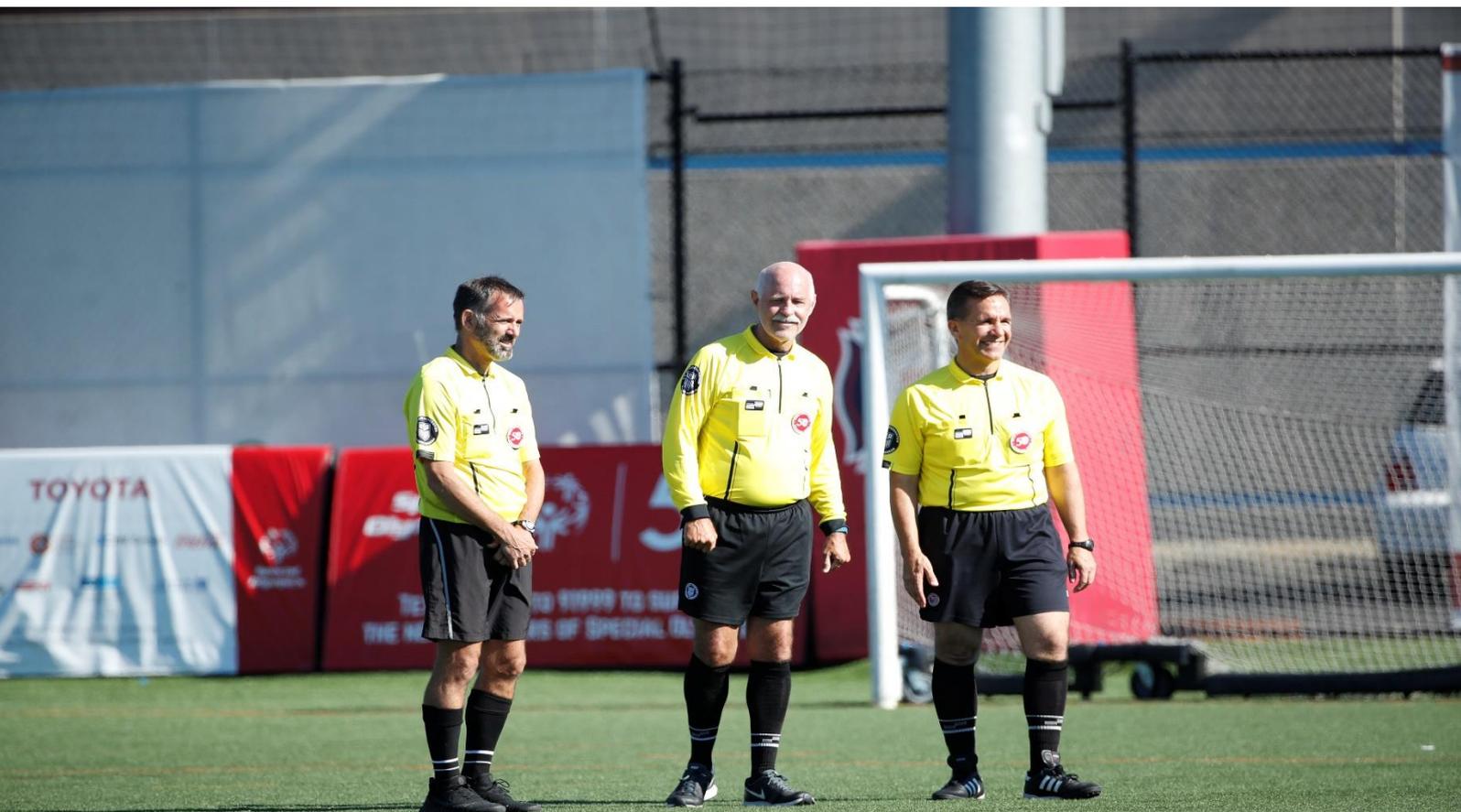
Defending a Free Kick - If the attacking team is close enough to get a good shot on goal, the defending team should make a defensive wall to try and block the shot. In 11-a-side, the wall is usually made up of three to four players, standing 9 metres (10 yards) away from the ball. In 5/7/8-a-side, the wall is usually made up of one to two players, standing 4.5 metres (5 yards) away from the ball.

Throw-In/Kick-In - When a player plays the ball over the sideline, a throw-in is awarded to the other team in 11-a-side match play, while a kick-in is awarded to the other team in 5/7/8-a-side match play.

A *throw-in* is taken with two hands, from behind the sideline, with both feet on the ground and the ball thrown in one motion from behind the head. An improper throw-in—usually caused by lifting the feet—results in the throw-in being turned over to the other team.

A *kick-in* is taken with the ball stationary on or behind the sideline. Defenders must be at least 4.5 metres (5 yards) from the ball.

It is beneficial for coaches to dedicate some practice time to working on restarts to ensure your players are confident in their abilities to efficiently restart game play if the situations arises.





Fundamentals of Football:



FUNDAMENTALS OF FOOTBALL

1

PASSING

2

CONTROLLING

3

DRIBBLING

4

TURNING

5

SHOOTING

6

TACKLING

7

HEADING

8

GOALKEEPER
SKILLS

1

PASSING

Passing is the most common action a player will do when in possession of the ball during the course of a football match. The type of pass can vary depending on the target, the part of the foot you use, the section of the ball you hit, how hard you hit the ball, and if there are any obstacles in the way.

Different types of pass:

- Inside of the foot (on the ground)
- Outside of the foot (on the ground)
- Lofted pass (in the air)
- Laces pass (on the ground/slight in the air)
- Volley (ball in the air as you strike it)

Passing Coaching Points:

1. Identify your target
2. Stepping into the movement, place standing (non-kicking) foot beside the ball.





3. Lock your kicking foot's ankle and keep your standing leg slightly bent at the knee.
4. In a controlled manner, swing your kicking foot at the ball so that the inside of your foot will meet the centre point of the ball.
5. Follow through with your kicking foot in the direction you want the ball to go.

Notes:

To keep the ball on the ground:

1. Keep your head and the knee of your kicking foot over the ball.
2. Do not lean back.

To make the ball go up in the air:

1. Lean back slightly.
2. Meet the ball under the centre point, using your first three toes.
3. Follow through with your kicking leg in an upwards direction.



Visit the Special Olympics Faces of Football Training Ground for challenges to improve your passing. Progress through the levels to refine your passing skills.



Level 1



Level 2



Level 3

Session Plan

Passing

Level 1

Category:

Passing

No of Players

Required:

2

Practice

Length:

5-10mins

Equipment

Required:

1 ball per pair

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve passing and receiving technique.
- Improve communication between players.
- Improve passing ability on both feet.

Coaching Points:

1. Meet the middle of the ball with the middle of the inside of the kicking foot.
2. Lock the ankle.
3. Follow through with kicking foot.

How to:

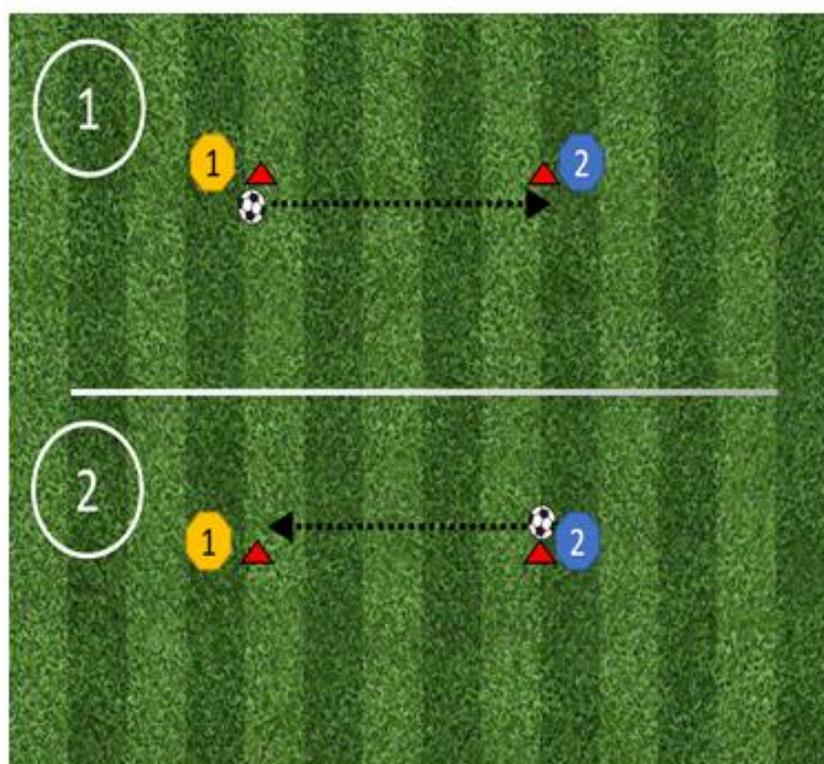
1. Player 1 and **Player 2** stand 5 metres apart. **Player 1** passes to **Player 2** using the inside of their foot.

2. Player 2 controls the ball using the inside of their foot.

Player 2 then passes to **Player 1** using the inside of their foot.

3. Repeat steps 1 & 2.

- Challenge players to use left and right foot.
- Challenge players to use different surfaces of the foot to pass and receive (laces, outside, etc.)





2

CONTROLLING

The purpose of controlling the ball is to efficiently manipulate it in order to effectively complete your next task, be that passing, shooting or dribbling. Controlling a football can be done with any part of the body (excluding the hands and arms). The most common parts of the body used to control a football are the feet, the thigh, or the chest, depending on where the ball is coming from and at what sort of speed.

Efficient controlling of the ball is considered keeping the ball within a close proximity to you and away from the danger of your opponent taking possession from you.



Controlling Coaching Points:

1. Identify the flight of the ball and position yourself where it will land and in a position where you can best control it with the desired part of the body (chest, thigh or foot).
2. Follow the flight of the ball with your eyes and prepare yourself to receive the ball.
3. As the ball comes close to you, cushion the ball with the chosen body part (for example the thigh).
4. As you make contact with the ball, relax the surface of the area you are using to control (thigh) so the ball doesn't bounce off a tight/stiff muscles/body part.
5. Cushion the ball into the space where there are currently no opposition players who make look to steal possession.

Notes:

Sometimes you might have to hold off an opponent when controlling the ball

- Get your body in-between the ball and your opponent.
- Keep a low centre of gravity and a strong core, this makes you hard to push/move.

You might look to shoot or pass the ball first time (in one touch)

- The same principles apply in terms of following the flight of the ball and preparing yourself to execute your desired action.



Visit the Special Olympics Faces of Football Training Ground for challenges to improve your ball control. Progress through the levels to refine your ball control skills.



Level 1



Level 2



Level 3





Session Plan

Controlling

Level 1

Category:

Passing
Controlling

**No of Players
Required:**

1-10

**Practice
Length:**

5-10mins

**Equipment
Required:**

1 ball per pair

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve passing technique
- Improve controlling technique

Coaching Points:

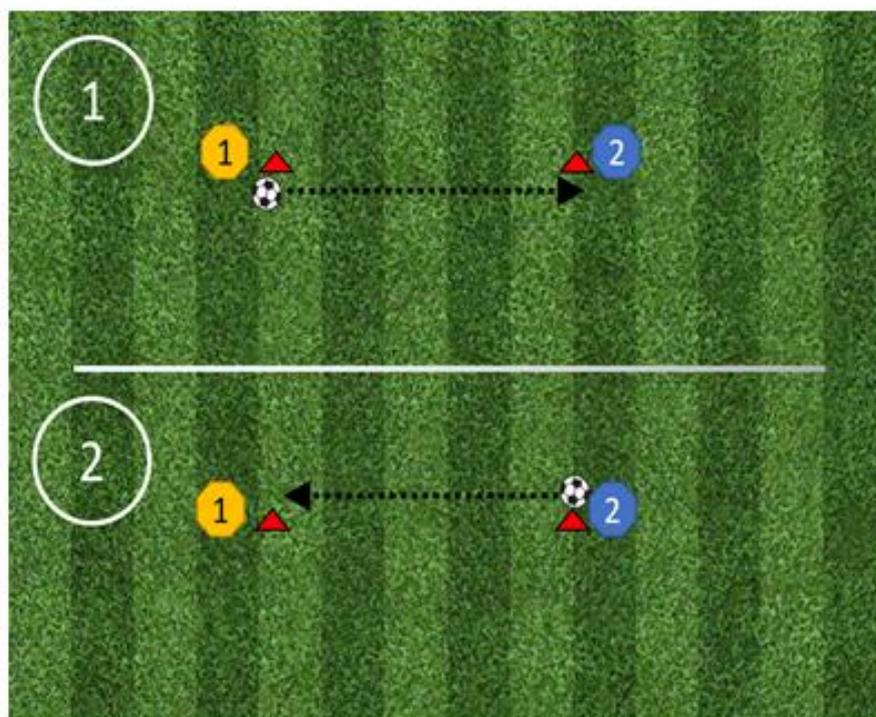
1. Body shape in relation to the ball.
2. Cushion the ball using the inside of the foot.
3. Slightly push the ball forward into space.

How to:

1. Player 1 uses the inside of their foot to pass the ball to **Player 2**.

2. As **Player 2** is receiving the ball they should adjust their body to get behind the ball, and using the inside of their foot, cushion the ball in front of them.

3. Pass the ball back to **Player 1** who repeats the controlling technique.





3

DRIBBLING

Dribbling is done using the various surfaces of the feet and by manipulating the ball in various directions in order to avoid opponents dispossessing you.

Note: The foot has a number of different 'surfaces' or sections that can be used to manipulate a football when dribbling, controlling, passing, or shooting. The surfaces include: The inside of the foot, the in-step (top and side of the big toe), the outside (baby toe), the laces (top of the foot), and the heel.

Effective dribbling depends on where you are on the pitch, where your opponents are, and how much space you have around you. When your opponents are close to you and you don't have much space to dribble in to, it is recommended to use short, soft touches when dribbling to keep the ball close to you. When you have a lot of space in front of you (during a transition to attack for example) you can use longer touches in front so you can cover greater distance at a faster speed.

Dribbling Coaching Points:

1. Using the inside and outside of the foot (big toe and little toe), you push the ball forward in the intended direction.
2. Keeping the ball under control continue to push it softly in front of you using different surfaces of the foot to move it.
3. Use both feet and different surfaces to maneuver the ball where you want it to go.

Notes:

- Opponents will try to steal the ball off of you when you are dribbling, try to dribble with the foot furthest away from your opponent. This means your whole body is between your opponent and the ball, making it harder for them to steal the ball.





- Keep a low centre of gravity and a strong core. This will make it more difficult to push/move you off the ball.
- When practicing, dribble in various directions with sharp turns using multiple surfaces of the feet. Try to avoid dribbling in straight lines or in circles as this is not applicable to a football match.

Visit the Special Olympics Faces of Football Training Ground for challenges to improve your dribbling. Progress through the levels to refine your dribbling skills.



Level 1



Level 2



Level 3





Session Plan

Dribbling

Level 1

Category:

Turning
Dribbling
Balance

**No of Players
Required:**

1-10

**Practice
Length:**

5-10mins

**Equipment
Required:**

1 ball per
player.

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve turning technique.
- Improve dribbling ability with both feet.
- Improve balance and coordination.

Coaching Points:

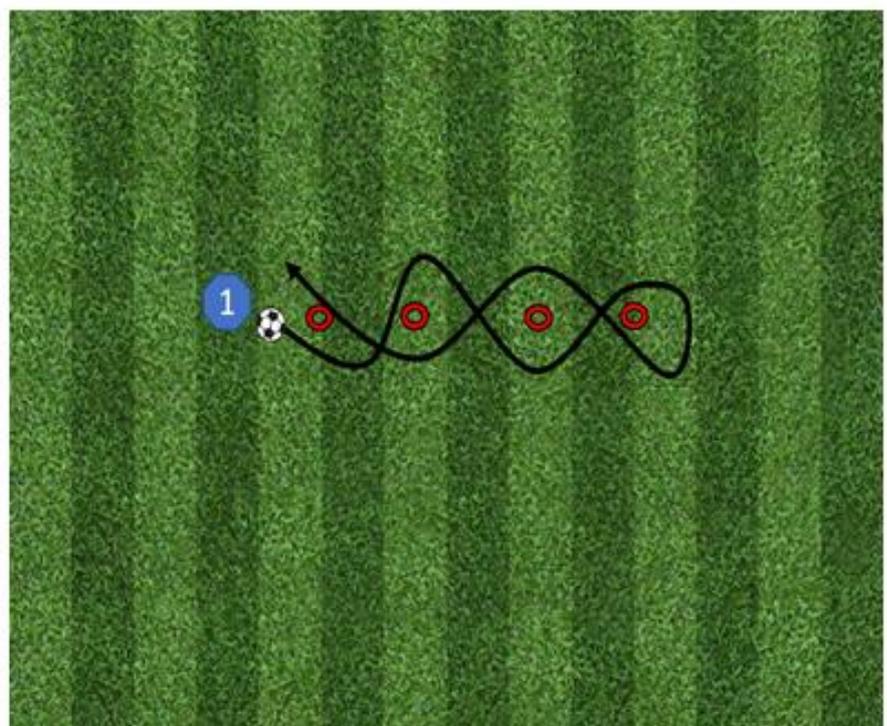
1. Use the inside and the outside of the foot (Big toe – Little toe).
2. Keep the ball close to you.
3. Move the ball slowly with small touches.

How to:

1. 4 cones 2 metres apart.

2. Taking small touches with the inside and outside of the foot, the player moves through the cones in a 'figure 8' shape (like a snake).

3. Once the player reaches the 4th cone, they practice their turn and come back in the same snake style dribbling.





4

TURNING

Turning is the action of changing the direction you are travelling. This can be done with or without the ball and is one of the most common actions performed by a football player. Turning with the ball can assist a player in getting away from their opponent, changing the direction of play, or creating space.

Effective turning is done at speed, i.e. quick change of direction, with multiple surfaces of the foot (inside, outside, studs), and by using your body to deceive your opponent, e.g. pretending to shoot before quickly changing direction.

Examples of Turns:

- Drag back
- Outside cut
- Inside cut
- Cruyff Turn

Drag Back Coaching Points:

1. Player is dribbling with the ball, begin to slow down and place standing leg beside the ball (similar to shooting technique).
2. Place other foot on top of the ball to stop it – place weight through standing leg.
3. Using the studs (bottom of the foot), pull or drag the ball backwards, ensuring it does not go further than 1 yard/1 metre from you (to maintain control).
4. Quickly turn your body and continue dribbling with the ball in the new direction.

Notes:

- Turning is an essential skill for all players and should be incorporated into every training session – this can be done in the warm up, through drills/challenges, or in game play.
- Encourage players to use different surfaces of the foot and to learn different types of turns.
- Encourage players to be 'explosive' in their movements – move the ball faster, move their feet faster.



Visit the Special Olympics Faces of Football Training Ground for challenges to improve your turning. Progress through the levels to refine your turning skills.



Level 1



Level 2



Level 3





Session Plan

Turning

Level 1

Category:

Turning
Dribbling
Balance

No of Players

Required:
1-10

Practice

Length:
5-10mins

Equipment

Required:
1 ball per
player.

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve turning technique.
- Improve dribbling ability with both feet.
- Improve balance and coordination.

Coaching Points:

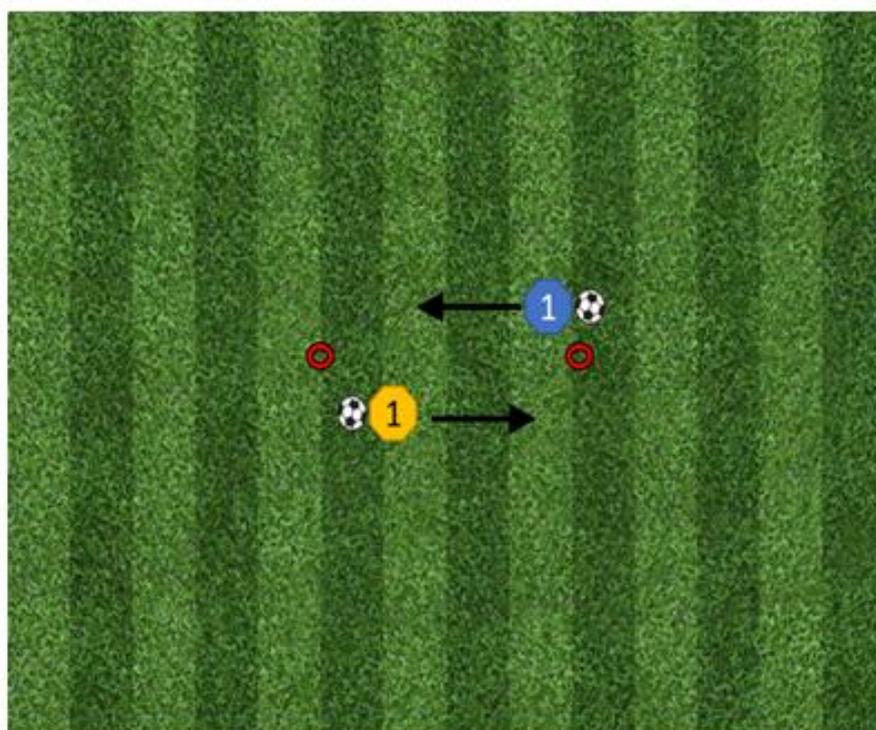
1. Use the sole of the foot (studs of the boots).
2. Take small steps with standing foot.
3. Move the ball slowly with small touches.

How to:

1. Two cones 5-10 metres apart. Players start at one cone with their back to the other cone.

2. Player places one foot on top of the ball. Taking small steps the hop backwards, dragging the ball with the sole of their foot.

3. Using small steps, continue backwards around the cone and change the foot used to drag the ball.





5

SHOOTING

Shooting is the act of striking the ball towards the goal in an attempt to beat the opposition goalkeeper and score a goal for your team. Shooting is often one of the most enjoyable actions players do during a game or training session (who doesn't love to score?!). Shooting is similar to passing in that you can use different surfaces of the foot and different techniques depending on the type of shot you wish to take.

Different Types of Shots:

- Straight/Driven shot (with laces or instep)
- Curled/Curved shot (using the inside of the foot)
- Chip shot (getting underneath the ball and lifting it over the goalkeeper)
- Placed shot (often using the inside of the foot)

Shooting Coaching Points:

*Different types of shooting technique require different coaching points, these points are based on a straight/driven shot.

1. Stepping into the movement, place your standing (non-kicking) foot beside the ball.
2. Lock the ankle of your kicking foot and, using the laces or instep section of the foot, strike the centre section of the ball.
 - a. Backlift with your kicking leg before kicking the ball and following through after kicking the ball will generate greater power in your shot.

Notes:

- Shooting is not just something for forwards/attacking players. It is not uncommon for defenders to shoot during a match so don't exclude them when it comes to shooting practice.
- Practice shooting:
 - From different positions on the pitch,
 - With different types of service (passes into the player shooting),





- With different starting positions (e.g. Back to the goal so the player must turn),
- Make sure to practice shooting when the ball is off the ground (a volley).

Visit the Special Olympics Faces of Football Training Ground for challenges to improve your shooting. Progress through the levels to refine your shooting skills.



Level 1



Level 2



Level 3



Session Plan

Shooting

Level 1

Category:
Shooting

**No of Players
Required:**
1

**Practice
Length:**
5-10mins

**Equipment
Required:**
3 balls per
player.

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve shooting technique.
- Improve shooting ability on both feet.

Coaching Points:

1. Approach the ball and place the standing leg beside the ball.
2. Meet the middle of the ball with the 'laces' of the kicking foot.
3. Follow through with kicking leg.

How to:

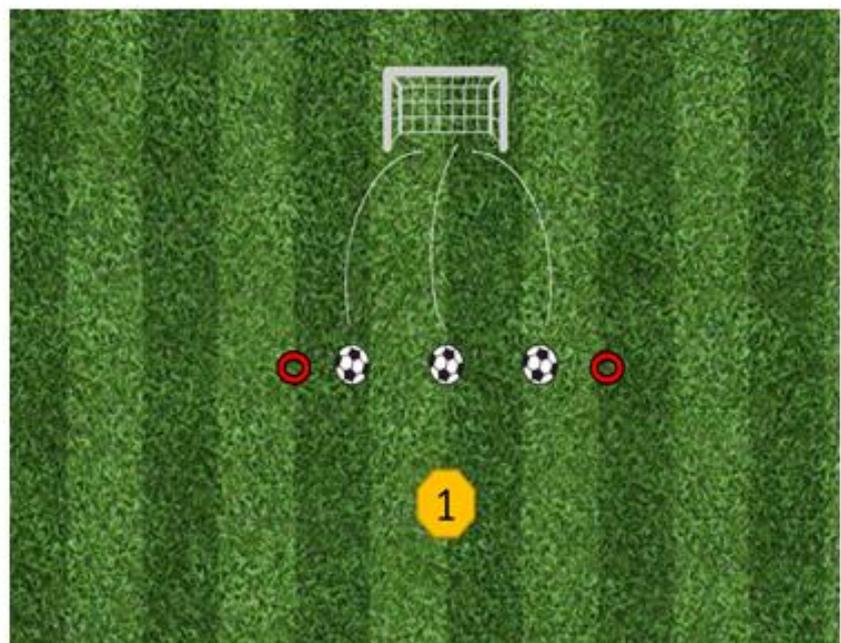
1. Place 3 footballs 5-10 metres away from the goal.

2. Player 1

approaches the balls and using good technique shoots the balls into the goal.

3. Award 1 point for each goal scored.

- Award 2 points for scoring using the players less-dominant foot.





6

TACKLING

Tackling is an important part of the game in order to regain possession, stop opposition attacks and starting your own attacks (transitioning).

The most important part of tackling is that you win the ball before touching the opposition player (unless shoulder to shoulder).



Under no circumstances should a player leave the ground when tackling or attempt a tackle in a lunge style motion. As well as this, tackles that are made with the players' studs facing up towards the opponent will be considered foul play and could result in a booking and a free-kick to the opposition.

Tackling Coaching Points:

The same basic coaching points apply to all types of tackles:

1. Assess the position and movement of the ball.
2. Assess where your opponent is and their movement.
3. Keep your eyes on the ball at all times.
4. Commit to the tackle (if you go in with half-effort you could hurt yourself or your opponent with poor technique).
5. Use your closest foot to the ball so you don't have to turn your whole body/go across your body to make the tackle.



7 HEADING

Note: Different regions and National Governing Bodies (NGB) have different rules around players heading the ball, particularly young players. You should consult your NGB's protocol to heading before you implement it with your players.

Heading the ball is a skill utilized by all players across the pitch to pass, control, shoot and clear the ball. It is important that players master the skill of heading with correct technique to ensure they do not injure themselves or anyone else on the pitch.

Heading Coaching Points:

1. Watch the flight of the middle of the ball with their eyes.
2. Position themselves slightly side-on for contact with the ball.
3. Jump at an appropriate time to ensure they meet the ball in the air.
4. Keep their eyes open and their mouths closed during the whole process.
5. Connect with the center of the ball with their forehead and push their neck forward as they connect with the ball.



Note: When challenging for the ball in the air there is the potential for a clash of heads between players. Head injuries are extremely serious and should be attended to immediately by trained healthcare professional. If there is a suspicion of a serious head injury from a player they should be removed from play and brought through the concussion protocol from their NGB.

Special Olympics has established a partnership with CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) to run their HEADS UP concussion awareness training for sports coaches which is available on our [Special Olympics Online Learning Portal](#). It is recommended that all coaches carry out this training before beginning their coaching journey.



8

GOALKEEPER SKILLS



The Basics:

Communication – The goalkeeper is the one player on the pitch who will always have play in front of them. They are in a position to communicate with their teammates on where to move to, who to pick up, when to press, and dangerous areas to be aware of.

Communication between a goalkeeper and their teammates is vital, particularly when defending, as miscommunication can result in an error and potentially conceding a goal.

Communication on the pitch is normally verbal (talking) or non-verbal (pointing, gesturing, or body shape).

Table 1: Examples of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication for Goalkeepers

Verbal	Non-Verbal
“Goalkeeper’s ball”	Pointing in the direction where you want your teammate to go.
“Away”	*Clapping hands* can indicate a teammate has done something well OR to show encouragement.
“Push up”	Open body shape to allow you to receive a pass and play off of your first touch.

Positioning – A goalkeeper’s positioning on the pitch can have a huge impact on how their own team and the opposition will play.

- **In Possession:** The goalkeeper is another player on the pitch, this means they should be used when their team is in possession of the ball. Goalkeepers should be keeping up with play and not standing on their goal line when the ball is up the other end of the pitch. It is



important that the goalkeeper does not stray too far up the pitch and risk leaving the goal open for the opposition to attempt to score.

- **Out of Possession:** The goalkeeper should be disciplined and following play. The goalkeeper should be shifting to the side of the goal that the ball is on along with their teammates in front of them.

In and out of possession, the goalkeeper should be aware of their surroundings and the location of their goal to ensure they get their positioning correct. This should include:

- Distance to both posts
- Distance to the goal line
- Distance between the goalkeeper and their defenders
- Location in/out of the goalkeeper's box.

Shot Stopping – Shot stopping is what most observers will think about when you mention a goalkeeper. Shot stopping is what we would call a 'save' or 'block' from the goalkeeper, which has prevented an opposition player's attempt at scoring from going into the goal.

Shot stopping is normally done by catching the ball, parrying the ball, or blocking it with other parts of the body such as the arms, legs or feet.

- **Catch** – Goalkeepers should catch the ball when it is appropriate to do so. Often this will be when a shot is travelling at an appropriate speed to safely hold the ball without fear of letting it slip out of their hands.
 - **Common catch technique – The 'W'**



- **Parry** – A parry is when a goalkeeper is unable to catch the ball and instead palms it away from the direction of the goal (this can be over the crossbar, around the post, or back into play but away from the opposition players).
- **Block** – A block is when the goalkeeper will use any part of their body to get in the way of a shot from an opposition player. Often this can be the goalkeeper's legs, feet, arms or midriff (their core). This involves the goalkeeper making themselves as big as possible and reading where the ball may go in order to block the ball going in to the goal.



Distribution – Goalkeepers must be comfortable with the ball at their feet as they are with it in their hands. For goalkeepers, distribution can come in various forms but the most common are:

- ***Distribution from the feet*** – In modern football, the goalkeeper is an essential part of the build-up play. With this, they should be able to pass the ball with their feet. This can be from goalkeeper to defender, or goalkeeper to midfielder, or goalkeeper to forward.
 - This can also be from dead ball situations or restarts, such as goal-kicks or free-kicks.
- ***Distribution from the hands*** – Goalkeepers are at an advantage over the other players on the pitch in that they are permitted to use their hands, within the box. Their distribution from their hands is as important as their distribution from their feet. This can be underarm throws, overarm throws, or rolling the ball out to a player to start an attack.

High-Balls – High balls can be considered any ball that requires the goalkeeper to reach their arms over their head to catch or punch away. These can be uncomfortable situations for some goalkeepers as they may feel like they are putting themselves in a vulnerable position. However, reinforce that your goalkeeper is at an advantage because they can use their hands and that any unnecessary contact with them will result in the referee awarding them a free-kick.

When a goalkeeper is going for a high-ball they should consider:

- Their starting position and the flight of the ball – *where will I be able to catch/punch that ball?*
- The position of the other players around them – *is my path to the ball clear or obstructed?*
- Their recovery position in relation to the goal – *if I go to meet the ball and miss it, am I still in a position to defend my goal?*

1 vs. 1 – A 1 vs. 1 situation is when the opposition's attacking player is directly challenging the goalkeeper in an attempt to score a goal. The role of goalkeeper in this situation is to force the attacking player away from the goal, to make themselves as big as possible, or to 'smother' the ball (if the opportunity is there).



Visit the Special Olympics Faces of Football Training Ground for challenges to improve your goalkeeper skills. Progress through the levels to refine your goalkeeper skills.



Level 1



Level 2



Level 3



Session Plan

Goalkeeper Skills

Level 1

Category:

Passing
Reactions
Scooping

No of Players Required:

1-5

Practice Length:

5-10mins

Equipment Required:

1 ball per pair

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve passing technique
- Improve reactions to flight of the ball
- Improve scooping technique

Coaching Points:

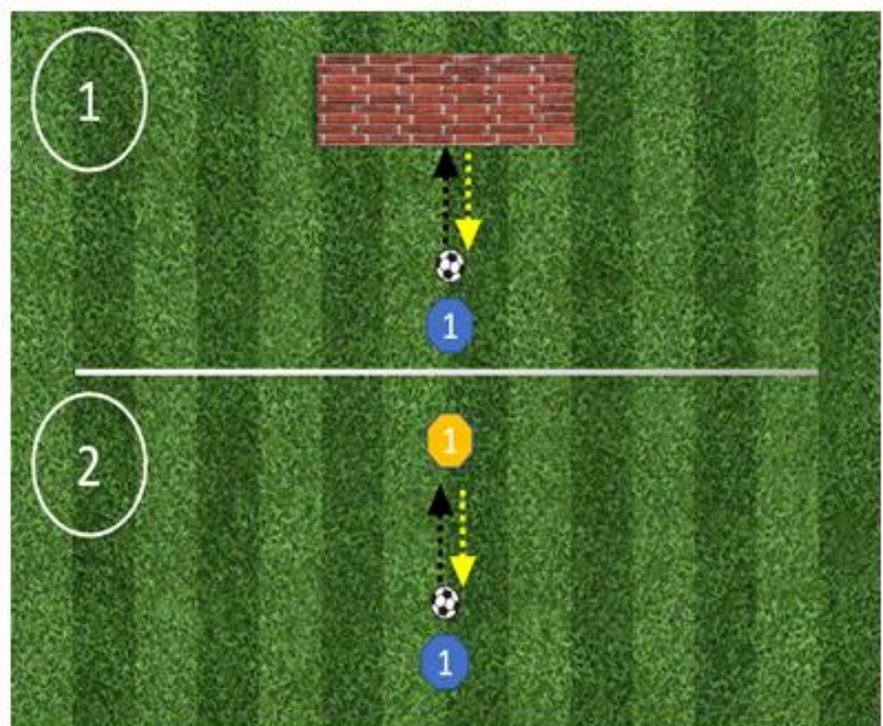
1. Body shape in relation to the ball.
2. Get full body behind the ball.
3. Hug the ball into your chest.

How to:

1. Use the inside of the foot to pass the ball against a 1. wall or 2. other player.

2. As the ball is rebounded (or passed) back, the GK should adjust body position to get behind the ball.

3. Scoop the ball up using both hands and hug the ball into chest.
Repeat.





Levels of Football

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Fundamental	Developmental	Intermediate	Advanced	Active
ABC's	Learn to Play	Learn to Train	Learn to Compete	Recreational
Learn to kick a ball	Basic Skills and Concepts (passing, shooting, tackling, turning, receiving). Introduction of football fitness concepts	Competent understanding of rules and basic principles of play. Building on football fitness.	Preparation for structured competition. Football specific fitness program.	Maintain sport participation – if not interested in competition
Learn the rules (through play)	Decision Making	Can take part in structured training session	Reach a level to compete in regional/international competitions	Combination of principles from all levels
	1v1/2v2 scenarios. Prepare for games/competition.	Introduction of tactical elements. Ability to compete at competition.	Ability to compete at World Games (Physically and Psychologically)	Skill retention and further development
	Learn to be part of a team.	More responsibility/independence for players.	Greater responsibility/independence for players.	Build/Maintain Relationships

Separate Section for those that meet the competencies of other levels but do not want to be competitive



Special Olympics offers sporting opportunities for athletes of all ability levels. This section of the coaching guide will offer guidance for coaches on the information they can provide to their players based off their current ability levels.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- Players are not restricted to one level and one level only. This is a dynamic framework that players can move freely throughout depending on their own personal progression (or regression), goals, commitment levels, and sense of enjoyment in their current environment.
- There may be players of varying ability levels within one SO football team. This emphasizes the need for coaches to individualize tasks and demands on players based on their current ability and the level they strive to reach.

Level 1 - FUNDAMENTAL

The Fundamental level is intended to assist players in mastering the fundamental skills and football actions and to work on the core movement competencies such as *Agility, Balance, and Coordination (ABC's)*.



Figure 24: Football Actions

Objectives: Ball mastery and fundamental skill and movement development.

Key Points:

- Coaches should focus on the core fundamentals – passing, controlling, dribbling.
- Significantly individualised level – ball mastery and technique development.
- Players will learn the basic rules of football through play and games.



While sessions are progressive, and participants should be exposed to each skill, understand that mastering a skill may not be possible immediately. Footballers will learn and improve as they go along. To progress on to the *Developmental Level* footballers must comfortably, confidently and consistently demonstrate the fundamental football skills and an understanding of how to play football (basics rules and principles).

Technical Goals:

- Dribbling in multiple directions using both feet.
- Pass the ball with good technique, good weight of pass, with good accuracy, maintaining good balance and coordination.
- Control a football.
- Unopposed/Semi-opposed passing and receiving.

Game Understanding Goals:

- Understand basic rules of football (through play/games).
- Follow coach's directions.
- Introduction of communication with other players.

Level 2 - DEVELOPMENTAL

The *Developmental Level* is directed towards players still learning the basics of football and developing their skills. The *Developmental Level* is aimed at further developing the basic football skills through play and opposed, game related scenarios. Players will be involved in more team-based activities which will develop teamwork and cooperative communication skills in addition to enhancing their decision making skills in alignment with improving their football actions.

Objectives: Learn to play in a team-based environment with other players of varying abilities.

Key Points:

- Progression of skills learned in Level 1 – introduction of opposition results in education around tackling (safety), shooting, and shielding the ball.
- Advancement of ABC's – turning, jumping, evasion, and contact with others while maintaining good balance and coordination.
- Game-like scenarios – Opposed training in the form of 1v1/2v2/Small sided games to work on decision making skills.



Certain players will thrive in more team-based environments while others will prefer the more intimate smaller group/individualized training sessions. Similarly to Level 1, coaches must be aware of the needs and requirements of each individual playing football. Some may be more advanced in one aspect (technically) than other players, but may require greater attention to other aspects of their game (decision making).

For example: Player 1 can pass the ball with both feet using excellent technique and over varying distances. However, they often pass the ball behind Player 2 meaning they have to adjust in order to move forward with the ball. While Player 2 consistently shows their intention to make the correct pass, they struggle with their execution.

This example shows us two common occurrences in a football team. This shows us that the coach must assist Player 1 with their decision making on where to place their pass and breakdown technique with Player 2 to assist them in improving their execution of a pass. This requires individualized coaching points from the coach relevant to the players' needs.

Technical Goals:

- Competent ability to complete fundamental football actions.
- Introduction of additional technical skills (e.g. turns).
- Comfortable in opposed scenarios (1v1/2v2/SSGs).

Game Understanding Goals:

- Understand how to play a practice/scrimmage game (positional knowledge/roles/responsibilities).
- Working as part of a team – communicating with others.
- The benefits of physical fitness for performance.

Level 3 - INTERMEDIATE

The *Intermediate Level* is an advancement on the *Developmental Level* in that athletes are required to possess the competencies required in the *Developmental Level* before they are considered to be categorized in the Intermediate Level. The *Intermediate Level* is when players will be involved in teams that participate in regular competition. This competition can be within SO programs, Unified® Sports Team, or external to SO completely. The intention for this level is that players are at a competent level to train for competition. This could include



an introduction to tactical elements of football, building football specific fitness, and competing at relevant competitions be that local, regional, or national competitions.

Objectives: Adequately prepare players for competition at their respective levels.

Key Points:

- Competent understanding of football competition rules.
- Basic understanding of four functions of football (Attacking, Transition to Defence, Defending, Transition to Attack).
- Introduction of tactical elements of football for competition.
- Players have more responsibility – leadership.

The *Intermediate Level* introduces players to the ‘Learn to train’ phase in which they are training for a specific competition, be that an upcoming match or tournament. Training now includes some tactical elements in the preparation phase which will require players to have an understanding of the four functions of the game (Attacking, Transition to Defence, Defending, Transition to Attack). Players should also be comfortable and happy to compete in a competition setting, be that a competitive match or a tournament setting. Players will be entrusted with greater responsibility and independence from their coaches. This could be in the shape of carrying out a player-led warm-up/cool-down, player-led team talks, or the players choosing areas of training they would prefer to work on as opposed to the coaches prescribing what they are to do in training.

Technical Goals:

- Proficient execution of fundamentals of football.
- Ability to perform tactical requirements – including fitness.
- Comfortable performing in competition.

Game Understanding Goals:

- Understanding what four functions of football are.
- Knowledge and understanding of team’s system of play – tactical.
- Improvement of leadership characteristics on and off the pitch – communication.

Level 4 - ADVANCED

The *Advanced Level* is for players who are consistently training and playing at a high-level of competition, in a structured team or club, with the intention of performing in a regional or international tournament (such as Regional or World Games). Players should be prepared



physically and psychologically to perform on multiple occasions over a short period of time (tournament structure) and to travel away from home for a number of consecutive days. In addition to these requirements, players should meet the competencies set out in the previous levels in terms of the fundamentals of football, tactical awareness, and understanding of football related fitness.

Objective: Consistently train and compete at a high-level of competition with the intention of competing at a regional or international tournament.

Key Points:

- Learn to Compete – players learn how to prepare for a tournament setting.
- Players are technically, tactically and psychologically competent to compete in a tournament setting.
- Greater responsibility/independence for players in their roles within the team.

Players are at a 'Learn to Compete' level in which they preparing for regional or international tournament settings. Players should have a comprehensive ability to perform the fundamental football actions, communicate effectively with teammates, and be competent in performing in a tournament setting. Coaches can assign greater responsibility and independence to players on and off the pitch to allow for greater leadership opportunities.

'Learn to Compete' attributes can be applied at all levels. Players at the 'Learn to Train' stage can experience competitions but may need greater assistance than those who meet all of the competencies of the 'Learn to Compete' level.

Technical Goals:

- Comprehensive ability to carry out the fundamentals of football.
- Physically (and mentally) capable of performing in a tournament setting – multiple games over consecutive games.

Game Understanding Goals:

- Comprehensive game understanding (tactically, four functions, decision making).
- Knowledge of competition structure and physical requirements.
- Effective communication with teammates and coaches.



Level 5 - ACTIVE

The *Active Level* is aimed at players that are looking for recreational football activity in the form of training and non-competitive games/matches for the intention of keeping fit and healthy, and socially interacting with others. Players will maintain sport participation without having to commit to competition while being able to maintain and develop skills, maintain and develop relationships with peers, and keep physically active for health reasons.

Objective: Provide a football activity for those that do not have an interest in competition through training and non-competitive games/matches.

Key Points:

- Maintain sport participation (physical activity).
- Continue to develop/maintain football actions through training or match-settings.
- For all levels of ability.

The *Active Level* is considered separate from the other *Football Levels* as it is aimed primarily at players who meet the competencies from various other levels but not wish to participate in competitive football. Players considered in the active level can still train with teams which intend to compete in tournaments or other competitions, but the *Active player* does not take part in the competitive games. *Active players* may wish to take part in drills but not participate in the scrimmage/games within training sessions or vice versa.

Coaches should look to creating *meaningful opportunities* for *active players* through facilitating their desire to play and continually develop, without the requirement for participation in competitive formats.

Active Player Goals:

- Be continually physically active.
- Be challenged to continually learn new skills.
- Build and maintain relationships with others.

Important:

This framework is a guide for coaches to assist the development of their players. Players should not be consigned/restricted to one level at a time – the framework provides guidance to coaches on what competencies their players should be meeting and provides a pathway of progression from foundational football skills to advanced competition participation.

Players may possess the competencies of multiple levels at the same time, while not possessing all of the competencies listed in one level. For example:

Joanne – 24 years old – Football player from SO France.

- *Comprehensive understanding of football actions (Level 2 + 3)*
- *Enjoys structured training sessions (Level 3)*
- *Still learning tactical elements of the game (Level 3 + 4)*
- *Understands four functions – learning to implement transitions (Level 3)*
- *Comfortable travelling away from home to participate in competitions (Level 4)*

Joanne possess competencies from a variety of Levels (predominantly Levels 2, 3 and 4). With this information, Joanne's coach can create a training plan for her to improve on the aspects of her game she wishes to improve.

Players should not be considered a 'Level 1' or 'Level 4' player. Coaches should use this framework as a guide to assist their players to improve their football fundamentals, game understanding, and progress as football players and athletes.





Planning and Preparation

Planning is the process of deciding in detail how to do something or what to do before you commence doing it. Planning is an essential part of coaching as it allows you to adequately prepare for the coming season, competition, or training session.

Three reasons we plan:

1. Identify key learning objectives for players
2. Keeps you responsible for the plans you have set
3. Improves player and coach confidence knowing there is a plan in place

Components of Planning:

- Assess athlete ability – facilitate their needs and goals
- Be adjustable – do not stick to a plan if it is not working – adjust the plan to help your athletes reach their set goals
- Reflect – at multiple stages throughout the season – consider if changes need to be made – if so, what changes?

Planning a Training Session:

Planning your training sessions is considered essential in all sports. Not only does it outline the information to be delivered in a session, it promotes good time management skills, presentation skills, and allows for comprehensive evaluation and reflection post-practice.

All training sessions should include a comprehensive warm-up to prepare players for the coming activities and a cool-down to assist their bodies in returning to a normal state. Below is a list of activities that can be included in a training session plan. Different regions, countries, clubs, and coaches have different ways of structuring training sessions and the content that goes into them. It will take time and trying new methods but eventually you will find what works best for you as a coach and for your players.



Table 2: Components of a training session

Warm-Up	Physically and mentally preparing the players to perform.
Technical Work	Refining technique through repeated activities, skills, and challenges.
Game Related Activity (GRA)	Activity that looks like a game with a specific limitation e.g. directional possession game.
Free-Play/ Match	Game/Match/Scrimmage (possibly with a limitations/challenge).
Cool-Down	Low intensity movement and stretching to return the body to normal state.
Debrief	Discussion/Feedback with the players about the session.

Logical Sequence:

When planning a delivering a training session, you should ensure that the session content follows a logical sequence in its delivery. *By logical sequence of instructions, we mean a sequence of instructions that have been designed to be executed one after the other one. For example, when explaining how to pass a ball, you would start with the approach, the part of the foot to use, the section of the ball to kick and the follow through.*

When planning a football training session the logical sequence would be:

1. Warm-Up
2. Technical Work – passing and receiving
3. Game Related Activity
4. Free Play
5. Cool Down



Content Selection:

The components/sections of your training session should align with your team’s learning objectives. *Learning objectives are the goals or intended learning outcomes for the period of time you are planning for.* Each player may have different learning objectives for the season, stage of the season, or each individual training session, but it is good-practice to set learning objectives for the team as a whole to have combined goals for all team members to achieve.

Table 3: Sample of Individual and Team Learning Objectives for a football season

Individual Learning Objectives	Team Learning Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the role and responsibilities of a right-back. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and understand the team’s own system of play (formation, style of football, attacking/defending style).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand how different techniques when striking the ball will impact how it moves along the ground/in the air. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify best methods of communication between teammates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize and explain where technical work in training will apply to a match setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an open system of player-led reflection on performance.

Learning objectives are like the goals you set for your players and team at the start of the season (see [Psychology section](#)). In addition to these goals, you will have objectives for different stages of the season and for each training session depending on the performance of your team. Your training sessions should be based around the objective you set (*Session Objective*), this can be based around your team’s learning objectives or may be more refined to work on an aspect of football that you noticed needs some work.

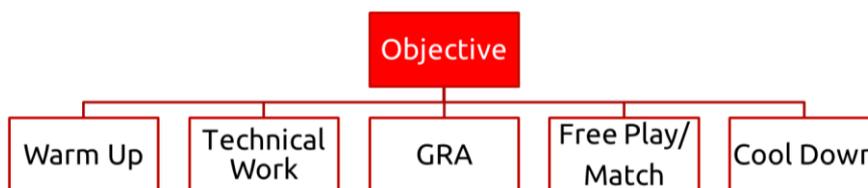


Figure 25: Components of a training session based off of a Session Objective

Coaching Tip

When selecting what you are going to include in your training session you should consider if it is RIP:

- Relevant to the players on your team and their needs
- In-line with the session objective
- Progressive in nature – can be progressed/regressed if needed

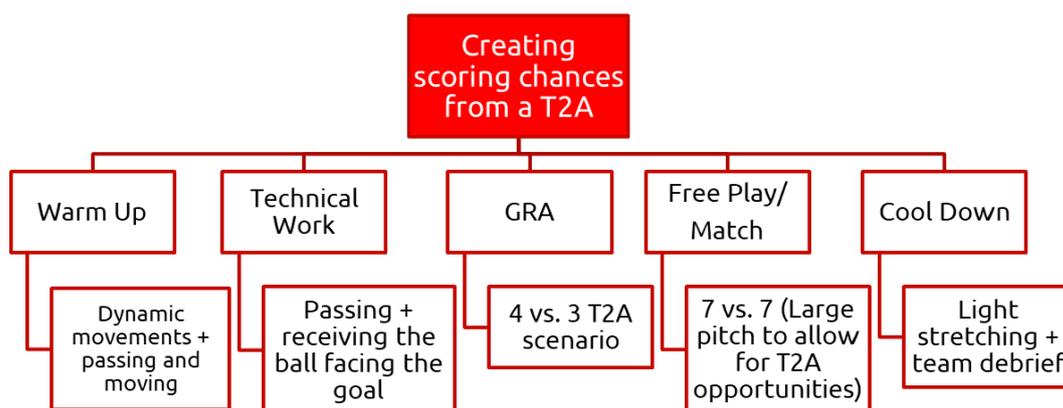


Figure 26: Training session components based off of a Session Objective

Try to stay consistent with the activities you are prescribing for your players. It can be difficult to understand all the key principles you are trying to get across if you change from attacking to defending each week. Block off some time to work on defensive work, this allows your athletes to gain an understanding of what you want from them. Once they have this understanding you can move on to working on attacking functions. Once the core principles are understood by the players, then it will be easier to change up the focus of your training sessions more regularly.

Time Management:

Time management is a life-skill but for coaches it is one of the most essential skills to have and develop. You are often restricted to a specific amount of time with your players so every minute counts!

Planning the time designated to activities in a training session can really help the flow and reduce the panic of having to shorten certain activities or abandon them completely. Of course exceptions can be made when unforeseen events occur such as injuries, player/coach delays, discussions with players, etc.

Certain sections of a training session may require more/less time than designated in your session plan, however, it is essential that coaches are flexible with their time management of training sessions. Often it is the case that sections of a training session can go on longer than intended, or specific skills require further attention from the coach. If a coach is required to shorten or remove a section of training to accommodate other sections, this is no problem, simply progress to them at another point in time. However, coaches should always try to include some form of match/game at the end of a training session to resemble a competitive match.

Table 4: Time designated to sections of a 60 minute training session

1.	Warm-Up	10mins
2.	Technical Work – passing and receiving	15mins
3.	Game Related Activity	15mins
4.	Free Play	15mins
5.	Cool Down	5mins





**Special
Olympics**

Date:

Session Planner

Practice Focus

Warm Up _____ Minutes

Aerobic	Dynamic Stretches	Basics & Conditioning

Transition

Drills/Skill Building _____ Minutes

Notes



Gallagher

**Special
Olympics**



Transition

Game Play

_____ Minutes

Notes

Cool Down

_____ Minutes

Fitness Lesson of the Day

Tips & Reminders for Athletes



Planning a Season:

Planning out your Special Olympics football season prior to the season beginning will assist you with setting goals and learning objectives for yourself and your players, setting durations for season phases (pre-season, in-season, post-season, off-season), and for organising competitions/tournaments for your team.

Each region, program, and team will have different season lengths, number of competitions, frequency of competitive games, and frequency of training sessions. This means that each coach will have a different season to plan for. Here are some helpful tips to help you plan your football season.

1. Identify how long your program is permitting for the football season.
2. Start from the end and work backwards.
3. Identify how many sessions per week you will train.
4. Identify key skills that your athletes should learn and a program for development for those skills.
5. Allow your plan to adjust depending on the circumstances.

It is recommended to break your season into phases. This allows you to plan for each phase separately as they will require different demands from your players.



Pre-Season: *Pre-season* is the phase just before the competition season begins (*In-Season*). The aims of pre-season are to master the fundamental skills of the sport and to build-up athlete's fitness levels in preparation for the coming season. Included in fitness levels would be mobility, flexibility, stability, and aerobic and anaerobic capacity. One of the most important parts of *pre-season* training is to **gradually** increase an athletes training load. This helps to prevent injuries occurring from overloading them with fitness work too early after their *off-season*.

In-Season: The *In-season* or *competition-season* is the stage where your athletes will compete in competitions, tournaments, events and games. Your athlete's in-season will vary depending on the sport, but this can range from eight weeks to 6 months, or sometimes longer. The aims of the *in-season* phase are to maintain fitness levels in the athletes and to achieve peak performance.

Post-Season: The *post-season* is a short phase after the final competition of the *in-season* has taken place. The *post-season* usually consists of two weeks of reduced training frequency and intensity where the athletes will wind-down after their competition season. The aim and priority of the *post-season* is to allow the athletes to have fun and enjoy their sport without the pressure of upcoming competition.

Off-Season: The *off-season* is the period of time after the *post-season* phase has ended and before the next *pre-season* phase is to begin. This is the stage when athletes will not train for this particular sport but may train and compete in other sports which seasons take place during their normal sport's *off-season*. For example, an athlete that may swim during the spring and summer seasons of the year and downhill ski during the winter season.





Table 5: Components of a training session per stage of the season

Pre-Season	In-Season	Post Season
<p>Warm Up</p>	<p>Warm Up</p>	<p>This is where the players will have the opportunity to reflect on their achievements- it provides players time to rest and do other activities.</p>
<p>Technical Work –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamentals of football <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing • Controlling • Dribbling • Shooting • Tackling • Heading • Communication 	<p>Technical Work –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamentals of football <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing • Controlling • Dribbling • Shooting • Tackling • Heading • Communication 	<p>Encouraging good nutrition and sleep is important not only in both Pre/Competition Season but also during the Post Competition season</p>
<p>Fitness Work –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Fitness Levels • Football Specific fitness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anaerobic + Aerobic • Short, repeated sprints • Change of direction • Accelerations • Decelerations • Reactive work 	<p>Fitness Work –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining Fitness Levels • Football Specific fitness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anaerobic + Aerobic • Short, repeated sprints • Change of direction • Accelerations • Decelerations • Reactive work 	<p>Reduce training load</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce frequency of training • Reduce length of training sessions • Avoid fitness specific work
<p>Tactical Foundations –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attacking • Defending • Transitions (To attack; To defense) 	<p>Tactical Specifics –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactive tactical work • Refining knowledge • Changing some principles 	<p>Facilitate player-led training sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes athlete leadership • Empowers players
<p>Recovery –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cool-Down • Sleep/Rest • Recovery methods - stretching 	<p>Recovery –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimal recovery after competition 	<p>Prioritise fun sessions full of games and activities</p>
<p>Talk about nutrition/hydration etc.</p>	<p>Talk about nutrition/hydration etc.</p>	

Divisioning +Plus

+ Divisioning plus establishes, by sport, a new model of sports operations for International competitions of SO, modernizing the divisioning strategy, and bringing the procedures and formats of competitions closer to those established in conventional sport.

+ Divisioning plus also, incorporates new processes and protocols to enhance the physical and mental readiness of our athletes, and to improve the whole competition experience, ensuring that athletes can perform at their best with equally matched competitors.

Aims of Divisioning +plus:

	Prime Sport Operations	Enhanced Athlete Experience
New and modern models of Divisioning	Well trained TD's/Officials	Professional Sport's Pre & Post Competition protocols
IF's formats of competition, including divisioning and final stage for a more competitive and exiting experience	IF support	Fitness, athlete's readiness & Performance Stations
Optimum schedule for performance	Sport information Stations – Coaches App	Improved Awards Ceremonies experience
Gender & ability equality	Improved flow layouts	Media Engagement (Mixed Zones, Broadcast ops)
Revamped quota process	Enhanced Venue Environment (athlete centered)	Sport stories on effort/personal best/performance
System that requires better preparation of athletes but also provided more information to allow it	Positive workforce culture	IF Sport Presentations
Collecting and processing Statistics	Venue Look/Sound	Adequate warm up & calm down opportunities during competition
New model of recognition for great performances	Enhanced Venue Environment (Fan experience)	Scheduled Training sessions
Personal Best focus in sports training/health	High quality sport equipment	Coach Qualification Standards
New global standards of events / categories / levels by sport	More detailed Data pre games available for a better planning	Unified Sports Competition Protocol
National Federation support	Evaluation & TOK stablished process	
Proper equipment and training environment		
Athlete/Coach commitment to the competitive experience		



World Games Divisioning:

+ A team qualified for World Games has to have trained together, at least one year prior to the games, and can guarantee to have at least 40 weeks of training, including a minimum of 2 sessions per week.

Each competition will offer places to programs using a quota-based operation. The quota sizes will vary depending on the category of the game (7-a-side, Futsal for World Games).

Competition Format:

There are three official competition formats:

- + 8 Teams (minimum number required to open event)
- + 12 Teams
- + 16 Teams (ideal format)



7 a-side (16 Teams)

- + Divisioning by Group Stage: Four (4) groups of Four (4) teams each
- + After Group Stage divisioning, teams will be reallocated into three (3) divisions for final standings
 - o Division 1 - (6 teams)
 - o Division 2 - (5 teams)
 - o Division 3 – (5 teams)
- + Division 1
 - o Division 1 will be comprised of the four (4) teams in 1st position within each group and the two (2) teams in 2nd position.
 - o Defining positions 1st – 6th
 - Teams will be allocated into two (2) groups of three (3) as follows:

Round Robin – Group 1
+ Team in 1 st position - Group A
+ Team in 1 st position - Group B
+ The 2 nd best finish of Group A & Group B
Round Robin – Group 2
+ Team in 1 st position - Group C
+ Team in 2 nd position - Group D
+ The 2 nd best finish of Group C & Group D
Each group will play a round robin, and then will play the following format to determine final standings:
+ Round Robin – Group 1 1 st position vs. Round Robin - Group 2 1 st position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Determines 1st & 2nd places respectively
+ Round Robin – Group 1 2 nd Place vs. Round Robin – Group 2 2 nd Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Determines 3rd & 4th places respectively
+ Round Robin - Group 1 3 rd Place vs. Round Robin Group 2 3 rd Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Determines 5th & 6th place respectively

+ Division 2

- o Division 2 will be comprised of the two (2) remaining teams in 2nd position from the group stage and the three (3) best teams in 3rd position
- o Defining positions 1st – 5th

The best 2nd position of both remaining places with a bye for the next game

+ Semi Final 1 Other 2 nd position vs. the third best 3 rd place
+ Semi Final 2 Best 3 rd position vs. middle team in 3 rd position
+ Semi Final 3 Winner of SMF2 vs. 2 nd with a bye
+ Loser of Semi Final 1 (5 th place)
+ Winners of Semi Final 1 vs. Semi Final 3 to determine 1 st and 2 nd place
+ Losers of Semi Final 2 vs. Semi Final 3 to determine 3 rd and 4 th place

+ Division 3

- o Division 3 will be comprised of the remaining lowest 3rd place of the group stage and the four (4) teams in 4th place
- o Defining positions 1st – 5th

Lowest 3rd place team with a bye for the next game

+ Semi Final 1 Team in lowest 4 th position vs. Team in best 4 th position:
+ Semi Final 2 Middle 4 th position vs. Middle 4 th position
+ Semi Final 3 Winner of Semi Final 2 vs. 3 rd with bye
+ Loser of Semi Final 1 (5 th place)
+ Winners of Semi Final 1 vs. Semi Final 3 to determine 1 st and 2 nd place
+ Losers of Semi Final 2 vs. Semi Final 3 to determine 3 rd and 4 th place

FUTSAL (12 Teams)

- + Divisioning by Group Stage – Three (3) groups of Four (4) teams each:
- + After Group Stage Divisioning, teams will be reallocated into three (3) divisions for final standings
 - o Division 1 - (4 teams)
 - o Division 2 - (4 teams)
 - o Division 3 - (4 teams)

- + **Division 1**
 - o Defining positions 1st – 4th

The team in 1st position of each group and the team in the best 2nd position of the group stage will play in the semifinals round as follows:

+ Semi Final 1: 1A vs. Best 2nd
+ Semi Final 2: 1B vs. 1C
+ Winners of Both games to play in the final (1st and 2nd place)
+ Losers of both games to play 3rd place match (3rd and 4th place)

- + **Division 2**
 - o Defining positions 1st - 4th

The remaining teams in 2nd position and the two (2) best teams in 3rd position will play the semifinal rounds as follows:

+ Semi Final 1: The least best team in 2nd position vs. the best team in 3rd position
+ Semi Final 2: The third 2nd place team vs. second best 3rd place team
+ Winners of Both games to play final (1st and 2nd place)
+ Losers of both games to plat 3rd place match (3rd and 4th place)

+ **Division 3**

- o Defining positions 1st - 4th

The remaining lowest 3rd place team and all 4th places will play semifinal rounds as follow:

+ Semi Final 1: lowest 3rd place vs. Least best 4th place team
+ Semi Final 2: Team with the best 4 th position vs. team with the middle 4 th position
+ Winners of both games will play in the final to determine 1 st and 2 nd place respectively
+ Losers of both games will play the 3rd place match to determine 3rd and 4th place respectively

8 Teams (Minimum number of teams required to open an event):

- + Divisioning by Group Stage: Two (2) groups of Four (4) teams each
 - o After divisioning, groups will be allocated into two (2) divisions for final standings.

+ **Division 1**

- o Defining positions 1st - 4th

Teams in First and second position of each group to will play semifinal rounds as follows:

+ Semi Final 1: 1A vs. 2B
+ Semi Final 2: 1B vs. 2A
+ Winners of both games will play in the final to determine 1st and 2nd place respectively
+ Losers of both games will play 3rd place match to determine 3rd and 4th place respectively

+ **Division 2**

- Defining positions 1st - 4th

Teams in 3rd and 4th position of each group to will play semifinal rounds as follows:	
+ Semi Final 1: 3A vs. 4B	
+ Semi Final 2: 3B vs. 4A	
+ Winners of both games will play in the final to determine 1st and 2nd place respectively	
+ Losers of both games will play 3rd place match to determine 3rd and 4th place	

- + To determine the final standings for the group stage, the following points system will be employed:

✓	Win - 3 points
↔	Tie - 1 point
✗	Loss – 0 points

- + The ranking of each team in each group will be determined as follows:

- Greatest number of points obtained in all group matches;
- Goal difference in all group matches;
- Greatest number of goals scored in all group matches

- + If two or more teams are equal on the basis of the above three criteria, their rankings will be determined as follows:

1. Greatest number of points obtained in the group matches between the teams concerned;
2. Goal difference resulting from the group matches between the teams concerned.
 1. Greater number of goals scored in all group matches between the concerned.
 2. Fair Play Criteria (Technical Group) 3.5 Drawing of lots by the Organizing Committee (SRC).

In order to preserve a positive sport experience for every athlete and partner, and understanding that this is the first edition of an event of this type, the maximum goal differential is 6. The knockout rule won't be applied.

As an example: If the final score of a game is 7 – 0, the winner will be given +6 goals. If the final score of a game is 8 -1, the winner will be given with +7 and -1. (Those additional goals might count for the best scorer award) teams

Divisioning By Group Stage – Unified Football

- + Teams will be seeded by in-group drawing. SOI will try to guarantee that teams from the same region will not be placed in the same group for the Group Stage. The Host country will not be seeded in advance. SOI is entitled to see any other team in advance should this be considered a positive impact for the tournament.
- + Divisioning by Group Stage: Four (4) groups of Four (4) teams each
- + After divisioning, teams will be reallocated into two (2) divisions for final standings
 - o **Division 1 - (8 teams)**
 - o **Division 2 - (8 teams)**
- + Semi Finals and Finals and other matches for finals standings
- + **Division 1**

The team in 1st position of each group will play for 1st to 4th place of Division 1:

- + **Semi Final 1 1st A vs. 1st D**
- + **Semi Final 2 1st B vs. 1st C**

The 3rd position of each group will play for places 5th and 6th place of Division 1:

- + **5th place match 1: 3rd A vs. 3rd D**
- + **5th place match 2: 3rd B vs. 3rd C**

Defining positions 1st to 4th in Division 1

- + **The winners of Semi Final 1 vs. Semi Final 2 will play final for 1st and 2nd place**
- + **Losers of Semi Final 1 vs. Semi Final 2 will play for 3rd and 4th place**

Defining positions 5th and 6th place of Division 1

- + **The winner of 5th place match 1 and 2 would get 5th place**
- + **The loser of 5th place match 1 and 2 would get 6th place**

+

+ Division 2

The 2nd position of each group to play for places 1st to 4th of division 2
+ Semi Final 1: 2nd A vs. 2nd D
+ Semi Final 2: 2nd B vs. 2nd C
The 4th position of each group to play for places 5th and 6th of division 2:
+ 5th place match 1: 4th A vs. 4th D
+ 5th place match 2: 4th B vs. 4th C
Defining positions 1st to 4th of Division 2
+ Winners of Semi Final 1 vs. Semi Final 2 to play final for 1st and 2nd place
+ Losers of Semi Final 1 vs. Semi Final 2 to play for 3rd and 4th place
Defining positions 5th and 6th place of Division 2
+ Winners of 5th place match 1 and 2 would get 5th place
+ Losers 5th place match 1 and 2 would get 6th place

Roster Size & Breakdown:

Each team will have the same roster size for competition to ensure equal and fair competition between teams.

7-a-side Team Roster Sizes

Team	Athletes	Partners	Coaches	Total
Women's Unified Team 7 a-side	6	5	1 Head Coach 2 Assistant Coaches	14 Members (At least 1 female HC or AC)
Men's Unified Team 7 a-side	6	5	1 Head Coach 2 Assistant Coaches	14 Members (At least 1 male HC or AC)
Women's Team 7 a-side	11	0	1 Head Coach 2 Assistant Coaches	14 Members (At least 1 female HC or AC)
Men's Team 7 a-side	11	0	1 Head Coach 2 Assistant Coaches	14 Members (At least 1 male HC or AC)

Futsal Roster Size

Team	Athletes	Partners	Coaches	Total
Women's Unified Team Futsal	6	4	1 Head Coach 2 Assistant Coaches	13 Members (At least 1 female HC or AC)
Men's Unified Team Futsal	6	4	1 Head Coach 2 Assistant Coaches	13 Members (At least 1 male HC or AC)
Men's Team Futsal	10	0	1 Head Coach 2 Assistant Coaches	13 Members (At least 1 male HC or AC)

Unified Team Roster Size

Team	Athletes	Partners	Coaches	HOD	Medical	Total
Men's Unified Team 11 a-side	9	7	1 Head Coach 1 Assistant Coach	1	1	20 Members
Women's Unified Team 7 a-side	6	5	1 Head Coach 1 Assistant Coach	1	1	15 Members



Key Tips for Officiating

Refereeing Special Olympics Football

More often than not coaches are officiating. This can be in the form of drills, scrimmages, practice matches or friendly games. Here are some key tips on officiating from Special Olympics Football Referee Cal Lovering.

1. Unified Matches

- I. Special Olympics play is divided into two groups Traditional and Unified.
 - **Traditional:** Play has a team make up of individuals, persons or people with intellectual disabilities "Athletes".
 - **Unified:** Play has a team make up with a mixture of "Athletes" and non-Athletes called "Partners".
- II. Referees make no distinction between Athletes and Partners. Call fouls and issue misconducts as necessary.
- III. No special consideration, call the game the same as any other game you do.
- IV. **Meaningful Involvement.** If you feel there is an issue take note but take no action. Remain neutral.

2. Substitutions

- I. All substitutions are from the center line.
 - Players should be warming up prior to coming on.
 - Discourage substitutions from the bench.
- II. Substitutes only come on the field with permission of the referee.
 - This includes substitutes replacing a player, after two minutes, sent off for a red card.
 - Do not allow substitutions on the fly.
- III. If necessary, allow coach(s) on the field to help position players and get them off the field.
- IV. For Unified matches; substitutes are Athlete for Athlete or Partner for Partner.



3. Player Management

- I. Talk to coaches before the match
 - Ask them about any medical conditions (I.E. seizures, asthma or hearing impairment).
 - Ask if there are behavior issues that could impact the game.
- II. Talk to players help them make the right decisions.
- III. Work with coaches if a player becomes an issue.
 - A player may need time off the pitch to regain composure.
 - If necessary allow coaches to come on the field to help with players.
- IV. If there is an injury stop play immediately bring coach(s) and trainer(s) on the field.
- V. Player safety is foremost. If you see a player in distress STOP play and allow a substitute.
- VI. Tempers can flare, especially after a foul, or goal, stay close to play.

4. Injuries

- I. Know what players have medical conditions.
- II. Stop play immediately bring coach(s) and trainer(s) on the field.
- III. If parents come on the pitch allow it, do not stop them from caring for their child.
- IV. Watch for player reactions. Emotions can run high after an injury. As necessary defuse the situation.



5. Officiating Hearing Impaired

- I. Instruct players/coaches on both teams when the whistle is blown to stop play and raise their hand(s).
- II. Use hand and arm signals, you may need to keep them up longer than normal.
- III. Use coach/interpreter to help players understand decisions and allow them time to relay to players.
- IV. Allow interpreter on field to help address questions, if necessary.

6. Keys to Success

- I. The game is for the ATHLETES.
 - No make-up call
 - Keep it SAFE, FUN, and FAIR.
- II. It's ok to be a person and share your love of the game with players.
 - Smile.
 - Be vocal, praise good play, high fives.
- III. Use any opportunities you may have to educate players, coaches and spectators.

SESSION PLANS



Session Plan Controlling

Level 1

Category: Passing Controlling	No of Players Required: 1-10	Practice Length: 5-10mins	Equipment Required: 1 ball per pair
--------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------

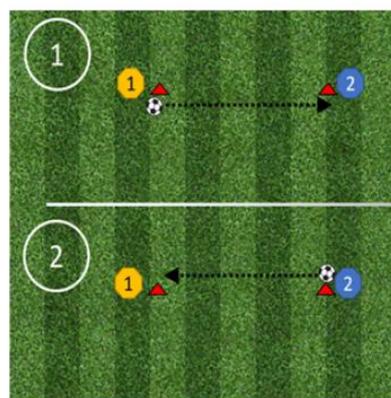
Aims & Objectives:

- Improve passing technique
- Improve controlling technique

Coaching Points:

1. Body shape in relation to the ball.
2. Cushion the ball using the inside of the foot.
3. Slightly push the ball forward into space.

2. As **Player 2** is receiving the ball they should adjust their body to get behind the ball, and using the inside of their foot, cushion the ball in front of them.
3. Pass the ball back to **Player 1** who repeats the controlling technique.



Session Plan

Controlling

Level 1

Category:

Passing
Controlling

No of Players Required:

1-10

Practice Length:

5-10mins

Equipment Required:

1 ball per pair

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve passing technique
- Improve controlling technique

Coaching Points:

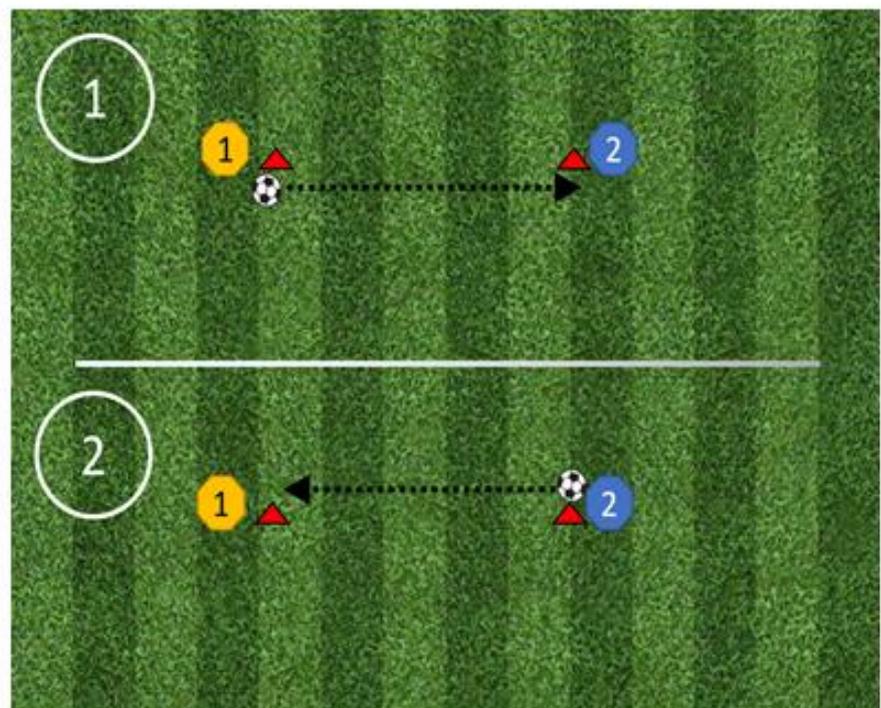
1. Body shape in relation to the ball.
2. Cushion the ball using the inside of the foot.
3. Slightly push the ball forward into space.

How to:

1. **Player 1** uses the inside of their foot to pass the ball to **Player 2**.

2. As **Player 2** is receiving the ball they should adjust their body to get behind the ball, and using the inside of their foot, cushion the ball in front of them.

3. Pass the ball back to **Player 1** who repeats the controlling technique.



Session Plan

Dribbling

Level 1

Category:

Turning
Dribbling
Balance

No of Players

Required:

1-10

Practice

Length:

5-10mins

Equipment

Required:

1 ball per
player.

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve turning technique.
- Improve dribbling ability with both feet.
- Improve balance and coordination.

Coaching Points:

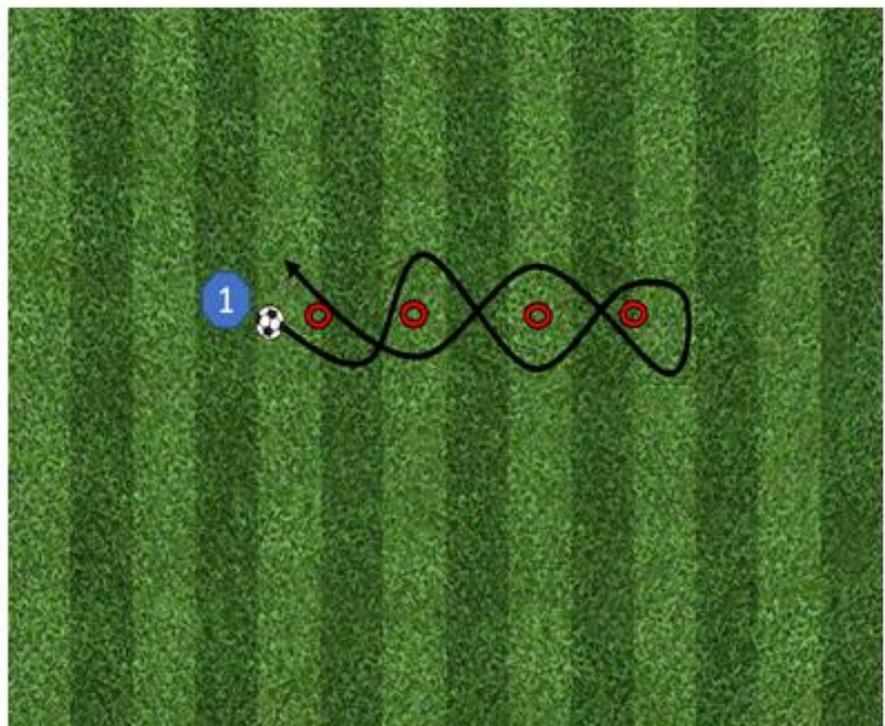
1. Use the inside and the outside of the foot (Big toe – Little toe).
2. Keep the ball close to you.
3. Move the ball slowly with small touches.

How to:

1. 4 cones 2 metres apart.

2. Taking small touches with the inside and outside of the foot, the player moves through the cones in a 'figure 8' shape (like a snake).

3. Once the player reaches the 4th cone, they practice their turn and come back in the same snake style dribbling.



Session Plan

Passing

Level 1

Category:

Passing

No of Players

Required:

2

Practice

Length:

5-10mins

Equipment

Required:

1 ball per pair

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve passing and receiving technique.
- Improve communication between players.
- Improve passing ability on both feet.

Coaching Points:

1. Meet the middle of the ball with the middle of the inside of the kicking foot.
2. Lock the ankle.
3. Follow through with kicking foot.

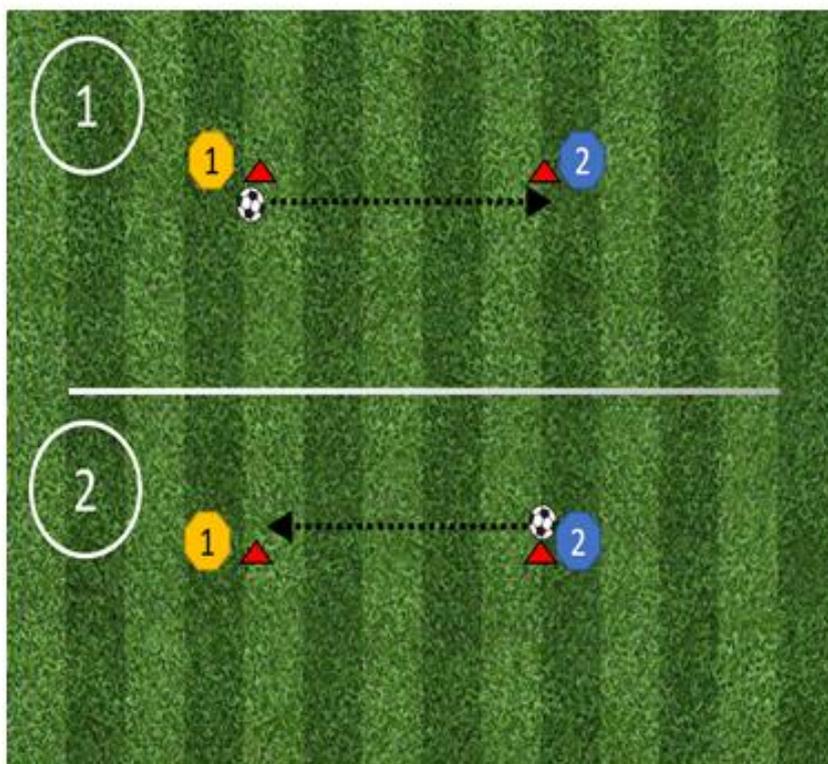
How to:

1. **Player 1** and **Player 2** stand 5 metres apart. **Player 1** passes to **Player 2** using the inside of their foot.

2. **Player 2** controls the ball using the inside of their foot. **Player 2** then passes to **Player 1** using the inside of their foot.

3. Repeat steps 1 & 2.

- Challenge players to use left and right foot.
- Challenge players to use different surfaces of the foot to pass and receive (laces, outside, etc.)



Session Plan

Shooting

Level 1

Category:

Shooting

No of Players Required:

1

Practice Length:

5-10mins

Equipment Required:

3 balls per
player.

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve shooting technique.
- Improve shooting ability on both feet.

Coaching Points:

1. Approach the ball and place the standing leg beside the ball.
2. Meet the middle of the ball with the 'laces' of the kicking foot.
3. Follow through with kicking leg.

How to:

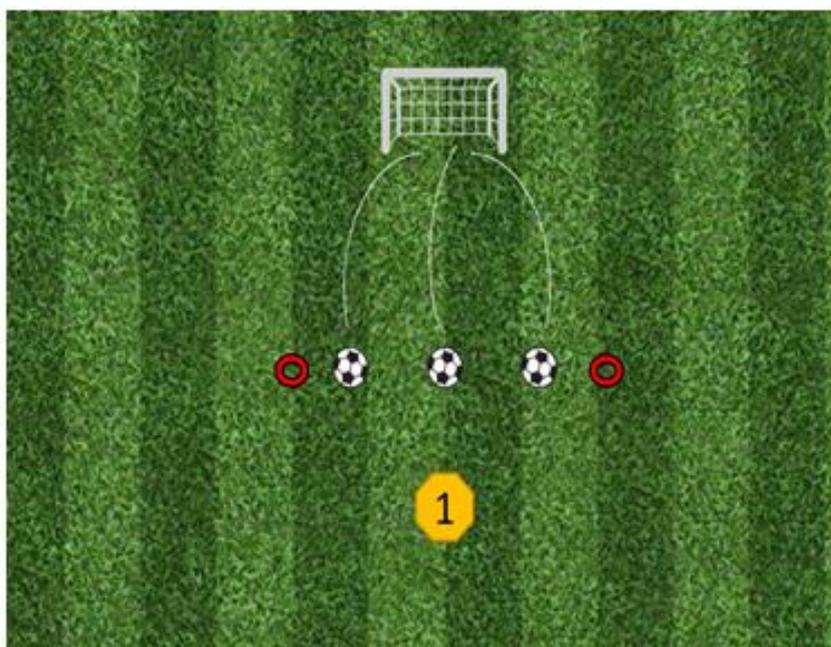
1. Place 3 footballs 5-10 metres away from the goal.

2. Player 1

approaches the balls and using good technique shoots the balls into the goal.

3. Award 1 point for each goal scored.

- Award 2 points for scoring using the players less-dominant foot.



Session Plan

Turning

Level 1

Category:

Turning
Dribbling
Balance

No of Players Required:

1-10

Practice Length:

5-10mins

Equipment Required:

1 ball per
player.

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve turning technique.
- Improve dribbling ability with both feet.
- Improve balance and coordination.

Coaching Points:

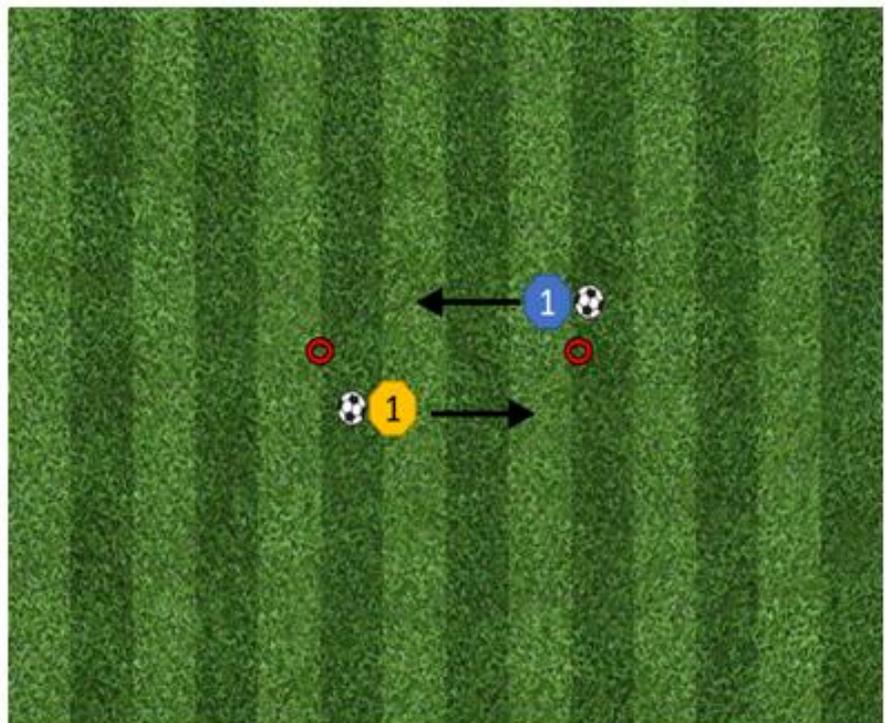
1. Use the sole of the foot (studs of the boots).
2. Take small steps with standing foot.
3. Move the ball slowly with small touches.

How to:

1. Two cones 5-10 metres apart. Players start at one cone with their back to the other cone.

2. Player places one foot on top of the ball. Taking small steps the hop backwards, dragging the ball with the sole of their foot.

3. Using small steps, continue backwards around the cone and change the foot used to drag the ball.



Session Plan

Goalkeeper Skills

Level 1

Category:

Passing
Reactions
Scooping

No of Players Required:

1-5

Practice Length:

5-10mins

Equipment Required:

1 ball per pair

Aims & Objectives:

- Improve passing technique
- Improve reactions to flight of the ball
- Improve scooping technique

Coaching Points:

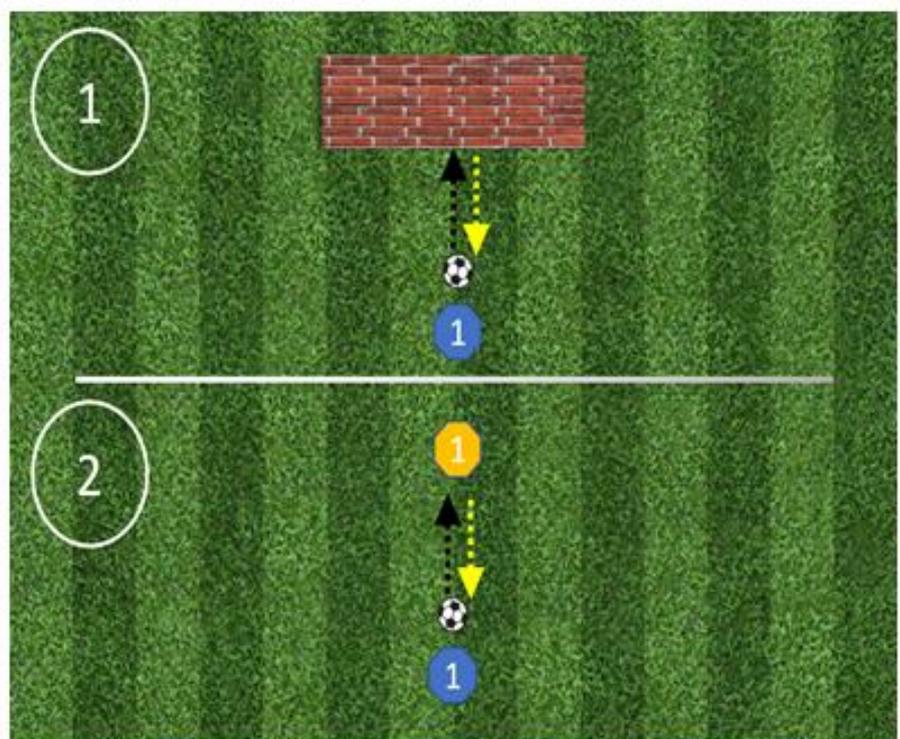
1. Body shape in relation to the ball.
2. Get full body behind the ball.
3. Hug the ball into your chest.

How to:

1. Use the inside of the foot to pass the ball against a 1. wall or 2. other player.

2. As the ball is rebounded (or passed) back, the GK should adjust body position to get behind the ball.

3. Scoop the ball up using both hands and hug the ball into chest.
Repeat.



Session Plan 3 vs. 2 (Attacking)

Level 2

Category:

Attacking
Shooting
Passing
Opposed

No of Players Required:

6+

Practice Length:

10mins

Equipment Required:

Goal x1
Bibs
Cones + Balls

Aims & Objectives:

- Creating and score scoring chances
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Transition to Defence

Coaching Points:

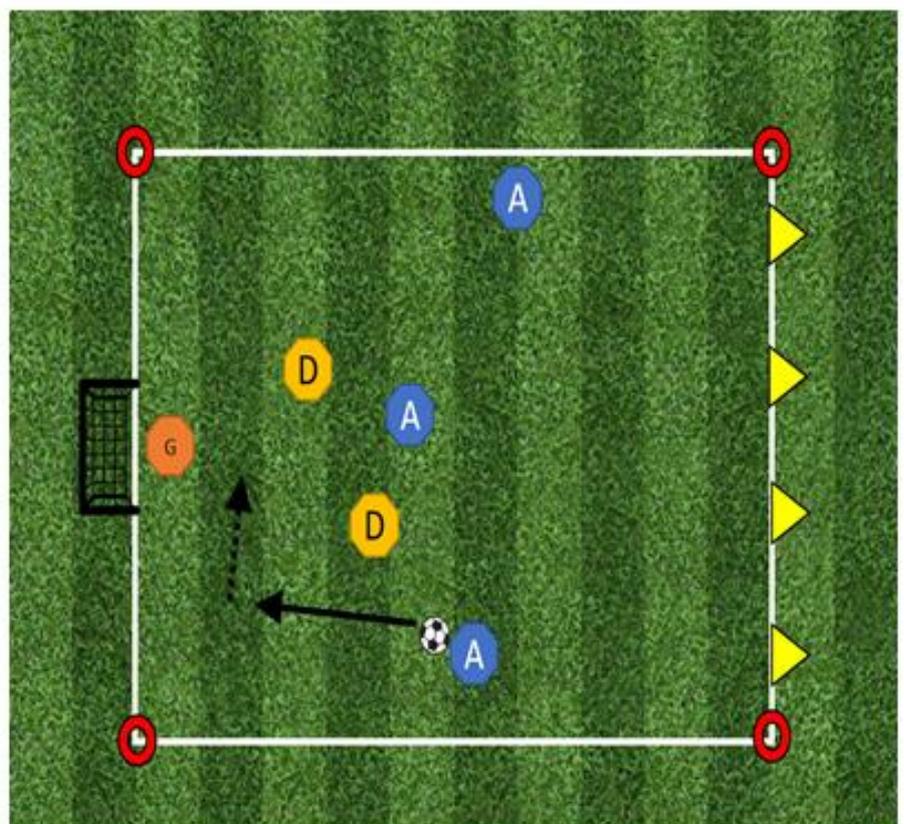
1. Utilize extra attacking player
2. Communication
3. Create width
4. Transition to defence

How to:

1. 3 attacking players (A) play against 2 defending players (D) and a goalkeeper (G).

2. Attacking players attempt to score, defending players attempt to stop them from scoring.

3. If defenders win the ball back, they look to score in the yellow goals at the other end of the pitch.



Session Plan

3 vs. 3 vs. 3

Level 3

Category:

Attacking
Shooting
Passing
Opposed
Defending

No of Players Required:

9

Practice Length:

22mins
10mins x2
+ 2mins rest

Equipment Required:

Goal x2
Bibs for 3
teams
Cones + Balls

Aims & Objectives:

- Creating and score scoring chances
- Teamwork
- Transition to Attack
- Transition to Defence

Coaching Points:

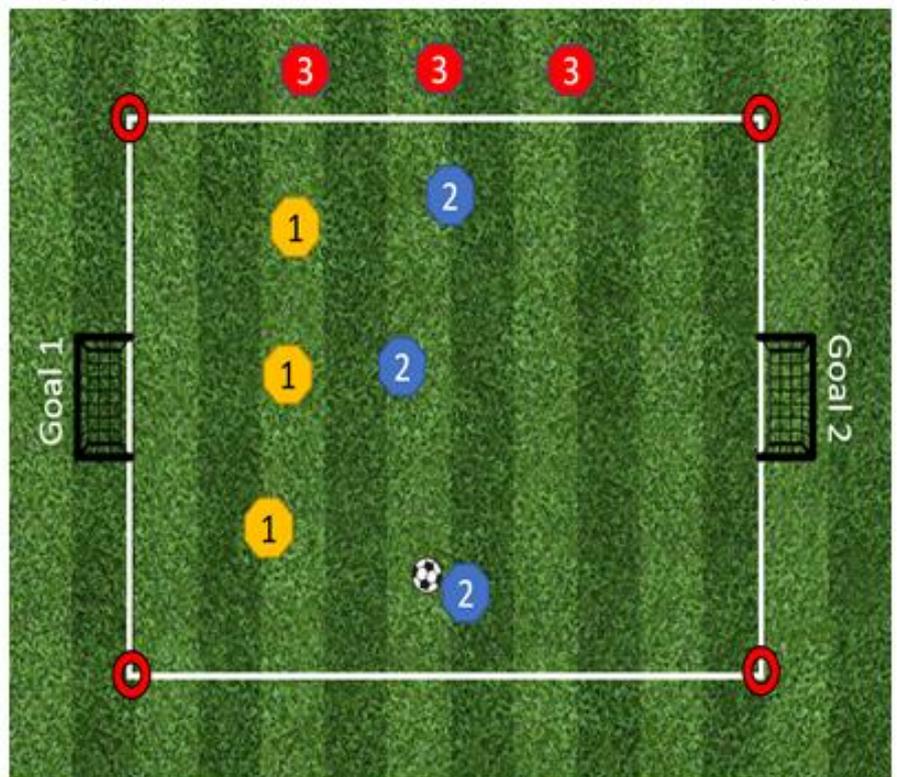
1. Speed of play
2. Awareness of transition
3. Always changing direction of play

How to:

1. Team 1 (1) vs. Team 2 (2) in a 3 vs. 3 match, with Team 3 (3) on the outside.

2. Team 2 try to score in *Goal 1*. If they score, they try to score in *Goal 2*. If Team 2 score, Team 1 must leave the pitch and Team 3 defend *Goal 2*.

3. The team that scores always keeps the ball.



Session Plan

Building from GK

Level 3

Category:

Attacking
Possession
Passing
Opposed

No of Players Required:

8/10+

Practice Length:

20mins
5mins work
2mins rest x3

Equipment Required:

Goal x2
Bibs
Balls, Cones

Aims & Objectives:

- Building possession from GK
- Possession 4v1, 4v2
- Speed of Play
- Decision to possess or advance

Coaching Points:

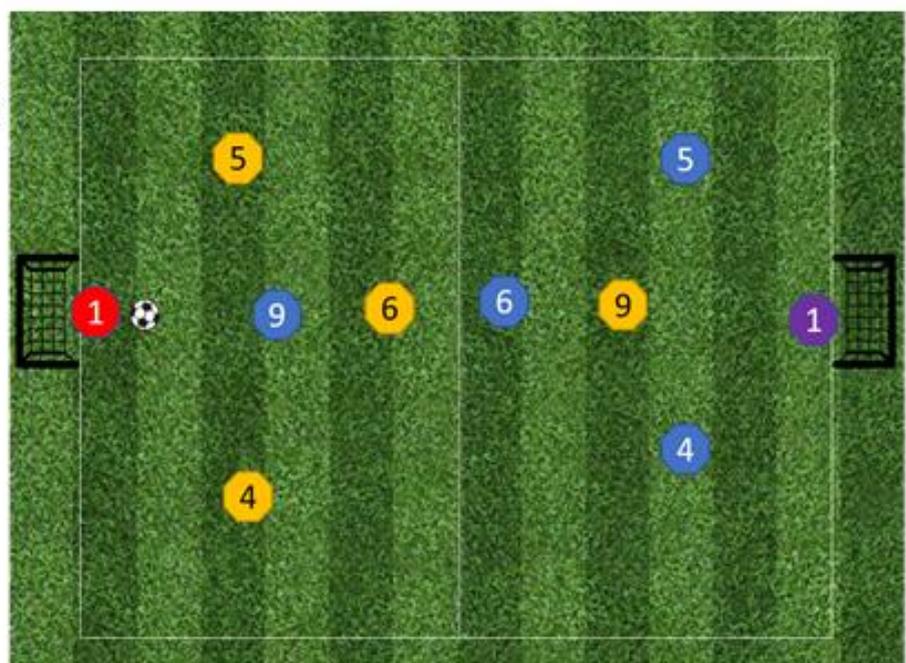
1. Use the GK to create numbers in possession. 4v1, then 4v2.
2. Move defender to eliminate pressure then advance to attacking zone.

How to:

1. 2 Teams, 5 vs. 5, 2 zones. Only one player from each team can defend in the attacking zone.

2. Team 1 tries to move the ball, move the defender, then advance and score.

3. With success in 4v1, the coach can allow the 6 to defend in attacking zone as well.





Session Plan

Possession with Pressure

Level 3

Category:

Possession
Passing
Teamwork in
Possession
Defending
w/transition

No of Players Required:

8 – 16 players.
Adjust area
size to
number of
players

Practice Length:

15 – 20 min

Equipment Required:

Cones and
balls, 2 sets if
bibs. 8 large
cones for
gates

Aims & Objectives:

- Individual ball mastery
- Protecting the ball
- Team Possession
- Defending
- Transition from defending

Coaching Points:

1. Ball mastery in tight areas
2. Supporting team mates keep possession
3. Passing
4. Transition from defence to attack

How to:

1. For this example 6 players in yellow with a ball each. Two defenders in blue. Yellows must keep possession of their ball

2. Blues try win balls back and then transition to scoring between any of 4 gates on outside.

3. When yellows lose their ball they must support other yellows to keep possession

4. Game ends when all balls have been won back. Defenders count their successful transitions and on last ball how many passes can yellow team do before they lose the ball.

