



Special Olympics  
**Junior Athletes**



# Football



## WHAT IS FOOTBALL?

Football is an invasion game. It is a team sport played with a round ball. Each team has 11 players, and they use their feet to kick and move the ball around the field.

The goal of the game is to kick the ball into the other team's goal to score points. The team with the most goals at the end wins.





## BASIC RULES:

- You can kick, pass, or dribble the ball with your feet.
- No hands allowed (except for the goalie).
- Try to stay in bounds and follow the referee's directions.
- Be a good teammate and show good sportsmanship.



## CONNECTING TO SPECIAL OLYMPICS YOUNG ATHLETES

The sport skills align with the categories of walking & running, balance & jumping, trapping & catching, throwing, striking, and kicking. Coaches who are familiar with the Young Athletes program will notice that the core gross motor skills taught there are continued and further developed in the Junior Athletes program. If you have athletes who need a little extra practice, reference the skill in Young Athletes for more skills, games, and activities. [Click here](#) or scan the code to access the Young Athletes activity guide.



## WARM-UP 1

### Equipment

- Optional: cones

### Setup

Players line up on a line or behind cones on one side of the field with a line or set of cones on the other side



Players all stand on a line on one side of the field and make their way across the field to the other side doing the following:

- Jogging
- High Knees
- Butt Kicks
- Side Step/Shuffle

Turn on some music to make this warm-up more fun!

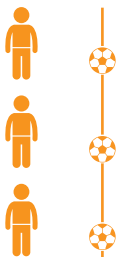
## WARM-UP 2

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players each have a ball, set it on the line, and step back about 10 feet



When the coach says "go," the player should run to the ball, touch it with their foot, and then run backwards. They should not kick the ball—this is working on foot agility.

Repeat for 1-2 minutes.

These warm-ups will be the same for each lesson in this unit.

## SKILL: DRIBBLING WITH CONTROL

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players stand with a football on the line, watching the coach



Demonstrate proper dribbling technique:

- Use the inside and outside of the foot to control the ball.
- Keep the ball close to the feet while moving.
- Keep eyes up to be aware of surroundings.

Let each player practice dribbling the ball from one line to the other. Each time they cross the field, remind them of a different technique to focus on. Really encourage players to take their time—do not acknowledge or reward speed during this practice!

### Extension

After players have practiced dribbling a few times, start to hold up fingers on the opposite side of the field so that players need to call out the number of fingers you are holding up while they dribble.

Make it even more fun by printing off silly pictures of animals or characters. Hold them up and have players call out what they see. (Examples: unicorn, puppy doing flips, snowman)

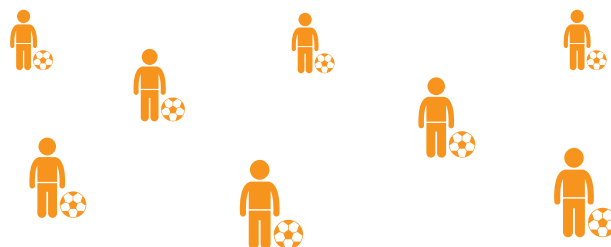
## GAME: COACH SAYS

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players each stand with a football, spread out around the field



Players start by dribbling around the field, while staying in control of the ball. Every 30 seconds, call out a different football move that they need to do:

- Fast
- Stop (foot on the ball)
- Slow
- With hands straight out from your body
- While singing a song out loud (or in your head)
- Personal bubble (do not get within 5 feet of anyone)
- Zigzag
- Switch balls with someone

Be creative! Let players come up with their own moves. Just make sure everyone can see what they are doing!

## COOL-DOWN

### Ball Mastery Moves



**Toe Taps:**  
Lightly tap the top of the ball, alternating feet 5-10 times.



**Back and Forth:**  
Move the ball side to side using the inside of the feet 5-10 times.



**Sole Rolls:**  
Roll the ball forward and backward using the bottom of the foot 5-10 times.

Have players dribble the ball to put it away before starting the final stretches.

### Stretches



**Lunge Stretch**



**Shoulder Stretch**



**Hamstring Stretch**



**Butterfly Stretch**

### Lesson 1 Reflection

During deep breathing, have players think about this question. If you have time after stretching, give players time to share out loud.

**Why would it be important to stay in control of the ball during football?**

The cool down will be the same for each lesson in this unit. To wrap up the lesson, try a team cheer or encourage players to give a high five to 3 other players and say, "Great job!"



## WARM-UP 1

### Equipment

- Optional: cones

### Setup

Players line up on a line or behind cones on one side of the field with a line or set of cones on the other side



Players all stand on a line on one side of the field and make their way across the field to the other side doing the following:

- Jogging
- High Knees
- Butt Kicks
- Side Step/Shuffle

Turn on some music to make this warm-up more fun!

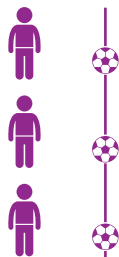
## WARM-UP 2

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players each have a ball, set it on the line, and step back about 10 feet



When the coach says "go," the player should run to the ball, touch it with their foot, and then run backwards. They should not kick the ball—this is working on foot agility.

Repeat for 1-2 minutes.

## SKILL: PASSING AND RECEIVING

### Equipment

- Football for each pair

### Setup

One partner stands with a football on the line, and the other partner stands across from them



Coach demonstrates proper passing technique.

Key Coaching Points:

- Use the inside of the foot for a controlled and accurate pass.
- Keep the non-kicking foot next to the ball, pointing toward the target.
- Follow through after making contact.

Let each player practice passing the ball to their partner. Spend time walking around, coaching, and reminding players about correct form.

Pause and teach proper receiving technique.

Key Coaching Points:

- Use the inside of the foot to stop or slow the ball down.
- Absorb the impact by relaxing the foot on contact.
- Stay on toes and ready for the next movement.
- Partners take turns passing and trapping the ball with control before passing it back.

**This is a lot of instruction, so make sure players get time to practice and give them lots of encouragement! The actual practice shouldn't be longer than 5 minutes—just enough for everyone to try proper form a few times.**

## GAME: PASS TO SCORE

### Equipment

- Football for each group
- Goals (nets or cones)

### Setup

Set up a goal (net or cones) on one side of the field, and divide players into teams of three



### Rules:

- Players cannot dribble. They must pass to move the ball forward.
- A goal only counts if the team has completed at least 3 passes.
- Each player needs to touch the ball at least one time.
- After 3 passes, the player can either score or continue passing to get closer to the net.

To keep the game moving, have the next group start as soon as the team on the field shoots.

Reminder, this is not a speed game, it is a teamwork and focus game!

**If you have room, set up 2 or 3 nets so that players are always playing.**

**Pro tip: Use a whiteboard or poster to draw out what this should look like to help players.**

## COOL-DOWN

### Ball Mastery Moves



**Toe Taps:**  
Lightly tap the top of the ball, alternating feet 5-10 times.



**Back and Forth:**  
Move the ball side to side using the inside of the feet 5-10 times.



**Sole Rolls:**  
Roll the ball forward and backward using the bottom of the foot 5-10 times.

Have players dribble the ball to put it away before starting the final stretches.

### Stretches



**Lunge Stretch**



**Shoulder Stretch**



**Hamstring Stretch**



**Butterfly Stretch**

### Lesson 2 Reflection

During deep breathing, have players think about this question. If you have time after stretching, give players time to share out loud.

**Why is it important to pass the ball in football?**



## WARM-UP 1

### Equipment

- Optional: cones

### Setup

Players line up on a line or behind cones on one side of the field with a line or set of cones on the other side



Players all stand on a line on one side of the field and make their way across the field to the other side doing the following:

- Jogging
- High Knees
- Butt Kicks
- Side Step/Shuffle

Turn on some music to make this warm-up more fun!

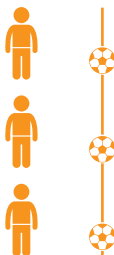
## WARM-UP 2

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players each have a ball, set it on the line, and step back about 10 feet



When the coach says "go," the player should run to the ball, touch it with their foot, and then run backwards. They should not kick the ball—this is working on foot agility.

Repeat for 1-2 minutes.

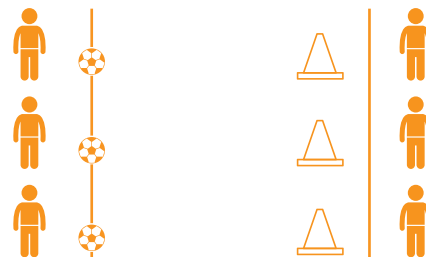
## SKILL: SHOOTING WITH ACCURACY

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

One player has a ball and stands on a line; a cone is placed 10-15 feet in front of the player with their partner standing behind the cone



### Key coaching points:

- Plant foot (non-kicking foot) should be next to the ball, pointing toward the target.
- Strike with the laces of the foot for power or the inside of the foot for accuracy.
- Keep the body slightly leaning forward to keep the shot low.
- Follow through by swinging the leg forward.

Coach demonstrates shooting at a goal, showing both power and accuracy shots.



### Practice:

- Set up this practice as shown above.
- The player with the ball shoots it at the cone, trying to knock it down.
- The player behind the cone receives the ball and passes it back to the first player.
- The first player gets 3 tries to hit the cone before switching.

If you have a tennis ball or another small item, set it on top of the cone to help encourage players to hit the cone and knock it off.

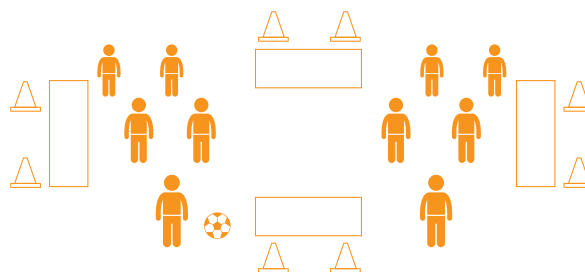
## GAME: SHOOTING SHOWDOWN

### Equipment

- 1 Football
- 4 Goals (nets or cones)

### Setup

Set up four goals (nets or cones) and draw or designate a small rectangle in front of the goal; divide players into two teams



### Rules:

- Toss the ball in to start the play.
- The only way to score is by shooting after at least one pass.
- Players must shoot inside a designated shooting zone (marked by cones or tape on the ground).
- No one can stand in front of the goal; the point of this game is to practice shooting.

### Variations:

- Limit the number of touches before shooting.
- Award bonus points for goals scored with the weaker foot.
- Introduce a time limit before shooting to encourage quick decision-making.

**Encourage everyone to get an opportunity to shoot! Talk about the importance of being a team.**

## COOL-DOWN

### Ball Mastery Moves



**Toe Taps:**  
Lightly tap the top of the ball, alternating feet 5-10 times.



**Back and Forth:**  
Move the ball side to side using the inside of the feet 5-10 times.



**Sole Rolls:**  
Roll the ball forward and backward using the bottom of the foot 5-10 times.

Have players dribble the ball to put it away before starting the final stretches.

### Stretches



**Lunge Stretch**



**Shoulder Stretch**



**Hamstring Stretch**



**Butterfly Stretch**

### Lesson 3 Reflection

During deep breathing, have players think about this question. If you have time after stretching, give players time to share out loud.

**What do you think is easier to do, shoot with accuracy or shoot with power? Why?**



## WARM-UP 1

### Equipment

- Optional: cones

### Setup

Players line up on a line or behind cones on one side of the field with a line or set of cones on the other side



Players all stand on a line on one side of the field and make their way across the field to the other side doing the following:

- Jogging
- High Knees
- Butt Kicks
- Side Step/Shuffle

Turn on some music to make this warm-up more fun!

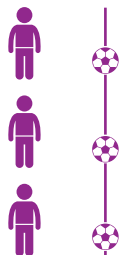
## WARM-UP 2

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players each have a ball, set it on the line, and step back about 10 feet



When the coach says "go," the player should run to the ball, touch it with their foot, and then run backwards. They should not kick the ball—this is working on foot agility.

Repeat for 1-2 minutes.

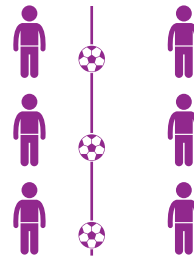
## SKILL: DEFENSE

### Equipment

- Football for each pair

### Setup

Players stand facing a partner with one ball; one player is the attacker (dribbler) and the other is the defender



### Key coaching points:

- Keep the ball close to the body while dribbling.
- Use the body to shield the ball from defenders.
- Keep eyes up to be aware of surroundings.

### Practice:

- Players pair up, one as an attacker (dribbler) and one as a defender.
- The attacker tries to shield the ball for 10 seconds without losing control.
- Rotate roles after each round.

**Start stationary and then challenge players to make it from one side of the field to the other. Really emphasize being a good sport with their partner!**

## GAME: KEEP AWAY

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players are in groups of four; three of the four players per group have a ball



#### Game setup:

- Divide players into groups of 3 or 4.
- One player is the defender, the rest are dribblers. Dribblers each have a ball.
- The defender tries to steal the ball from any dribbler.
- Rotate defenders every 30 seconds to 1 minute.

#### Rules:

- Dribblers cannot pass—they must protect their own ball while staying inside the playing area.
- If the defender wins a ball, the dribbler performs 5 toe taps before rejoining.

#### Variations:

- Play 2v2, allowing dribblers to pass.
- Decrease the playing area to increase difficulty.

**Sharks and Minnows is another game that is great for practicing defense. Have players start with a ball on one side of the field and practice ball control across the field while some defenders try to get the ball.**

## COOL-DOWN

### Ball Mastery Moves



**Toe Taps:**  
Lightly tap the top of the ball, alternating feet 5-10 times.



**Back and Forth:**  
Move the ball side to side using the inside of the feet 5-10 times.



**Sole Rolls:**  
Roll the ball forward and backward using the bottom of the foot 5-10 times.

Have players dribble the ball to put it away before starting the final stretches.

### Stretches



**Lunge Stretch**



**Shoulder Stretch**



**Hamstring Stretch**



**Butterfly Stretch**

### Lesson 4 Reflection

During deep breathing, have players think about this question. If you have time after stretching, give players time to share out loud.

**What do you think is more important in football: offense (passing and shooting) or defense (blocking or stopping the ball)? Why?**



## WARM-UP 1

### Equipment

- Optional: cones

### Setup

Players line up on a line or behind cones on one side of the field with a line or set of cones on the other side



Players all stand on a line on one side of the field and make their way across the field to the other side doing the following:

- Jogging
- High Knees
- Butt Kicks
- Side Step/Shuffle

Turn on some music to make this warm-up more fun!

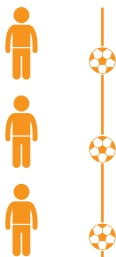
## WARM-UP 2

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players each have a ball, set it on the line, and step back about 10 feet



When the coach says "go," the player should run to the ball, touch it with their foot, and then run backwards. They should not kick the ball—this is working on foot agility.

Repeat for 1-2 minutes.

## SKILL: FOOTBALL RULES & STRATEGY (COACH SAYS)

### Equipment

- Football for each player

### Setup

Players spread out with a football, watching the coach



Each player needs a football and clear boundaries. The coach calls out different instructions and the players complete the directions. Some of the instructions will be against the rules of the game. The coach stops and quickly discusses after each.

- Dribble the ball for 10 seconds.
- Stop the ball (put your foot on top of it).
- Pick up the ball with your hands.  
(For discussion: Can you do that? Only goalies can touch it with their hands.)
- Dribble the ball while looking down at the ball.  
(For discussion: Is this a good technique? No!)
- Dribble the ball while looking up.
- Dribble the ball and stand next to a partner.
- Take a few steps back and pass the balls to each other.
- Dribble the ball out of bounds.  
(For discussion: What happens when the ball goes out of bounds?)
- Practice throwing the ball in bounds. Then dribble quickly and in control.
- If you have nets or goals set up, have players dribble and shoot at the goal.

If you sense that players are getting restless, have them do a silly dance while dribbling, sing a song, or make up their own move! The point is to have fun and learn something.

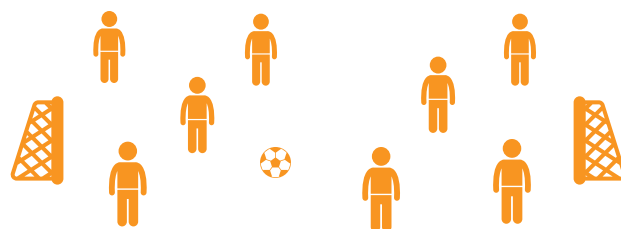
## GAME: MINI MATCHES

### Equipment

- Football for each game
- Goals (nets or cones)

### Setup

Set up two goals (nets or cones) on either side of the field; if space allows, set up two to three additional fields so players get more playing time



#### Game setup:

- Set up 4v4 or 5v5 games on small fields.
- Use cones as goals or actual portable goals.
- Rotate positions every few minutes.

#### Rules:

- Encourage teamwork and fair play.
- Pause play briefly to ask guiding questions:
  - » *"Where should you move to get open?"*
  - » *"What could you have done differently on defense?"*

#### Variations:

- Limit touches (e.g., 3-touch max) to promote passing.
- Play one round where teams must pass to 3 different players before shooting.

**Make a competition out of who can cheer the loudest or who can pass the most times. Be creative!**

**This is a great lesson to recruit additional coaches or volunteers! If possible, set up two games so that all players are engaged the whole time.**

## COOL-DOWN

### Ball Mastery Moves



**Toe Taps:**  
Lightly tap the top of the ball, alternating feet 5-10 times.



**Back and Forth:**  
Move the ball side to side using the inside of the feet 5-10 times.



**Sole Rolls:**  
Roll the ball forward and backward using the bottom of the foot 5-10 times.

Have players dribble the ball to put it away before starting the final stretches.

### Stretches



**Lunge Stretch**



**Shoulder Stretch**



**Hamstring Stretch**



**Butterfly Stretch**

### Lesson 5 Reflection

During deep breathing, have players think about this question. If you have time after stretching, give players time to share out loud.

**What are the basic rules of football?**

**How would you describe it to someone who has never played football?**



## WARM-UP 1

### Equipment

- Optional: cones

### Setup

Players line up on a line or behind cones on one side of the field with a line or set of cones on the other side



Players all stand on a line on one side of the field and make their way across the field to the other side doing the following:

- Jogging
- High Knees
- Butt Kicks
- Side Step/Shuffle

Turn on some music to make this warm-up more fun!

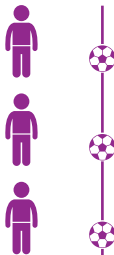
## WARM-UP 2

### Equipment

- Football for each game

### Setup

Players each have a ball, set it on the line, and step back about 10 feet



When the coach says "go," the player should run to the ball, touch it with their foot, and then run backwards. They should not kick the ball—this is working on foot agility.

Repeat for 1-2 minutes.

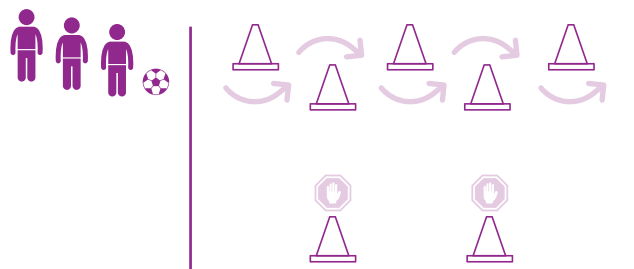
## SKILLS SHOWCASE STATION 1: DRIBBLING OBSTACLE COURSE

### Equipment

- Footballs
- Cones

### Setup

Players line up with a ball at the start of the obstacle course



Players dribble through the cones in a zigzag pattern to one side of the field. On the way back, they dribble fast, stop at the first cone, put their foot on the ball and then dribble again to the second cone, stop, and dribble back to the line. The next player goes when the person in front of them is done with the zigzags. Keep going until they are ready to rotate!

## SKILLS SHOWCASE STATION 2: PASSING ACCURACY

### Equipment

- Football for each pair
- Cones

### Setup

Players should be in pairs with a ball and a set of cones between them



Players pair up and pass the ball through gates marked by cones.

Challenge: Increase distance or add another player as the goalie.

A simple checklist can be super motivating for players. Create a simple 4-spot checklist, and have stickers or a marker to check each one off as players rotate through stations.

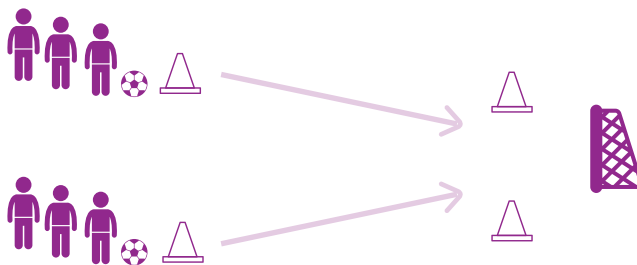
## SKILLS SHOWCASE STATION 3: SHOOTING AT GOAL

### Equipment

- Footballs
- Cones
- Net

### Setup

Have two lines of players behind cones with additional cones set up to show a shooting line in front of the net



Players dribble the ball from the starting cone to the designated shooting line, and shoot at the net. They retrieve their ball and either pass to the next player in line or keep their ball and get in line. Continue rotating which line they start in.

## SKILLS SHOWCASE STATION 4: BALL CONTROL CHALLENGE

### Equipment

- Football for each pair

### Setup

Players are in pairs with a ball



Player 1 has control of the ball. Player 2 shouts out commands for player 1.  
Switch after 1 minute.

Command Ideas:

- Tap the ball 4 times with your foot.
- Dribble fast.
- Close your eyes and dribble.
- Pass the ball back and forth between your feet 5 times.

**This is a great activity to include a parent or volunteer! Instead of partnering up, have the volunteer call things out.**

## COOL-DOWN

### Ball Mastery Moves



**Toe Taps:**  
Lightly tap the top of the ball, alternating feet 5-10 times.



**Back and Forth:**  
Move the ball side to side using the inside of the feet 5-10 times.



**Sole Rolls:**  
Roll the ball forward and backward using the bottom of the foot 5-10 times.

Have players dribble the ball to put it away before starting the final stretches.

### Stretches



**Lunge Stretch**



**Shoulder Stretch**



**Hamstring Stretch**



**Butterfly Stretch**

### Lesson 6 Reflection

During deep breathing, have players think about this question. If you have time after stretching, give players time to share out loud.

**What was something you are proud of from this football unit?**  
**What is something you are excited to keep practicing?**

## WRAPPING UP THE SKILLS SHOWCASE

### Thank you for your dedication to the Junior Athletes program.

As you close out the Skills Showcase, be sure to highlight the next steps in your participants' Special Olympics journey. Junior Athletes is a multi-sport experience designed to introduce children to a variety of activities—not just one sport. Use this moment to inspire families and help them see what comes next. Here are some ideas to help you plan:

- **Promote What's Next:**  
What sport will your Junior Athletes learn about next? Create a simple way for parents to sign up or learn more—whether it's a flyer, a sign-up sheet, or a QR code linked to more info. Don't forget to collect emails if you don't already have them!
- **Celebrate Every Athlete:**  
Hand out certificates to recognize each child's achievement. Take photos to send to families as a fun and meaningful wrap-up.
- **Recognize All Pathways:**  
Congratulate every athlete and share that while some may continue with Junior Athletes, others might be ready for competitive play—and no matter what, there's a place for everyone in Special Olympics.
- **Invite a Local Program Staff Member:**  
Having someone available to answer questions about area teams, how to start competing, or how to get involved can make a big difference for families.
- **Include a Guest Athlete Speaker:**  
Invite a Special Olympics athlete to speak about their own journey. Hearing firsthand experiences can help parents understand the possibilities for their child's future in the program.





Special Olympics  
Junior Athletes

# CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

PRESENTED TO:

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FOR:

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**CONGRATULATIONS ON A FANTASTIC SEASON!**

COACH'S SIGNATURE

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COACH'S SIGNATURE

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Special Olympics  
**Junior Athletes**