

Training Sessions for Middle School Teams (6th-8th Grade)

Practical, ready-to-use sessions for boys and girls teams

Session Design Principles for 11-14 Year Olds

Developmental Considerations:

- **Physical:** Variable maturity levels, growth spurts, coordination challenges
- **Cognitive:** Developing abstract thinking, can handle more complex tactics
- **Social:** Peer relationships critical, self-conscious, seeking identity
- **Attention:** 60-75 minutes optimal, variety needed every 10-15 minutes

Session Structure (75 minutes total):

- Warm-up: 10 minutes
- Technical Practice: 15-20 minutes
- Tactical Game: 20-25 minutes
- Small-Sided Game: 20-25 minutes
- Cool-down: 5 minutes

Key Coaching Tips:

- Keep instructions brief (30-60 seconds)
- Use demonstrations frequently
- Create positive competition
- Mix individual and team challenges
- Allow player input and creativity
- Balance structure with freedom

WEEK 1 SESSIONS: Foundation & Culture Building

Session 1.1: Team Culture & Ball Mastery

Theme: Building team identity while developing comfort on ball

Equipment: 1 ball per player, cones for grid, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Getting to Know You Dribbling"

- 30x30 yard grid, every player with ball
- Dribble around, when coach calls out, find partner and share:
 - Name + favorite team
 - Position they want to play + why
 - One goal for this season
- Variations: Different surfaces of foot, speed changes, moves
- **Coaching Points:** Head up, close control, personality encouraged!

Technical Practice (15 min): Ball Mastery Circuit

- Set up 4 stations, groups rotate every 3 minutes
- **Station 1:** Toe taps & roll-overs (coordination)
- **Station 2:** Inside-outside touches (ball control)
- **Station 3:** Step-overs & scissors (moves)
- **Station 4:** Pull-backs & turns (changing direction)
- Players work at own pace, challenge themselves
- **Coaching Points:** Light touches, rhythm, balance, confidence

Tactical Game (20 min): "Numbers Game"

- 20x20 yard grid
- 6v6, each team has players numbered 1-6
- Normal game, BUT when coach calls a number, that player must touch ball within 5 seconds or other team gets point
- Progression: Call 2 numbers, both must touch before anyone else
- **Coaching Points:** Awareness, support, communication, finding space

Small-Sided Game (25 min): 5v5 to Small Goals

- 40x30 yards, 2 small goals each end (no GK)
- Free play with minimal stoppages
- Observe: Who are your leaders? Who struggles? Who's confident?
- **Coaching Points:** Let them play! Minimal interruptions, just observe

Cool-Down (5 min): Team Circle

- Static stretching
- Each player shares: One thing they liked about practice
- Set expectations for next practice
- Build team cheer/chant together

Session Objectives: ✓ Learn names and begin building relationships ✓ Assess current technical abilities ✓ Observe personalities and team dynamics ✓ Establish positive, fun culture

Session 1.2: First Touch & Support Play

Theme: Receiving the ball, supporting teammates

Equipment: 1 ball per 2 players, cones, small goals, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Partner Passing Relay"

- Partners 10 yards apart
- On coach signal, pass back and forth 10 times
- Then both sprint to opposite cone and back
- First pair done wins point
- Variations: Different passing surfaces, distance changes
- **Coaching Points:** Firm passes, good first touch, quick movement

Technical Practice (20 min): First Touch Mastery

- **Setup:** 10x10 grids, groups of 4 (1 ball per group)
- **Part 1 (5 min):** Inside of foot control

- Player in middle, receives from 3 feeders
- First touch to side, pass back to different feeder
- Rotate middle player every minute
- **Coaching Points:** Open body shape, cushion the ball, look before receiving
- **Part 2 (5 min):** Outside of foot control
 - Same setup, outside of foot first touch
 - **Coaching Points:** Drop shoulder, turn with ball, protect ball
- **Part 3 (5 min):** Directional first touch
 - Feeder calls "left" or "right" before passing
 - Middle player must take first touch that direction
 - **Coaching Points:** Scan before ball arrives, decisive touch
- **Part 4 (5 min):** Pressure added
 - One feeder becomes passive defender
 - Can't tackle but makes it realistic
 - **Coaching Points:** Shield ball, body position, quick decision

Tactical Game (20 min): "3-Team Possession"

- 25x25 grid
- 3 teams of 4-5 players (different colors)
- Two teams possess, one team defends
- If defending team wins ball, they join possession with team that lost it
- Previous possession team now defends
- **Coaching Points:** Constant support angles, movement off ball, communication, "Show for me!"

Small-Sided Game (20 min): 6v6 with Target Players

- 40x30 field
- Each team has a "target player" (different pinnie) at each sideline
- Target players play for their team but stay on sideline
- Provides wide support option
- **Coaching Points:** Use wide players, switch play, create passing angles

- **Progression:** Target players can come in if ball is played to them

Cool-Down (5 min): Partner Stretching

- Each pair stretches together
- Quick pair share: "One way I supported my teammates today"

Session Objectives: ✓ Improve first touch quality under varying pressure ✓ Understanding supporting positions ✓ Decision-making: When to play forward vs. keep possession ✓ Communication habits starting to form

Session 1.3: Passing Combinations & Movement

Theme: Playing 1-2 combinations, movement off ball

Equipment: Cones, balls (1 per 3 players), small goals, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Passing Gates"

- 30x30 grid with 8-10 "gates" (2 cones 2 yards apart)
- Partners have 1 ball
- Pass through gates to score points
- Can't use same gate twice in a row
- **Coaching Points:** Weight of pass, communication, movement after pass

Technical Practice (20 min): 1-2 Combination Patterns

- **Setup:** Groups of 3, one ball, 10x10 area
- **Pattern 1 (5 min): Basic Wall Pass**
 - A passes to B, runs forward
 - B one-touch back to A
 - A passes to C, repeat
 - **Coaching Points:** Timing of run, firm wall pass, quality final ball
- **Pattern 2 (5 min): Overlapping Run**
 - A passes to B
 - A overlaps around B
 - B passes into space for A

- A dribbles to next cone
- **Coaching Points:** Communication ("Go!"), timing, pass into space
- **Pattern 3 (5 min):** Third Man Run
 - A passes to B
 - C makes run behind B
 - B one-touch to C
 - **Coaching Points:** C's timing, B checks to ball, disguised pass
- **Pattern 4 (5 min):** Under Pressure
 - Add passive defender to any pattern
 - Execute combinations with pressure
 - **Coaching Points:** Quick thinking, protect ball, use partner

Tactical Game (20 min): "End Zone Game"

- 40x25 field with 5-yard end zones
- 7v7, score by passing to teammate in end zone
- Receiving player must control in end zone
- Player who receives can't score next time
- **Coaching Points:** Looking for runner, timing of runs, weight of pass, creating space
- **Progression:** Only 1-2 combinations can score (forces pattern use)

Small-Sided Game (20 min): 6v6 to Goals

- 50x35 field, small goals (or full goals with GKs)
- Free play, recognize combinations happening naturally
- Freeze 2-3 times when good combinations occur: "See what they just did?"
- **Coaching Points:** Celebrate successful combinations, encourage creativity

Cool-Down (5 min): "Combo Challenge"

- Groups of 3, demonstrate their favorite combination from practice
- Vote on coolest one (fun ending!)

Session Objectives: ✓ Execute basic passing combinations ✓ Understand movement off ball ✓ Timing of runs
✓ Creative problem-solving

Session 1.4: Defending Basics & Transition

Theme: Individual defending principles, winning ball back

Equipment: Cones, balls, pennies, small goals

Warm-Up (10 min): "Shadow Defending"

- Partners, one ball
- Attacker dribbles slowly, defender shadows 2 yards away
- Focus on defensive footwork: side-on stance, small steps
- Switch roles every 2 minutes
- **Progression:** Attacker can change speed, defender must adjust
- **Coaching Points:** Knees bent, on toes, see ball and player

Technical Practice (15 min): 1v1 Defending Progressions

- **Setup:** 10x10 grids, pairs with 1 ball
- **Part 1 (5 min): Delay**
 - Attacker tries to dribble through grid
 - Defender focuses on slowing down (not winning ball)
 - **Coaching Points:** Stay on feet, patient, force away from goal
- **Part 2 (5 min): Channel**
 - Same setup but defender tries to force attacker one direction
 - Mark with cones where to force toward
 - **Coaching Points:** Body angle, show inside/outside, be strong
- **Part 3 (5 min): Win Ball**
 - Now defender tries to win ball
 - When to tackle vs. when to delay?
 - **Coaching Points:** Wait for heavy touch, stay balanced, timing

Tactical Game (25 min): "Win-It-Back Game"

- 35x25 grid, 5v5 + GKS
- Normal game BUT: When team loses ball, they have 5 seconds to win it back
- If they win it back within 5 seconds = 2 points if they score
- If they don't win it back = normal game (1 point if score)
- **Coaching Points:** Immediate pressure on ball, surrounding ball, working together, reading when ball is loose

Small-Sided Game (20 min): 6v6 Transition Focus

- 40x30 field, goals at each end
- Play normal game
- Coach stops play when ball turns over
- Ask: "Who should press?" "Who should cover?" "Where should we be?"
- Restart quickly
- **Coaching Points:** Defensive organization, who presses, supporting defenders, recovery runs

Cool-Down (5 min): Defending discussion

- Circle up
- "What makes good defending?"
- Players share ideas
- Coach reinforces key principles

Session Objectives: ✓ Understanding individual defending ✓ Delay, channel, win ball ✓ Immediate pressure after losing ball ✓ Team defending concepts introduced

WEEK 2 SESSIONS: Building Tactical Understanding

Session 2.1: Width & Penetration

Theme: Creating and using width to penetrate

Equipment: Full field, cones, balls, goals, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Switching Play"

- 30x20 grid, two groups on each sideline
- Ball starts with one side, they must complete 5 passes
- Then switch ball to other side
- Other side must complete 5 passes and switch back
- **Coaching Points:** Quick switches, accuracy, communication

Technical Practice (20 min): Width Patterns

- **Setup:** Half field, full width
- **Pattern 1 (7 min):** Outside Back to Winger
 - Outside back dribbles up line
 - Winger checks away then back to ball
 - Receives, drives at defender
 - **Coaching Points:** Winger's movement creates space, timing, receive on back foot
- **Pattern 2 (7 min):** Switch of Play
 - Center mid receives centrally
 - Switches ball to opposite winger
 - **Coaching Points:** Open body shape, weight of pass, winger position
- **Pattern 3 (6 min):** Overlap
 - Winger receives ball
 - Outside back overlaps
 - Winger plays ball into space for overlap
 - **Coaching Points:** Communication, timing, quality of through ball

Tactical Game (20 min): "Wide Zones Game"

- 50x40 field, divided into 3 vertical zones (left, center, right)
- 8v8, must have at least 1 player in each zone at all times
- Score double points if goal comes from wide area cross/pass
- **Coaching Points:** Stretching defense with width, patience to use width, when to penetrate centrally vs. wide

Small-Sided Game (20 min): 7v7 with Wide Goals

- Full field width, goals at each end but 10 yards wide
- Can score anywhere in wide goal
- Encourages using full width
- **Coaching Points:** Stretching defense, switching play when congested, overlaps

Cool-Down (5 min): Width discussion

- "Why is width important?"
- "When did we use it well today?"

Session Objectives: ✓ Understanding importance of width ✓ Creating and exploiting space ✓ Combination play on flanks ✓ Switching point of attack

Session 2.2: Pressing as a Unit

Theme: Team defending, pressing together

Equipment: Cones for grids, balls, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Numbers Pressing"

- 25x25 grid, 6v4 possession
- Defending four try to win ball
- When defender wins it, call out number and that attacker becomes defender
- **Coaching Points:** Pressure, cover, communication, work together

Technical Practice (20 min): Pressing Patterns

- **Setup:** 30x20 grid, 5v3 scenarios
- **Part 1 (7 min):** First Defender Pressure
 - When attacker receives, nearest defender presses
 - Focus just on first defender's approach
 - **Coaching Points:** Speed of approach, body angle, arc run to ball
- **Part 2 (7 min):** Second Defender Cover
 - Add second defender covering behind
 - 2-3 yards behind first defender, inside position

- **Coaching Points:** Cover passing lanes, provide security, communication
- **Part 3 (6 min):** Third Defender Balance
 - Add third defender balancing the press
 - Prevent switches and through balls
 - **Coaching Points:** Reading play, adjusting position, team shape

Tactical Game (20 min): "Pressing Zones"

- Half field, 8v8
- Divide field into 3 zones (attacking, middle, defending)
- Defending team gets 3 points if they win ball in attacking zone
- 2 points in middle zone, 1 point in defending zone
- Regular points for goals
- **Coaching Points:** Trigger to press (bad touch, back pass), hunt in packs, squeeze space, prevent forward progress

Small-Sided Game (20 min): 7v7 with Offside Line

- 60x40 field
- Mark offside line 20 yards from each goal
- Creates higher press opportunity
- **Coaching Points:** Stepping up together, compressing space, winning ball high

Cool-Down (5 min): Pressing review

- Draw on whiteboard/ground: Where should we press?
- Players contribute ideas

Session Objectives: ✓ Understanding pressing principles ✓ First, second, third defender roles ✓ Working as defensive unit ✓ Triggers for pressing

Session 2.3: Possession & Control

Theme: Keeping the ball, playing out of pressure

Equipment: Cones, balls, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Continuous Possession"

- 30x30 grid
- 6v3, attackers keep ball from 3 defenders
- When attackers complete 10 passes, three defenders do 5 push-ups
- When defenders win ball, rotate
- **Coaching Points:** Movement, support angles, scanning

Technical Practice (20 min): Rondo Progressions

- **Setup:** 15x15 grids
- **Rondo 1** (5 min): 4v1
 - Four on outside, one in middle
 - Keep away from middle player
 - **Coaching Points:** First touch away from pressure, quick passing, body shape
- **Rondo 2** (5 min): 5v2
 - Five outside, two middle
 - Pass through middle players or around
 - **Coaching Points:** Creating passing lanes, splitting defenders, weight of pass
- **Rondo 3** (5 min): 6v3 with Target
 - Six pass around three defenders
 - Play to target player in middle for 3 points
 - **Coaching Points:** Patience, when to play forward, recognition of opportunity
- **Rondo 4** (5 min): 7v3 with Zone
 - 20x20 grid divided in two halves
 - Start in one half (3v3), others wait in other half
 - When ready, play ball to other half (becomes new 3v3)
 - **Coaching Points:** Switch play to relieve pressure, control tempo

Tactical Game (20 min): "Possession with End Zones"

- 50x30 field with 5-yard end zones each end
- 8v8, teams get 1 point for 6 consecutive passes

- 3 points for dribbling into opponent's end zone
- **Coaching Points:** Keeping possession under pressure, patient build-up, when to penetrate

Small-Sided Game (20 min): 6v6 with Neutrals

- 40x35 field, 6v6 + 2 neutral players (always play with team in possession)
- Creates 8v6 scenarios, easier possession
- Score in small goals
- **Coaching Points:** Using extra player, maintaining possession, building attacks

Cool-Down (5 min): Possession principles

- "What helped us keep the ball today?"
- Players identify keys: movement, communication, support

Session Objectives: ✓ Possession under pressure ✓ Creating passing angles ✓ Patient build-up ✓ Recognition of when to penetrate

Session 2.4: Attacking Transitions

Theme: Exploiting space after winning ball

Equipment: Full field, balls, cones, goals, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Quick Attack"

- Half field
- Coach starts with ball at midfield
- Plays ball to either team (4v4)
- That team attacks quickly, other team defends
- **Coaching Points:** Immediate forward thinking, speed of play, decision-making

Technical Practice (15 min): Counter-Attack Patterns

- **Setup:** 40x30 field, goals at each end
- **Pattern 1 (5 min):** Direct Counter
 - Start with GK/defender

- Play long ball to forward
- Midfielders sprint to support
- Finish quickly
- **Coaching Points:** Quality of long ball, forward's hold-up play, supporting runs
- **Pattern 2 (5 min): Speed Dribble Counter**
 - Win ball in midfield
 - Dribble at speed into space
 - Support players join
 - **Coaching Points:** Driving at speed, heads up, decision: dribble or pass?
- **Pattern 3 (5 min): Quick Combination Counter**
 - Win ball, quick 1-2 combination
 - Play in behind defense
 - **Coaching Points:** Speed of combinations, penetrating passes, forward runs

Tactical Game (25 min): "Transition Game"

- 50x40 field, 7v7 with GKs
- Team scores = possession restarts from GK
- BUT: Defending team gets 10 seconds to win it back for "golden goal" (worth 2)
- After 10 seconds, whistle and reset
- **Coaching Points:** Immediate transition thinking, reading turnover moments, explosive attacking, quick decisions (shoot or pass?)

Small-Sided Game (20 min): 6v6 with Counter-Attack Zones

- 50x35 field
- Central zone (15 yards wide)
- If team wins ball in central zone and scores within 10 seconds = 3 points
- Normal goals = 1 point
- **Coaching Points:** Explode forward on turnover, players ahead of ball sprint, supporting players join attack

Cool-Down (5 min): Transition discussion

- "When did we counter-attack well?"
- "What makes a good counter-attack?"

Session Objectives: ✓ Recognizing transition moments ✓ Speed of play after winning ball ✓ Supporting counter-attacks ✓ Quick decision-making

WEEK 3 SESSIONS: Position-Specific Development

Session 3.1: Defenders Workshop

Theme: Center back and outside back development

Equipment: Full field, balls, cones, goals, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Defensive Footwork"

- Cone courses with defensive movement patterns
- Backpedaling, side shuffling, turning, sprinting
- With ball: Jockeying attacker
- **Coaching Points:** Low center of gravity, quick feet, balance

Technical Practice - Center Backs (20 min): *Split team by position - this is CB group*

- **Part 1** (7 min): Heading Progression
 - Partner service
 - Defensive headers (power, distance, direction)
 - Practice attacking crosses
 - **Coaching Points:** Eyes open, forehead contact, attack the ball, body shape
- **Part 2** (7 min): Passing Under Pressure
 - Two CBs build from back
 - 2 forwards press
 - Must complete 10 passes then play to target
 - **Coaching Points:** Body position (open hips), weight of pass, communication, when to go long
- **Part 3** (6 min): 1v1 Defending Scenarios
 - Attacker runs at goal

- CB must delay, channel, win ball if possible
- **Coaching Points:** Patience, body angle, don't dive in, force away from goal

Technical Practice - Outside Backs (20 min): *This is OB group, working simultaneously*

- **Part 1** (7 min): Overlapping Runs
 - Winger has ball
 - OB times overlap run
 - Practice timing and communication
 - **Coaching Points:** "Go!", sprint in behind, get goal-side of winger
- **Part 2** (7 min): Defending 1v1 Wide
 - Winger attacks OB down line
 - OB must show inside, prevent cross
 - **Coaching Points:** Force inside to help, protect goal-side, tackle or delay?
- **Part 3** (6 min): Recovery Runs
 - OB pushed high, ball turns over
 - Sprint back to goal side
 - Track runner or cover space?
 - **Coaching Points:** Sprint angles, recognize danger, communicate with CBs

Tactical Game (20 min): "Defensive Shape Game"

- 8v8, full field
- Coach awards bonus points for:
 - Good defensive headers
 - Successful building from back (5+ passes from GK)
 - Stopped overlaps
 - Recovery runs
- **Coaching Points:** Defenders recognize game situations from their training, apply techniques learned

Small-Sided Game (15 min): Backs vs. Forwards/Mids

- Defenders plus GK vs. rest of team
- Defenders build from back, must complete 8 passes before going to goal

- Attacking players try to win and score quickly
- **Coaching Points:** Defenders work on all skills practiced, game pressure

Cool-Down (5 min): Defender debrief

- "What was hardest today?"
- "What improved?"

Session Objectives: ✓ Position-specific skills for defenders ✓ CB vs. OB different responsibilities ✓ Defending and attacking from back ✓ Communication and partnerships

Session 3.2: Midfielders Workshop

Theme: Central and wide midfielder development

Equipment: Full field, balls, cones, goals, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Midfielder Movement"

- 30x30 grid
- Midfielders work on:
 - Checking away and back to ball
 - Turning on half-turn
 - Playing on the move
- **Coaching Points:** Create space with movement, scanning, readiness

Technical Practice - Central Mids (20 min): *CM group*

- **Part 1** (7 min): Receiving on Half-Turn
 - Server plays to CM who has defender behind
 - CM must receive and turn
 - Play forward to target or retain possession
 - **Coaching Points:** Check shoulder, open body shape, protect ball, quick turn
- **Part 2** (7 min): Switching Play
 - CM in middle, servers on both sides
 - Receive from one side, switch to other side

- Add pressure progressively
- **Coaching Points:** First touch across body, weight of switch, disguise
- **Part 3** (6 min): Box-to-Box Runs
 - Start at defensive third
 - Receive, drive forward
 - Play forward pass or shoot
 - Sprint back and repeat
 - **Coaching Points:** Timing of runs, endurance, quality at speed

Technical Practice - Wide Mids/Wingers (20 min): *Wing group*

- **Part 1** (7 min): 1v1 Attacking Moves
 - Winger receives, defender closes
 - Beat defender with move and cross or shoot
 - **Coaching Points:** Variety of moves, change of pace, end product
- **Part 2** (7 min): Crossing Technique
 - Different crossing scenarios:
 - From standstill
 - At speed
 - Cut-back
 - Early cross
 - **Coaching Points:** Quality of delivery, picking out teammates, different types
- **Part 3** (6 min): Tracking Back
 - Winger attacks, ball turns over
 - Must recover and defend OB
 - **Coaching Points:** Work rate, defensive responsibility, team defending

Tactical Game (20 min): "Midfield Battle"

- 30x30 central zone, 6v6 midfield only
- Score by playing ball to targets at each end
- Bonus: Switches of play = double points

- Must complete 4 passes before playing to target
- **Coaching Points:** Midfield control, switching play, combining, working hard

Small-Sided Game (15 min): 7v7 - Midfield Emphasis

- Full field
- Coach freezes game when midfielders do something excellent
- Highlight: good movement, turns, switches, runs
- **Coaching Points:** Recognition of midfielder roles in game

Cool-Down (5 min): Midfielder discussion

- "What makes a good midfielder?"
- Box-to-box concept, engines of team

Session Objectives: ✓ CM vs. winger different skills ✓ Technical development for each role ✓ Work rate and transitions ✓ Creating and using space

Session 3.3: Forwards Workshop

Theme: Striker and attacking player development

Equipment: Full field, balls, cones, goals, pennies

Warm-Up (10 min): "Finishing Circuit"

- 4 stations, quick finish at each
- Right foot, left foot, header, volley
- Rotate through stations
- **Coaching Points:** Technique first, power second, different finishing types

Technical Practice (20 min): Forward Play Progressions

- **Part 1 (5 min): Movement to Receive**
 - Forward checks away from defender
 - Spins and receives to feet or in behind
 - Finish on goal
- **Coaching Points:** Creating separation, timing, check shoulder, explosive sprint

- **Part 2** (5 min): Hold-Up Play
 - Forward receives back to goal
 - Midfielder plays to feet
 - Forward holds off defender, lays off, spins
 - Midfielder shoots or plays forward back in
 - **Coaching Points:** Strong on ball, feel defender, lay off accuracy, quick spin
- **Part 3** (5 min): Running Channels
 - Forward starts central
 - Ball played wide
 - Forward makes run into box (near post, far post, penalty spot)
 - Finish cross
 - **Coaching Points:** Variety of runs, timing, attacking ball, body shape to finish
- **Part 4** (5 min): Combination Play
 - Two forwards combine with midfielder
 - Various patterns: 1-2s, overlap, cutback
 - Finish on goal
 - **Coaching Points:** Movement creates space, timing, unselfish play

Tactical Game (20 min): "Forward Focus Game"

- 8v8, full field with goals
- Forwards must stay in attacking third until ball enters that third
- Teaches forwards to time runs and stay high
- Bonus points for:
 - Good hold-up play leading to goal
 - Off-ball forward movement that creates goal
 - Combination between forwards
- **Coaching Points:** Patience, timing, movement off ball, partnership

Small-Sided Game (20 min): 5v5 - High Pressure

- 30x25 field, small goals

- Forwards must press aggressively
- Lots of goal-scoring opportunities
- **Coaching Points:** Finishing under pressure, quick decisions, team attacking

Cool-Down (5 min): Forward mentality discussion

- "What separates good scorers from great scorers?"
- Confidence, positioning, persistence

Session Objectives: ✓ Forward-specific movements ✓ Various types of finishes ✓ Hold-up and combination play ✓ Attacking mentality and positioning

Session 3.4: Goalkeepers + Integrated Team Session

Theme: Goalkeeper training + full team integration

Equipment: Full goals, balls, cones, GK gloves, pennies

GK Specific Training (30 min) - *While team does technical work*

- **Part 1** (10 min): Shot-Stopping
 - Various shots: Low, high, near post, far post
 - Reaction saves, power saves
 - **Coaching Points:** Set position, footwork, hands strong, catch or parry decision
- **Part 2** (10 min): Distribution
 - Rolling, throwing, goal kicks, punts
 - Accuracy and distance
 - Practice finding teammates under pressure
 - **Coaching Points:** Technique, vision, when to go short/long, quick release
- **Part 3** (10 min): 1v1 Situations
 - Striker breaks through, GK comes out
 - Timing, angle, making self big
 - **Coaching Points:** When to come, when to stay, body position, dive timing

Team Technical Work (while GKs train) (30 min):

- Review any skills needing work from previous sessions
- Small-sided technical games
- Individual skill development
- **Rotate groups so GKs eventually join**

Integrated Tactical Game (30 min): "Complete Team Game"

- 10v10 or 11v11, full field
- Real game with all positions
- Focus on team shape, transitions, all principles covered
- **Coaching Points:**
 - Defenders building from GK
 - Midfield connecting play
 - Forwards creating chances
 - GKs organizing defense, distributing well
 - Everyone working in system

Cool-Down (5 min): Full team circle

- Recognize each position group's contributions
- "How did we work together as a team?"
- Preview next week's focus

Session Objectives: ✓ GK-specific development ✓ Integration of all positions ✓ Full team understanding ✓ Recognition of how positions connect

GENDER-SPECIFIC COACHING CONSIDERATIONS

Coaching the Girls Team

Key Adjustments:

- **Communication:** Often more receptive to explanation of "why"
- **Team Dynamics:** Relationship-focused, address conflicts quickly
- **Competition:** Frame as personal bests and team goals, less direct comparison

- **Confidence:** May need more verbal reinforcement, especially in physical challenges
- **Physical:** Wide variation in maturation, adapt for physical differences
- **Social:** Friendships very important, use partner/small group work

Strengths to Leverage:

- Often coachable and focused
- Strong tactical understanding capacity
- Team unity and support
- Technical precision development

Coaching the Boys Team

Key Adjustments:

- **Communication:** Brief, direct, action-oriented
- **Team Dynamics:** Hierarchy-conscious, channel competitive energy positively
- **Competition:** Embrace it but teach respect and sportsmanship
- **Confidence:** May be overconfident, teach humility through challenges
- **Physical:** More aggressive play, teach control and safety
- **Social:** Use humor and banter, but set boundaries

Strengths to Leverage:

- Physical intensity and drive
- Risk-taking in positive ways (trying skills)
- Competitive nature for improvement
- Energy and enthusiasm

Both Teams: Build culture of respect, effort, and growth mindset. Treat each individual as unique, these are tendencies not rules.

12-WEEK PROGRESSIVE CURRICULUM

Weeks 1-3: Foundation (Above sessions + 5 more)

- Ball mastery and first touch
- Basic passing and receiving
- Individual defending
- Small-sided games
- Team culture building

Weeks 4-6: Tactical Understanding

- Width and penetration
- Pressing as a unit
- Possession principles
- Attacking transitions
- Defensive transitions

Weeks 7-9: Position Specialization

- Defender development
- Midfielder development
- Forward development
- Goalkeeper integration
- Team shape and organization

Weeks 10-12: Game Situations & Refinement

- Set pieces
- Match preparation
- Game management
- Advanced combinations
- Peak performance

SESSION VARIATIONS FOR DIFFERENT ABILITY LEVELS

For Advanced Players:

- Tighter spaces
- More defenders/pressure
- Time limits
- Technical restrictions (two-touch, weak foot)
- Tactical complexity

For Developing Players:

- Bigger spaces
- Fewer defenders
- More time
- Free play options
- Simplified tactical focus

Mixed-Ability Solutions:

- Zones with different rules
- Bonus points for certain players
- Rotating difficulty positions
- Peer teaching opportunities
- Individual challenges within team game

EQUIPMENT NEEDS (Minimal Setup)

Essential:

- 15-20 balls (proper size)
- 20-30 cones/discs
- 2 sets pinnies (3 colors)

- 4-6 small goals (can use cones)
- Goal nets (if available)

Nice to Have:

- Agility ladder
- Speed hurdles
- Pop-up goals
- Coaching board
- Whistle

Free/Low-Cost Alternatives:

- Use cones for goals
- Make your own pinnies (colored shirts)
- Use backpacks for markers
- Draw on ground when possible

PRACTICE PLANNING TEMPLATE

SESSION TITLE: _____ **DATE:** _____ **THEME:** _____ **AGE**

GROUP: 6th-8th Grade

Session Objectives (2-3 specific, measurable goals):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

WARM-UP (10 min)

- Activity: _____
- Organization: _____
- Coaching Points: _____

TECHNICAL PRACTICE (15-20 min)

- Activity: _____
- Organization: _____
- Progressions: _____
- Coaching Points: _____

TACTICAL GAME (20-25 min)

- Activity: _____
- Organization: _____
- Rules: _____
- Progressions: _____
- Coaching Points: _____

SMALL-SIDED GAME (20-25 min)

- Activity: _____
- Organization: _____
- Emphasis: _____
- Coaching Points: _____

COOL-DOWN (5 min)

- Activity: _____
- Reflection Question: _____

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: _____

POST-PRACTICE NOTES:

- What worked well:
- What needs adjustment:
- Individual player notes:
- Next session focus:

QUICK SESSION IDEAS (When You Need Something Fast)

15-Minute Technical Focus

1. Dynamic warm-up with ball (3 min)
2. Technical circuit - 4 stations (8 min)
3. Competition using that technique (4 min)

30-Minute Tactical Session

1. Warm-up game related to theme (5 min)
2. Freeze game teaching moments (15 min)
3. Free play applying concept (10 min)

60-Minute Complete Session

1. Warm-up (10 min)
2. Technical focus (15 min)
3. Tactical game (20 min)
4. Small-sided game (15 min)

90-Minute Extended Session

- Use full session plans above
- Add extra small-sided game time
- Include more position-specific work
- Add fitness integration

WEATHER ADAPTATIONS

Rain/Wet Field

- Smaller spaces (less running)
- More technical focus (ball control in rain)
- Shorter sprints

- Safety first - cancel if dangerous

Heat

- Frequent water breaks (every 15 min)
- Shorter activity segments
- More shade time
- Technical over physical
- Watch for heat exhaustion signs

Cold

- Longer warm-up
- Keep moving constantly
- Layers allowed
- Shorter technical activities (cold hands)
- More running-based games

Indoor (Gym/Small Space)

- Futsal-style (smaller ball if available)
- Technical focus (tight space benefits)
- Quick feet and turns
- Lower ceiling = low-driven passes
- Safety: no slide tackles

MANAGING COMMON CHALLENGES

Late Arrivals

- Have early arrivals start warm-up activity
- Can join activity in progress
- Partner with on-time players

Low Attendance

- Smaller games (more touches)
- Position-specific work
- Technical focus
- Opportunity for individual attention

Mixed Ability Wide Gap

- Create multiple grids/games
- Different success criteria
- Peer teaching partnerships
- Position-specific groupings

Behavioral Issues

- Clear expectations from day one
- Positive reinforcement emphasis
- Private corrections when possible
- Consistent consequences
- Keep them moving (less idle time)

Lost Focus/Energy

- Change activity
- Add competition element
- Make it fun
- Break into smaller groups
- End with favorite game

PARENT COMMUNICATION TEMPLATES

Pre-Season Email

"Welcome to [Team Name]! We're excited for a great season. Our focus is on player development, teamwork, and love of the game. Here's what to expect..."

Include:

- Practice schedule
- Game schedule
- What to bring
- Your coaching philosophy (brief)
- Communication method
- Volunteer needs

Weekly Update

"This week we focused on [theme]. Players are improving in [specific skills]. Next week we'll work on [preview]. Reminder: [upcoming event]."

Playing Time Philosophy

"Every player will play. Playing time is earned through: effort in practice, attitude, attendance, and improvement. My goal is to develop all players while competing to win."

Handling Concerns

"I welcome questions and concerns. Please email me or request a brief meeting after practice. I cannot discuss playing time or strategy during games. Let's work together for [player name]'s development."

SEASON PLANNING CALENDAR

Pre-Season (Weeks -2 to 0)

- Parent meeting
- Team selection/formation
- Equipment check
- First practice focus: culture and assessment

Early Season (Weeks 1-3)

- Establish team culture
- Technical foundation
- Basic tactics
- Team bonding

Mid-Season (Weeks 4-8)

- Tactical development
- Position specialization
- Game model implementation
- Individual development focus

Late Season (Weeks 9-12)

- Refinement and mastery
- Peak performance preparation
- Advanced tactics
- Competition preparation

Post-Season (Week 13+)

- Individual meetings
- Season review
- Recognition and celebration
- Off-season development plans

YOUR FIRST WEEK CHECKLIST

Before First Practice: Field secured and confirmed Equipment gathered Emergency contact info collected Session 1.1 planned in detail Parent contact established First aid kit prepared Roster/attendance sheet ready

First Practice Goals: Learn all names Establish culture and expectations Assess technical abilities
Observe personalities Make it fun! End with excitement for next practice

After First Practice: Write notes on each player Reflect on what went well Adjust Session 1.2 as needed Follow up with any concerns Prepare for second practice

MOTIVATION: YOUR COACHING JOURNEY STARTS NOW

You have everything you need to start coaching effectively:

- **Knowledge:** This guide + your study plan
- **Tools:** These sessions ready to use
- **Mindset:** Growth mindset for you and players
- **Passion:** Your desire to help players develop

Remember:

- You'll make mistakes - learn from them
- Players don't expect perfection - they expect care
- Every great coach started where you are
- Your lack of elite playing experience makes you relatable
- Focus on continuous improvement

Start Simple:

1. Use Session 1.1 next practice
2. Follow the structure
3. Keep it fun and positive
4. Reflect and improve
5. Move to Session 1.2

You've got this! Your players are lucky to have a coach who cares enough to prepare this thoroughly. Now go make a difference! 

QUICK REFERENCE: COACHING LANGUAGE

ENCOURAGEMENT

- "Great effort!"
- "I like how you..."
- "That's exactly what we practiced!"
- "Keep working!"
- "Much better!"

INSTRUCTION

- "Show me..."
- "Try this..."
- "Can you...?"
- "What if you...?"
- "Remember to..."

QUESTIONS (Guided Discovery)

- "Why did that work?"
- "What could you do differently?"
- "Where should you be?"
- "What do you see?"
- "How can we...?"

CORRECTION

- "Good try, next time..."
- "Almost! Adjust this..."
- "I noticed... can you...?"
- "Let's work on..."
- "Try again, focus on..."

Avoid:

- "Don't..." (frame positively instead)

- "You always..." (specific moments only)
- "That was terrible" (focus on improvement)
- Sarcasm (they're kids!)
- Comparing players negatively

Your Tone Matters More Than Your Words 