

# Heads up! How to improve your players' dribbling skills

Dribbling is, perhaps, the most important soccer skill and it's one that should be worked on constantly, especially if you are coaching very young players.

Simple, unopposed dribbling is easy. Any child can do it.

But dribbling becomes a lot harder when other players are trying to take the ball away from you. To be able to do that, young players need to be encouraged to dribble with their heads up - not looking at the ball all the time.

These "heads up" games will help your players become confident dribblers. They are simple to explain and set up for children aged from four to 10.

You could play two or three of them in one "dribbling" themed coaching session or use them as a warm-up to a coaching session on any subject.

The set-up is the same in every game – a ball for each player, some flat cones to mark the playing area and a few bibs (pennies) – and each game uses the same size playing area.

## **Follow The Leader**

Players work in pairs and each player has a ball.

One player in each pair is the leader. She dribbles the ball around the playing area while her partner follows, copying what the leader is doing.

Coaching notes: Encourage frequent changes in direction, pace and technique.

Change the leader every minute or so.

## **Shark Attack**

Each player now dribbles a ball independently.

While they are dribbling, they try to kick other players' balls out of the area.

Balls that are kicked out are retrieved immediately.

The winner: The player(s) who have their ball kicked out least often.

## **Look Out!**

Spread your players around the four lines that mark the boundary of the playing area.

Each has a ball.

On your command they dribble to the opposite line, turn and return to their starting point.

Then see who can complete 10 return trips the fastest.

Coaching notes: Before you begin, remind your players that they must dribble with their heads up while playing this game. If they don't, there will be many collisions!

Ask your players to show you different ways to turn with the ball.

## **Round The Cone**

Place flat cones (one for each player) five or 10 yards away from the playing area.

On your command, your players dribble around the area using different parts of their feet to control the ball.

On your command, each player runs to a cone, dribbles their ball around it and runs back to you. They bring the ball under control with the sole of their foot and give you a "high five". The first player to high five you is the winner.

Coaching note: Make sure that two or more players do not run around the same cone. It's one cone per player. If a player is beaten to their chosen cone, she must find another one.

## **Safety First**

Make a three-yard square "safe zone" with flat cones in each corner of the playing area.

Your players dribble around the area – using all parts of their feet – while a tagger without a ball tries to tag them.

Players are safe if they are in a safety zone but the zones can only hold one player at a time – if a new player enters a safety zone, the other player in the zone has to leave.

Taggers carry a training vest. If they tag someone, they give them the vest and take that player's ball.

Coaching notes: Swap taggers regularly and make the game competitive by seeing which tagger can tag the most players in the allotted time.

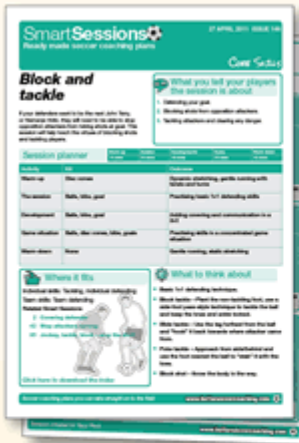
## **The Line Game**

Divide your players into teams of four or five.

Tip: If you have more than 10 players, set up another playing area and adjust the size of the teams. If you have 12 players, for example, use two three-yard square areas.

Each team is given a line to defend and a line to attack.

Players score a "goal" for their team by dribbling the ball over any portion of the line that their team is attacking.



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## 20, 19, 18, 17, 16...

**Objective:** To improve dribbling, passing, defending and shooting skills.

**Players' objective:** To score a goal in less than 20 seconds.

**Age range:** U8s and upwards.

**Difficulty:** Moderate.

**Set-up:** Use an area 25 yards long by 20 yard wide with two small goals at both ends.

Divide your players into teams of three.

### How to play:

- One team attacks. The other team has two goalkeepers (who cannot leave goal areas) and one outfield player whose job is to try to stop the attacking team from shooting.
- The attacking team has 20 seconds to score.
- At the end of that time (or earlier if the sole defender can win the ball) the teams switch roles: Two of the attacking team retreat to their goals, and the two goalkeepers on the defending team come out and their team goes on the attack.

The teams score points in two ways: For every goal they score when they are attacking and by stopping the attackers from shooting for 20 seconds when they are defending.

**Progression:** The attacking team must make at least two passes before shooting.

