

## The Fun Touch

### ***Background***

My oldest son didn't start playing soccer until he was in first grade, but my daughters wanted to start much younger. I had been coaching my son for years and they had been tagging along to practices and games for so long they were more than eager to start playing themselves. The club my eldest played with has a pre-school league, so when they were four years old we signed them up.

### **Pre-school Soccer League**

The league was structured just like the older kids leagues, one practice a week on a weeknight and a match on the weekend. The matches were interesting affairs. My daughters did well, they had been around soccer since before they could walk. They knew exactly what they wanted to do and how to go about doing it. But some of the others who didn't have that experience were lucky to touch the ball once in the entire match. There were parents and coaches shouting all kinds of instructions at the kids, "Run! Run!" "Pass it!" "Kick the ball!" Thankfully the kids really did not pay too much attention to the shouting. Some coaches had the kids playing positions already, leaving one player standing next to each of the goals watching while the game went on in the middle of the field. I remember kids in tears, kids confused and lost, for the kids that didn't already have an idea how to play soccer it wasn't much fun. The only accommodations they made for the age of the children was to reduce the size to 5v5, though the USYS recommends 3v3 for that age. For the kids who already knew how to play soccer, and the kids naturally gifted athletically, it was fun and a good experience. Many of the others only played one season and didn't go back.

### **Pre-school Soccer at the Recreation Center**

The girls were my middle two children, after them came one more. When the youngest got old enough to beg to play soccer we thought we would try something different. We searched around and found a soccer program at the county recreation center which included his age and we signed him up. The most important factor at that point was that it wasn't a league.

This program was supposed to be designed for very young children starting out with soccer, so we thought maybe it would be the answer for him. When we got there we were quite surprised to see these three and four year olds spending about 20 minutes stretching before they were allowed to start playing. Then they started playing little nursery games like duck, duck, goose, and red light-green light. All through the stretches and nursery games the balls were in a bag at on the side. Finally, with about fifteen minutes left the coach set up cones in a row and had them line up to dribble through one at a time. After some prompting he allowed them to score in the goal the second time through the line. Our son was miserable, and it didn't seem like anyone else was having much fun either. We tried to help

the instructor with subsequent sessions, but he seemed to be running from a script. We stopped taking our son to the class, fearing he would fall out of love with soccer forever if he completed the class.

## **The Answer**

So what was the answer? We kept looking around until we decided the answer was to create our own program. Our older children had switched to a smaller club with more flexibility that did not yet have a pre-school program, so we put together our ideas, made a presentation to the board, and The Fun Touch was born.

## ***Pre-school Soccer Program Designed for Children***

Nothing about The Fun Touch came about at random or by accident. We wanted the whole program to be designed with children in mind. We started at the top, deciding what we think are the most important goals for a pre-school soccer program. Always focused on those goals, we worked out a program that met those goals and is appropriate to the age of the participants. My wife and I were both trained as educators and have a good bit of experience in both teaching and day-care as well as soccer, so we used that experience in designing the program to be age-appropriate.

## **Program Goals**

The program goals are very simple, fun, inspiration, and touches. We want the children to have lots of fun playing the best sport in the world, help inspire their love of the game, and get them lots of touches on the ball. Once we determined the most important goals, we developed the strategies for how to meet those goals.

## **Strategies**

Below are the key strategies we developed for meeting the goals, listed out by goal.

### ***Fun***

- Play lots of fun children's games that incorporate a soccer ball.
- Let them play soccer.
- Every gets to participate at all times—No waiting in lines.
- Everyone gets to score goals.
- Organized chaos is a good description. If you look at a Fun Touch session and see a chaotic jumble of squealing kids running around the field kicking soccer balls then you know things are going well.

- Transitions can be difficult with very young kids, since they don't understand instructions as quickly as older children.—work to make them as quick and smooth as possible.
- Coaches have as much fun as the kids.

### *Inspire*

- Have fun playing the game of soccer.
- Make sure everyone has success.
- Get young enthusiastic coaches that love playing with children.
- Allow the kids the freedom to explore and learn at their own pace.
- Teach them activities they can do on their own or with a friend/parent at home.
- Keep the program free to adapt to the needs of the children.

### *Touch*

- Most activities everyone has a ball.
- When we play mini-games, make them very small format such as 2v2 or 1v1. For these little guys, it is more effective to have three 1v1 games running simultaneously on the same pitch than to have one 3v3 game.

### **Equipment**

The equipment needed for this program is pretty much the standard BBC soccer coach toolbox. Balls (size 3), Bibs (aka pinnies), and Cones are all the equipment needed. Portable mini-goals can be helpful, but cones also work for this. Enough balls must be on hand for every participant to have a ball at once. This can be achieved by requiring players to bring a ball with them, or by keeping a large supply on hand. Bibs help divide the group into smaller groups or teams.

### **Time**

The program comes with a recommended breakdown of time between the types of activities. This is flexible, older or more experienced children can spend more times in small-sided games while younger children will probably need to spend more time in the 1 ball per child games.

- 1 ball per child soccer-related games – 1/3 to 1/2
- Small-sided games (1v1-3v3) – 1/3 to 1/2
- 1 ball per 2 children games and activities – as needed

### **Soccer-Related Games**

In order to spend a good portion of the time with a ball at every player's foot, we can't spend the whole time playing soccer. We need fun activities to play where every player has a ball, or every two players has a ball.

The main purpose of this book is to present a compendium of soccer-related games to use with young children. These are not meant to replace playing soccer,

but as a supplement. All of the games incorporate a soccer ball, usually one for each child in the game. They also offer opportunities to improve basic soccer skills such as dribbling, passing, and receiving. The remainder of the book consists of descriptions of each of the games including crude diagrams to help illustrate. Experiment, different groups will enjoy different games.

### ***List of games and descriptions.***

The following is a list of the games included in the rest of this book, along with a brief description of each game. The games are not organized in any specific order.

In a few cases the instructions in here are a slight variation, on the standard. Usually the variations make sure nobody spends time “out” on the sideline or that players get more touches.

Game descriptions also include coaching points. Things you can look for and try to help players improve while they’re playing this game. Most also include variation ideas, but you can feel free to alter the game in your own way if you can make it more fun or beneficial for all the children.

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**Keep your yard clean**

Simple game that is fast paced and fun. Players soon find that power by itself isn't enough, and accuracy is better for keeping it away from the other team. Those that can control the ball coming to them faster will have a big advantage, so it also helps teach them to receive the ball when it is not a perfect pass.

**Global warming**

This is a fun game that gets them dribbling and controlling the ball around the field. Not drastically different than all of the "sharks and minnows" type games, but they do seem to like it and it makes good variety.

**Cops and robbers**

Fun dribbling game. Different from the old standard Sharks and Minnows, but same effect and just as fun.

**Sharks and minnows**

This may be the classic soccer practice game. Called many different names such as pacman, and there are a lot of variations used, but this game is definitely a soccer practice staple. It is a fun way to get the kids to work on their dribbling and ball control skills and get them looking up while they are dribbling.

**Traffic jam**

So simple and non-competitive it's almost not even a game. In spite of the lack of a "result" I have yet to run into a group of kids that didn't enjoy this game. Gets them looking up and controlling the ball in traffic.

**Marbles**

Game for working on accuracy. Is similar to DMZ, but incorporates many balls so it lasts longer and gives players more options.

**Kick the coach**

While sharks and minnows is probably the most commonly used, kick the coach is not far behind, and may just be the most popular of all with the kids. Something about hitting their coach really gets the kids very excited. The animal imitations ensure there is a smile on everyone's face. Try to make sure you let everyone get you at least once.

**Red light – green light**

A playground classic converted to soccer. By putting a ball at their feet, this simple playground game becomes a great teaching tool.

**DMZ**

Good for accuracy and just kicking. Not very intense as far as running and all, so it is a good warmup/cooldown activity.

**Kick the cone**

Good fast paced game that emphasizes teamwork. Beat the defender by shooting from two angles simultaneously—if you can cooperate. Also emphasizes accuracy.

**Lions and tigers**

Big listening skills game. If transitions are killing you try this one. I start out getting confused when I play this one. Also incorporates dribbling, but not as much as other games.

**Easter egg hunt**

At the younger ages they may never figure out this is pretty much impossible to win if they all understand the game. As soon as they figure that out, you can reduce the number of “eggs” required to win to make victory possible. This is amazing fitness drill until they figure out how to work as a team.

**Goalfest**

Who doesn't love to score lots of goals?

**Dribble through the gates**

This is a great 1 ball per 2 children, competitive activity to emphasize ball control, dribbling, and turns.

**Trick or treat**

Silly game that is fun for the kids and has a seasonal theme.

**Challenge Game**

This game is really for older children, but can be used later in season when you are adding in more 1v1 competitive activities.

**Minefield**

Fun game. That challenges them to control the ball in tight spaces. If you set it up right you will find yourself irresistably drawn to try your own skills out weaving through the tight spaces.

**Freeze Tag**

This is a fun game where everyone has a ball which works on basic dribbling skills and also helps build team spirit.

**Frogger**

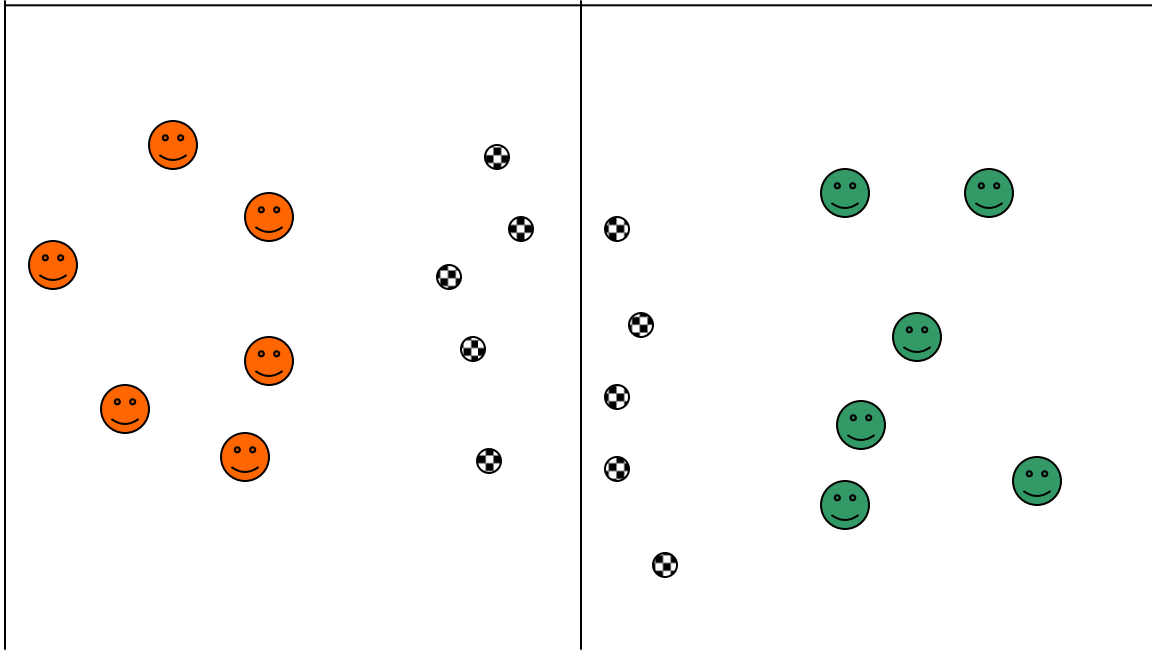
This game is quite similar to the cops and robbers game. Players have to keep their heads up while dribbling to dodge the hopping frogs.

**Death Valley**

This is another favorite. Can you get through the valley alive?

## **Soccer Related Children's Games**

## Keep your yard clean

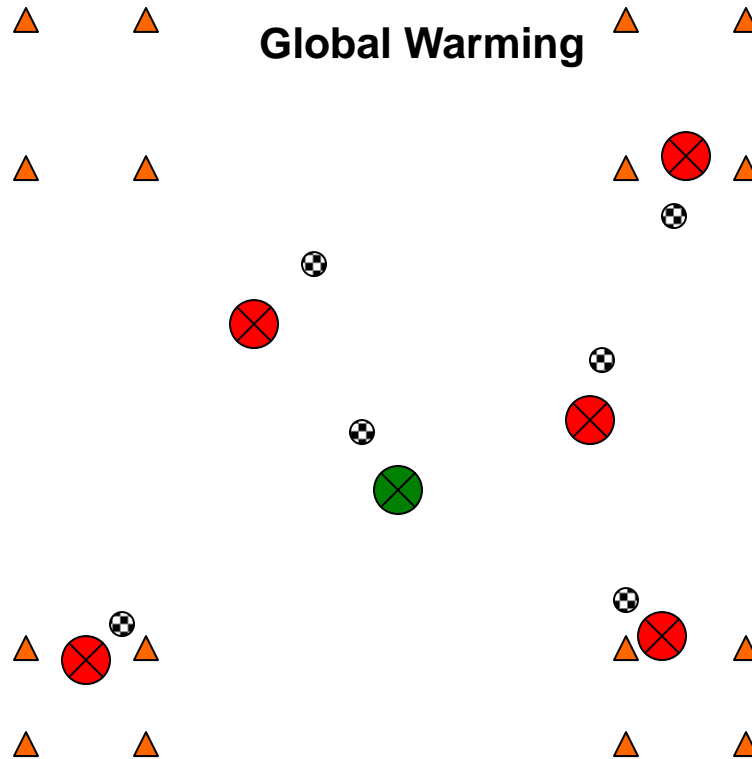


**Setup:** Mark off a large H, 30-40 x 60+ . Two equal teams on each side of middle line. Lots of balls evenly distributed between the two sides. Best with 8-12 players.

**Play:** Teams must get all the balls into their opponents field. Have parents line sidelines and return balls that stray back into play. Players cannot cross the center line.

**Coaching Points:** Good kicking stroke. Follow through. Kicking with whole body instead of leg. Placement. Plant foot. Backswing.

**Variants:** No back line, power is big advantage.



### Setup

A 15x15 square with four cones set up in a 2 yard square in each corner. All players in the middle, everyone has a ball. One player is the polar bear the rest are seals. The small squares in the corners are icebergs.

### Play

The seals dribble around the squares with their balls while the polar bear dribbles around hunting seals. To catch a seal the polar bear must hit that player's ball or feet (below the knee) with his/her ball. Seals are safe inside the icebergs, but they are melting fast. Every time a player enters an iceberg he/she must count to 5 and then leave the iceberg again. When seals get caught they become polar bears. Last seal remaining is "winner" and gets the honor of being polar bear in the next game.

### Coaching Points

Vary your pace. Keep the ball close. Control the ball. For polar bear, accuracy over speed and power.

### Variations

Younger kids might need more than one polar bear to start out, or coach can help.

## Cops and Robbers



### Setup

Mark out a square with cones about 15x15. Each player except one starts at one end of square with a ball—they are the robbers. One player without ball is sherriff and he/she starts inside the square. Works best with 6-10 players.

### Play

When sherriff calls jailbreak, robbers must dribble across the square. Sherriff tries to get their balls away from them. If sherriff controls a robber's ball or kicks it out of the square, the robber joins the posse. If a robber can play his/her ball through the sherriffs legs, the sherriff becomes a robber. Play until everyone is a sherriff or everyone is a robber.

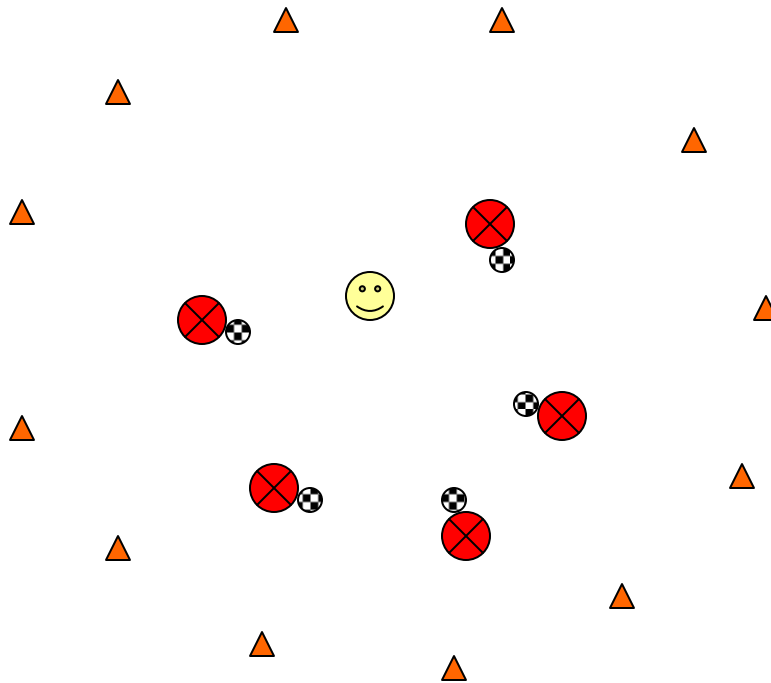
### Coaching Points

Try to use your moves. Vary your pace. Keep the ball close. Control the ball.

### Variations

Restrict robbers to one foot, or one side of foot.

## Sharks and Minnows



### Setup

Mark out a circle with cones, or use center circle. If you are short on cones you can just make a square. Each player except one starts in circle with a ball—they are minnows. One player without ball is shark.

### Play

Minnows dribble around in circle trying to keep away from the shark. Shark attempts to kick minnows balls out of the circle. If their ball leaves the circle, the minnows must dribble once around the outside before they can come back in. If shark can get all minnows out at once he/she wins.

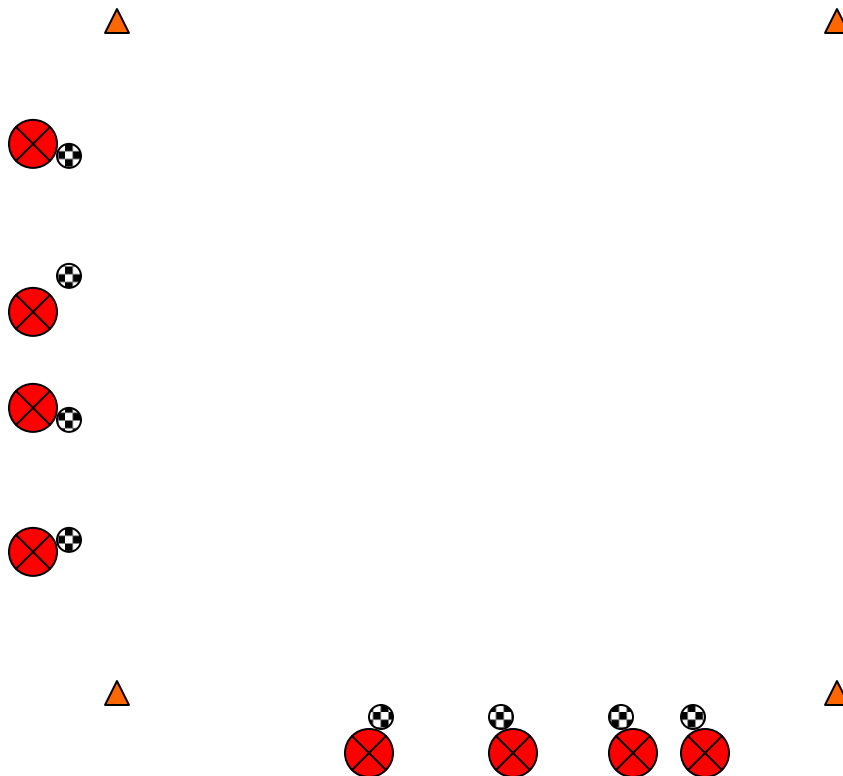
### Coaching Points

Keep the ball close. Control the ball.

### Variation

If minnows get hit they become sharks instead of coming back in as minnows and play until everyone is a shark.

## Traffic Jam



### Setup

Mark out a square with cones about 10x10. Start out with an even number of players on each of two adjacent sides.

### Play

Players must dribble across the square and back without the player or their ball contacting any other player or ball. At each end the players must execute a turn specified by the coach.

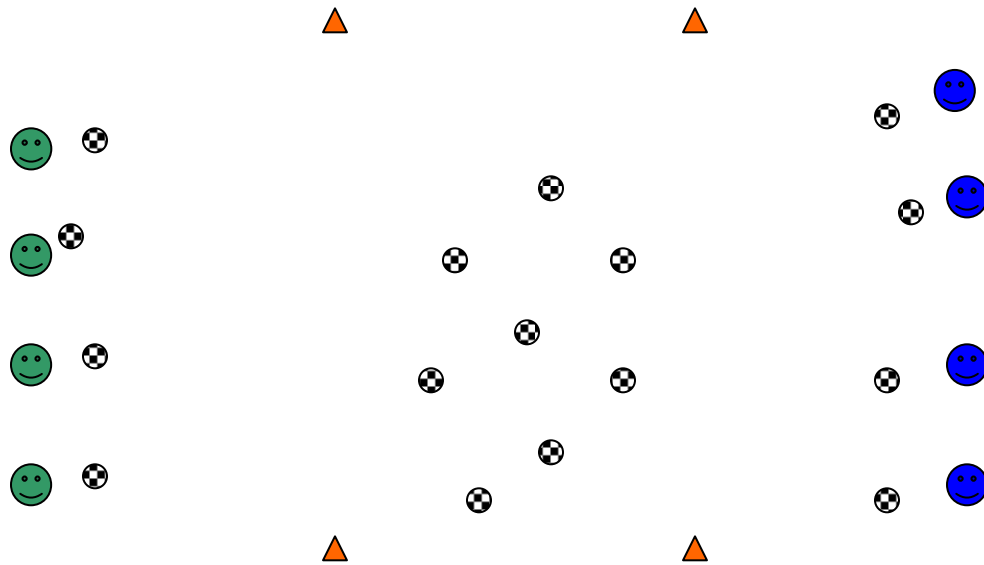
### Coaching Points

Vary your pace. Keep the ball close. Control the ball.

### Variations

Restrict players to one foot, or one side of foot. Scorekeeping—each player starts with 10 points every time contact is made they lose a point. Game over when someone gets to 0 and highest score is winner. Can also start with players distributed on all four sides.

## Marbles



**Setup:** Start with a rectangle about 10-15 meters wide. Nobody is allowed inside this area. Two even teams on either side of the rectangle have a ball for every player. A bunch of balls are spaced out inside the rectangle, preferably of different color or size than the ones the players start out with to be able to differentiate. These are the marbles.

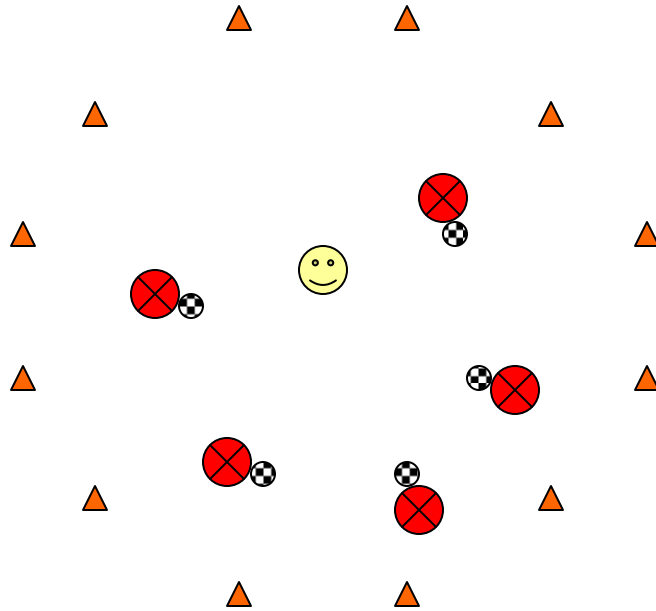
**Play:** Outer teams kick their balls and attempt to knock the marbles outside the rectangle.

**Coaching points:**

Shooters: Shooting strength use instep and follow through. Accuracy. Older players can use this to work on bending around obstructions.

Defenders: Positioning between the attacker and the goal.

## Kick the Coach



### Setup

Mark out a circle with cones, or use center circle. If you are short on cones you can just make a square. Each player starts in circle with a ball. Coach is in circle with players. Between 4 and 10 players works best for this game.

### Play

Players dribble around in circle trying to get close enough to the coach to hit him with their ball. Must hit below the knees to count. Coach tries to avoid getting hit. With younger players, he/she doesn't try very hard.

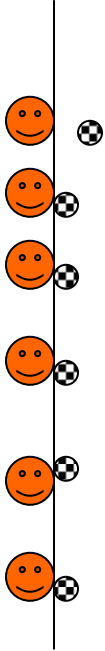
### Coaching Points

Keep the ball close. Control the ball.

### Variation

Each time the coach gets hit, the player who hit him/her gets to choose which animal the coach must imitate until he/she gets hit again.

## Red-Light Green-Light



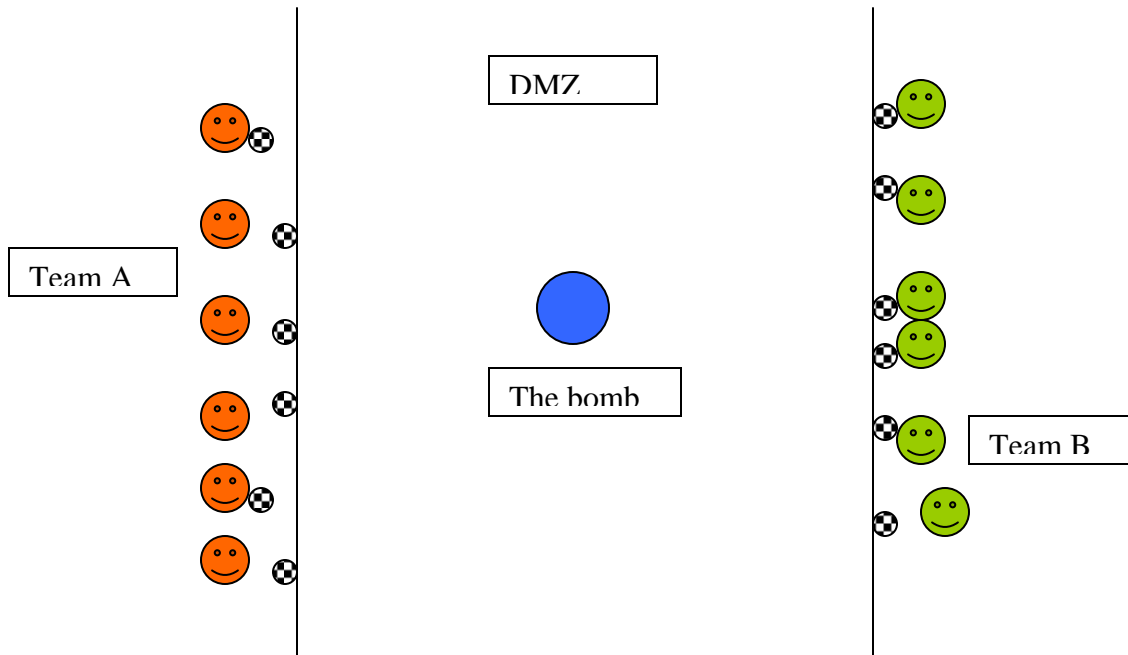
**Setup:** Two parallel lines between 20 and 50 yards apart. Can be cones or lines on the field. Players start on one line with a ball facing the other line.

**Play:** When caller calls Green Light, the players start dribbling towards the opposite line. When the caller calls Red Light, all the players must stop. If they don't stop right away they have to take two steps backwards. First one to reach the other end wins.

**Coaching Points:** Keep the ball close to you. Keep it under control.

**Variation:** Restrict to one foot or part of foot, etc. If you really want to enforce the ball must be stopped rule strictly then say, "1, 2, 3 red light" instead of just "red light" to make sure you give them a realistic chance to get the ball fully stopped.

## De-Militarized Zone (DMZ)



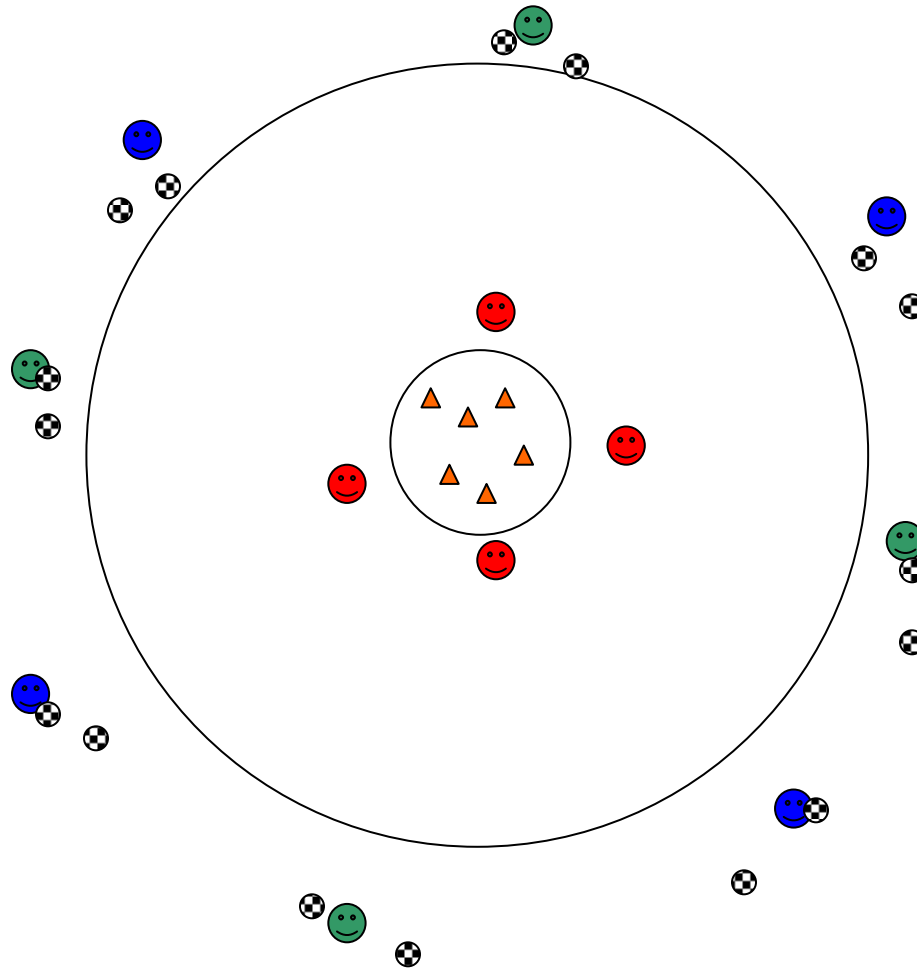
**Setup:** Two parallel lines about 10-20m apart depending on age and kicking ability. Two equal teams all with a ball along each line. Target ball in the middle is the bomb. The space between the two lines is the DMZ. One of those big inflatable balls can be used for this.

**Play:** Players try to hit the bomb and knock it to the other team's line without entering the DMZ. If the bomb crosses your line, it explodes and you other team gets a goal. Bomb is reset and restored to middle to restart.

**Coaching Points:** This is about accuracy. The team that hits the "bomb" the most often usually wins. Coach push pass for best accuracy. Plant foot to keep it on ground where target is.

**Variants:** Vary the distance of the lines and the size of the teams.

## Kick the Cone



**Setup:** 15-25 yd outer circle and 5-8 yd inner circle. Mark circles off with disc cones. Six tall cones set up in inner circle. Three teams of four, two outside circles, one in ring between circles.

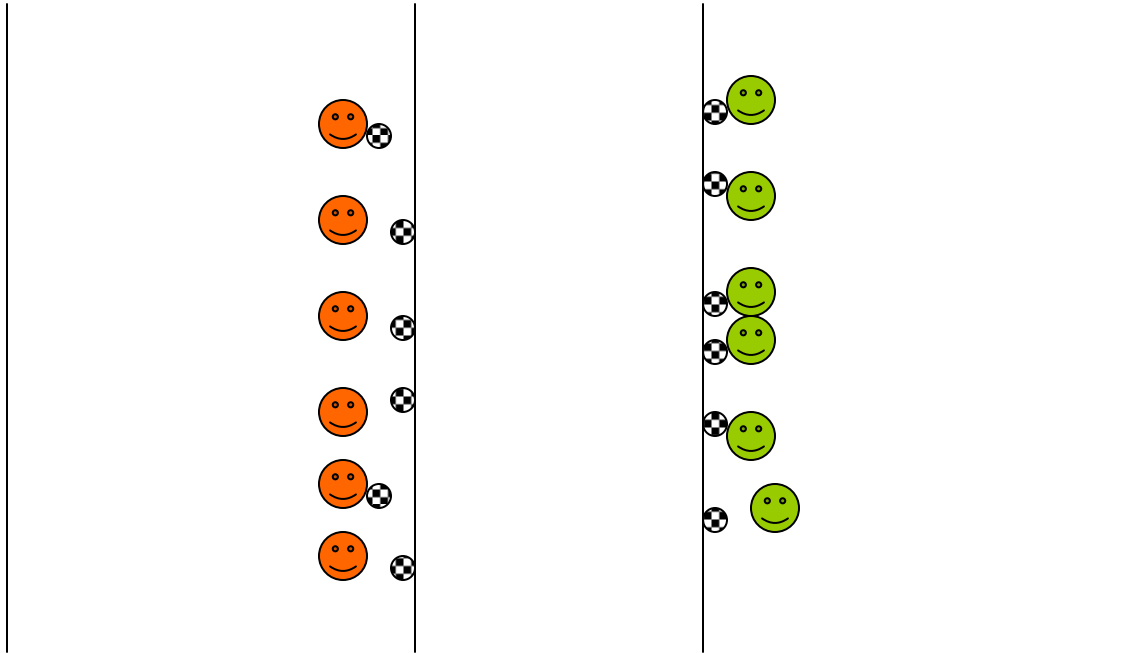
**Play:** Outer teams try to kick balls to knock over cones in inner circle. They must kick from outside outer circle. Outer teams may enter outer circle to retrieve ball, but may not kick from inside the circle. Inner team must defend cones, blocking balls from knocking them over. Inner team gets point for each cone left standing after 1 or 2 minutes. Rotate so each team gets a turn guarding the cones.

### Coaching points:

Shooters: Shooting strength use instep and follow through. Accuracy. Older players can use this to work on bending around obstructions.

Defenders: Positioning between the attacker and the goal.

## Lions and Tigers



**Setup:** Need four parallel lines. Two inner lines about 2-6 yards apart and two outer lines about 12-16 yards further out. If marked with cones, it makes it easier to explain the game if the inner and outer lines are different colors. Players are split into two teams, Lions and Tigers, and each team starts on one of the two inner lines. Each player has a ball. Also requires a caller, usually the coach.

**Play:** When the caller makes a call, the team called must get their ball past the outside line, without getting tagged by the other team. So if the caller calls “Lions” the lions dribble away from the tigers towards the outside line. The tigers leave their balls and chase the lions trying to tag them before they cross the line. Opposite if the caller calls tigers. If a player is tagged, that player joins the team that tagged him/her. Play continues until all players are on one team.

**Coaching Points:** Control the ball. Move quickly. Truthfully this one comes down to listening skills. The ones paying the most attention to the caller will have a huge advantage.

**Variation:** Restrict to one foot or part of foot, etc. If it gets too easy for them, halfway through change it so the team called is the one chasing instead of the one being chased.

## Easter Egg Hunt

I like to play this game a couple times around the easter holidays. Can be used to work on passing, dribbling, tackling, or a combination of all of them. Also good for teaching that game awareness, you must keep an eye on how many the other teams have. And teamwork as some division of labor must take place to succeed. Don't tell the kids this is also good fitness training, that can be a secret.

### Setup

Four small cone squares in each corner of ~20 yard squares are the baskets

12 balls (easter eggs) start out in center of square

4 teams of 3-4 in each corner

### Gameplay

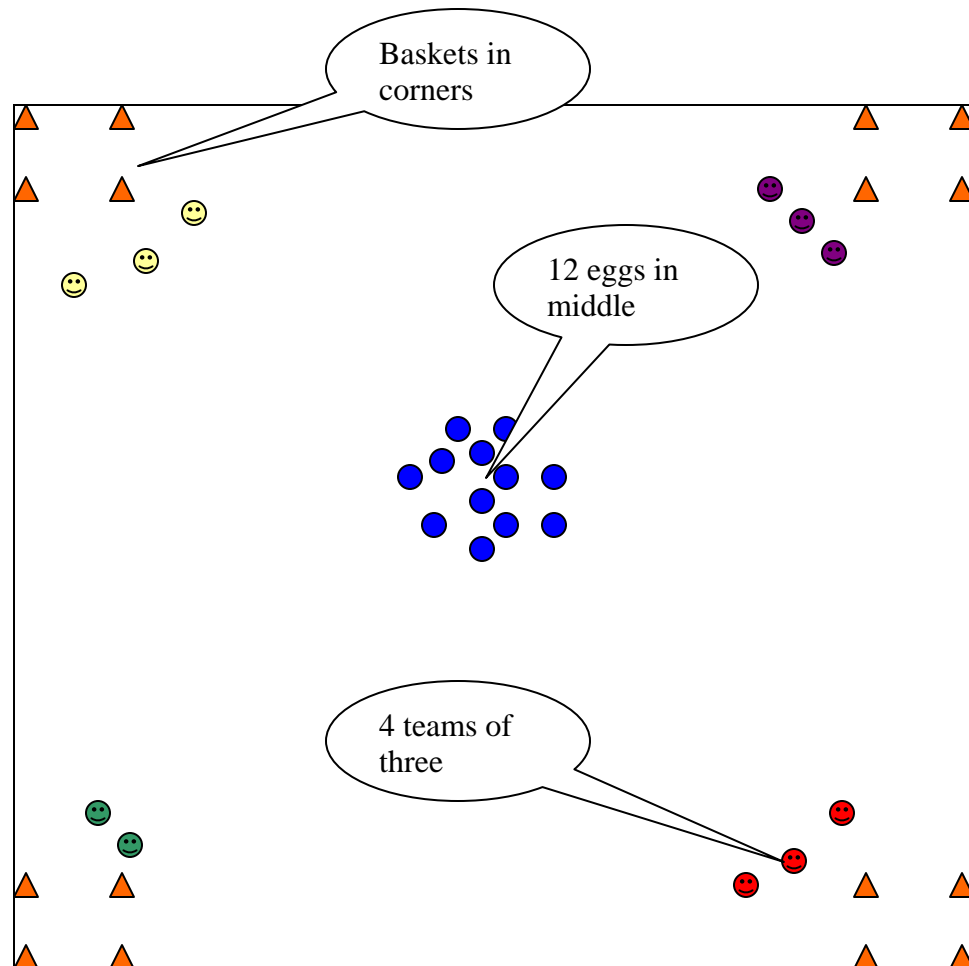
Each team must try to get eggs into their basket.

First team with 4 eggs in their basket wins.

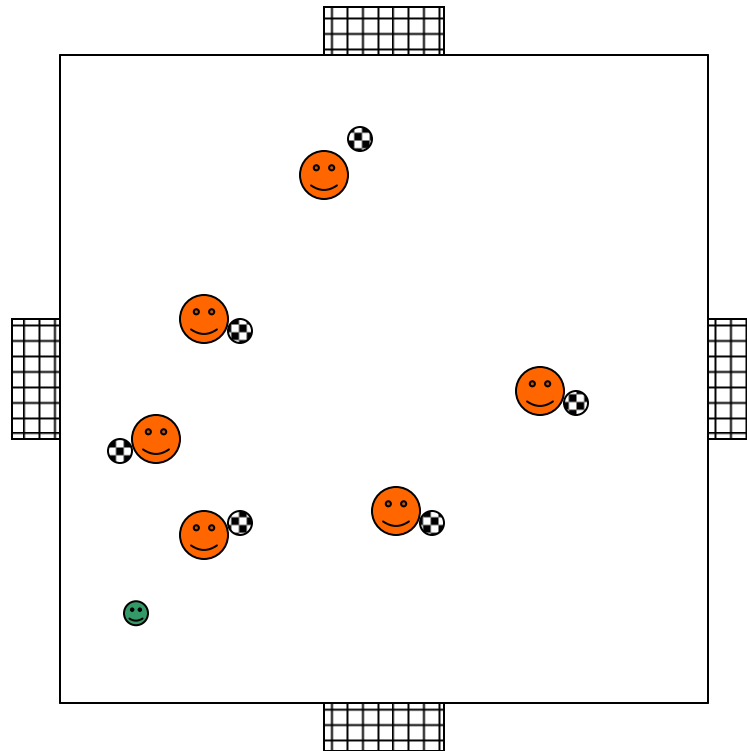
Players can dribble or pass balls to get them in their basket. Players can tackle or steal balls away from the other teams.

### Variation

No passing.  
No dribbling.



## Goalfest



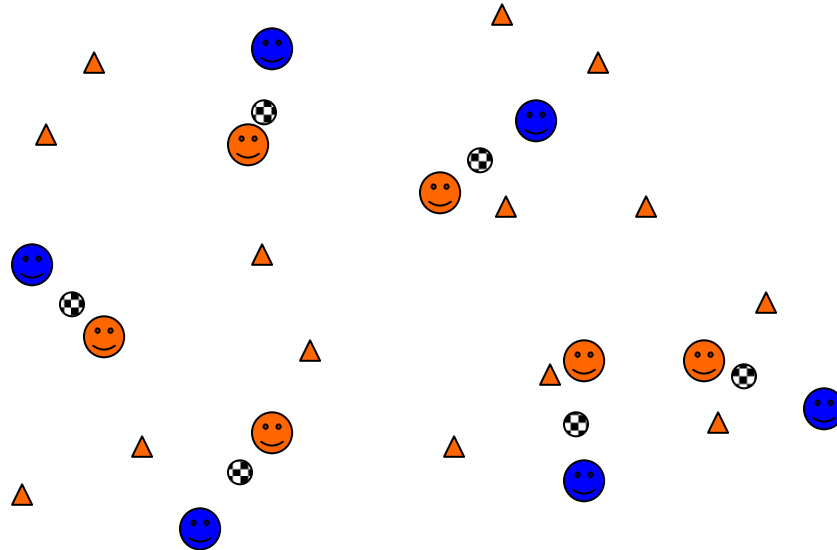
**Setup:** Square or rectangular pitch marked out about 20 yards across. At least four mini-goals set up around the pitch. If you don't have enough mini-goals, bigger goals or cones can be used. If goals used don't have nets, you'll want to try to recruit some parents or siblings to stand behind the goals and stop the balls before they get too far away. Can use any number of players, adjust size of field based on number of players. Make sure field is a little crowded so they have to look up to avoid each other.

**Play:** Every player has a ball. Coach sets a time limit, such as one minute, and players must score as many goals as possible within that minute. They cannot score in the same goal twice in a row. Players are responsible for keeping their own score. If you like you can declare the player with the most goals after the time limit a winner, but it may be better to have them go for a personal best.

**Coaching Points:** Keep your head up. Watch out for other players. Look where you're going. Keep the ball under control.

**Variation:** Restrict to one foot or part of foot, etc. Use cones or goals without nets to encourage them to keep it in control rather than shooting. This can also be done as 1v1 for pair time.

## Dribble Through the Gates



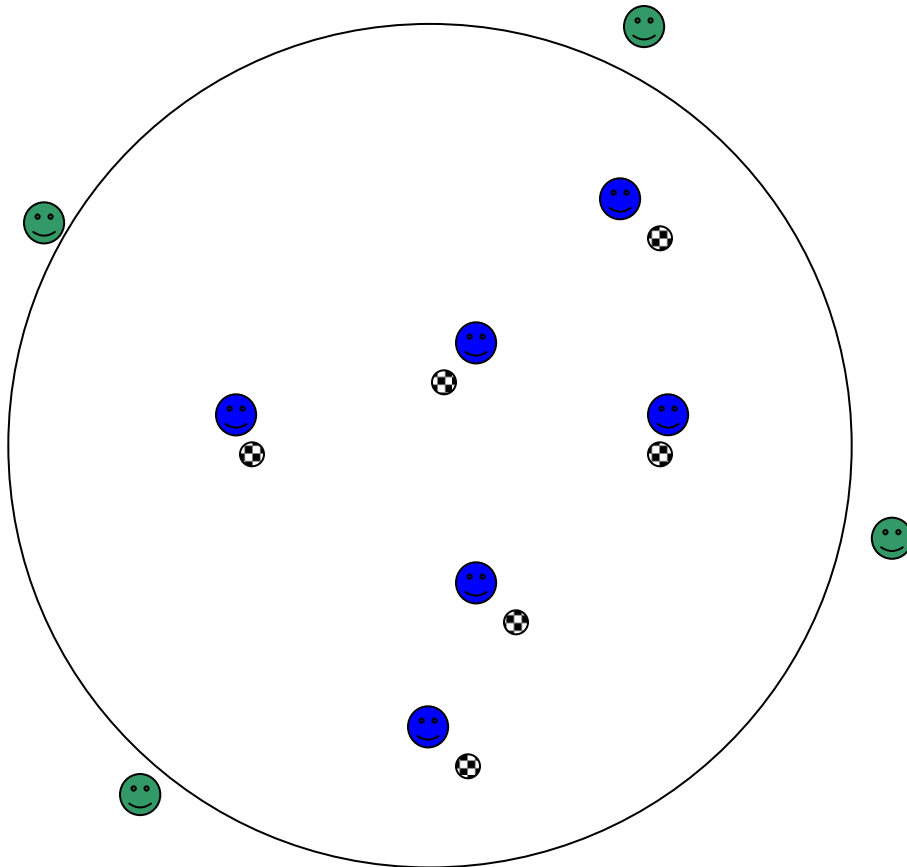
**Setup:** Place cones in pairs scattered randomly around approximately 20x20 space. These are the gates. Players as individuals, or in pairs or groups of four 2v2. Each player or group of players has a ball.

**Play:** The pairs of cones are gates, and the players get a point each time they dribble their ball through one of the gates. They cannot go through the same one twice in a row. Usually start unopposed first time, then progress to pairs against each other. All players or groups are going simultaneously.

**Coaching points:** Brilliant drill for working on ball control and fitness. The 1v1 battles are exhausting as the action does not pause. Players soon learn to turn away from defender towards open gate, and then becomes great exercise for practicing turning. Coach them to use their moves!

**Variations:** Major variation is to incorporate passing. Same objective but players compete against each others in pairs and can pass to set up or pass it through for a point. Ball must be controlled by same team on other side of gate to count as a point.

## Trick or Treat

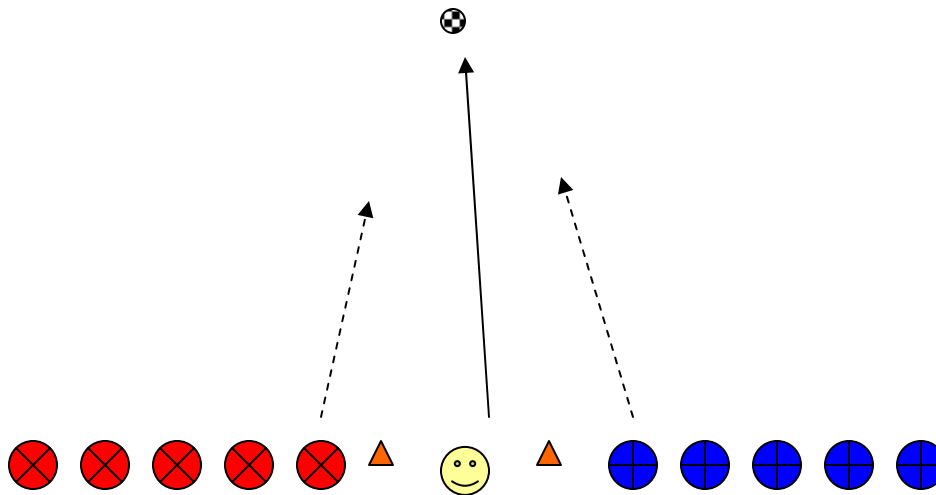


**Setup:** 15-25 yd circle with parents or siblings standing around the outside with a stack of little cones or real treats. The kids are all in the middle of the circle with a ball.

**Play:** Players dribble the ball up to one of the parents on the side and say, “Trick or Treat.” The parent names a trick or move for the player to do and if they do it they get a cone. The one with the most cones wins.

**Coaching points:** We usually play this game in the fall, around the end of October. Not really any special lessons, but the kids love playing it, and they are dribbling around and attempting to perform tricks with the ball. Give the parents some tricks to use that the players will be able to do at their level. Can use anything, even things without the ball, just keep it within their reach.

## The Challenge Game



### Setup

One goal (or cones) at one end of 20x30 yard field. Two teams lined up on each cone. Coach in middle of goal with pile of balls. Lines should be uneven in length if possible. Should not be played with more than 12 players.

### Play

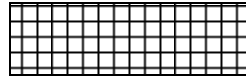
Coach throws out ball into field. First player from each team goes out and tries to score through goal. Start the next pair if they have been going for too long. After once through the line you want to get it to where they are in line just long enough to catch their breath before going out again. This is one game where the line works because it is so intense while they're playing the breather in line becomes part of the game. If the lines are even, swap a couple of them to the other line every once in a while to make sure they all get to face each other.

### Coaching Points

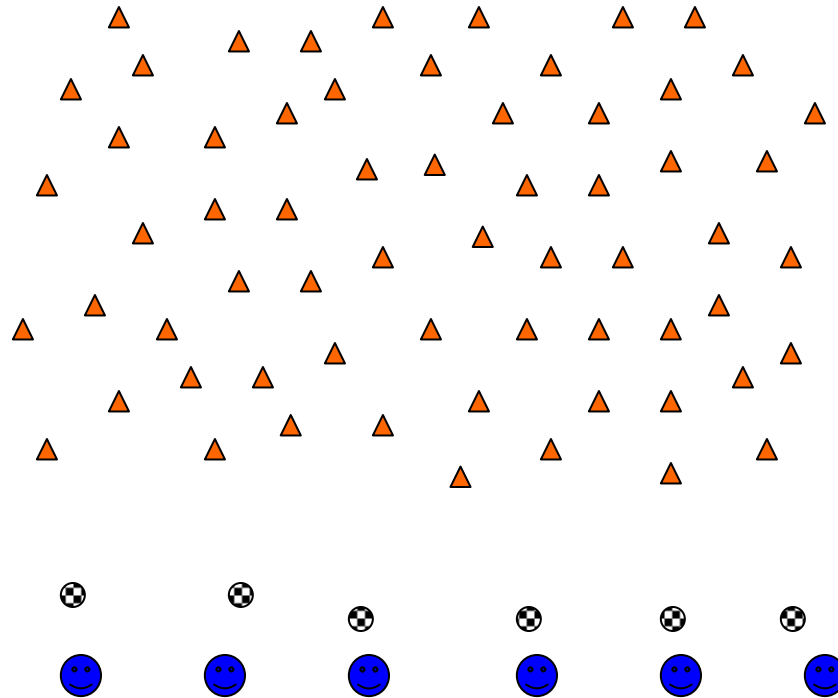
Creativity with the ball. Reading/turning away from defender. Positional defending. Can also be used to introduce legal v illegal contact later on.

### Variations

Send out more than one player from each team to introduce teamwork.



## Minefield



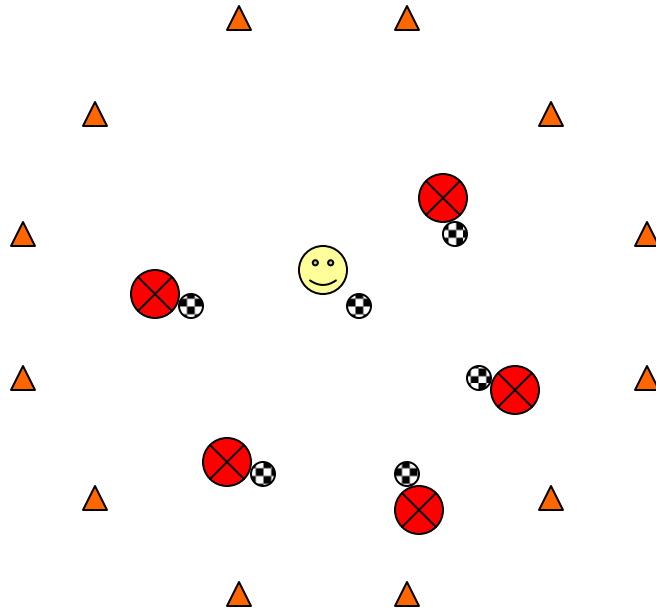
**Setup:** The setup for this is important, as you want to make sure there are no straight lines through the minefield. Scatter as many cones as you have around the minefield, with a goal shooting distance away from one end. Also works nice if you can have a goal at either end of the minefield.

**Play:** The cones are land mines (bombs) which will explode if player or ball touches them. Players must dribble through the minefield and shoot the ball into the goal without getting blown up. Give them a set time limit and challenge them how many can they score within time.

**Coaching points:** This is a nice simple activity for working on turns and ball control. Show them a few turns in warmup or before playing so they can try them out. Coach them to use their dribble skills to dodge the cones.

**Variations:** As mentioned, goals at each end or on all four sides so they can be dealing with traffic too. For older kids, include a rule that they can kick another players' ball away so they have to avoid each other too.

## Freeze Tag



### Setup

Mark out a circle with cones, or use center circle. If you are short on cones you can just make a square. Each player except one starts in circle with a ball. One or more players start as it.

### Play

Players dribble around in circle trying to keep away from the one who's it. Player(s) who's it tries to hit other players or their ball with his ball. If his ball touches a player or their ball, that player must freeze with their legs apart holding their ball above their head. They can be unfrozen if another player plays his/her ball through the frozen player's legs.

### Coaching Points

Keep the ball close. Control the ball.

### Variation

Multiple "it" players. Limit to right/left foot, inside/outside, etc.

## Frogger



### Setup

Mark out a square with cones about 15x15. Each player except one starts at one end of square with a ball. Two players without ball are frogs and starts inside the square. Works best with 6-10 players.

### Play

Frogs can only hop. Players must dribble balls across the square without getting tagged by the frogs. If a player gets tagged she becomes a frog. Last two players left are winners and get to be the frogs next game.

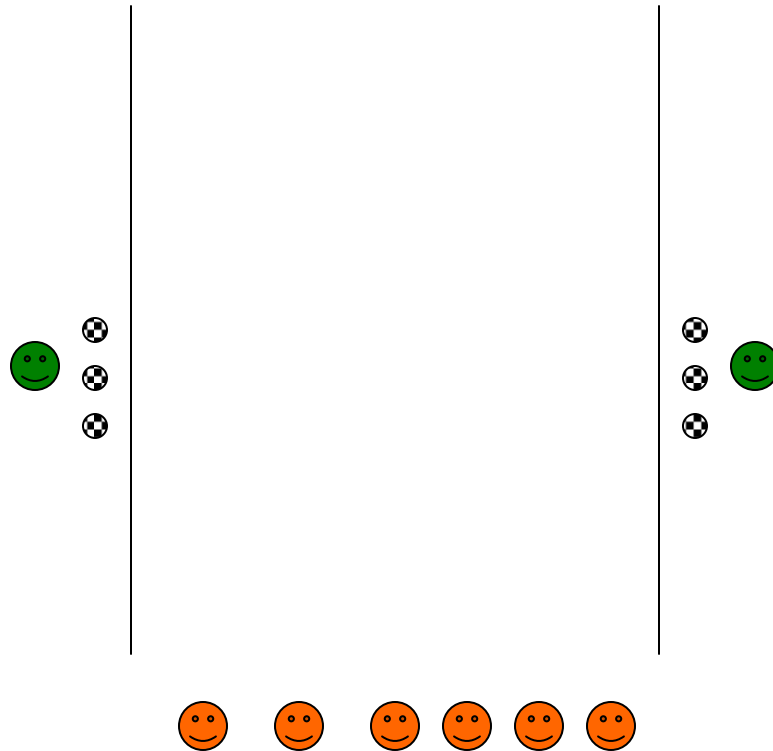
### Coaching Points

Try to use your moves. Vary your pace. Keep the ball close. Control the ball. Keep your head up to see the frogs and avoid them.

### Variations

Restrict players to one foot, or one side of foot.

## Death Valley



**Setup:** Two parallel lines between 12 and 20 yards apart. Can be cones or lines on the field. These lines are the valley. Players start at one end of the valley except for two kickers who start on the side with a bunch of balls.

**Play:** Kickers start play by calling “Death Valley”. All the players must dribble to the other end of the valley without them or their ball getting hit by a ball. Kickers kick their balls and try to hit the players or their balls. Balls must be played on the ground, hits above the knee won’t count. Once players get hit they become kickers. Last two players to get hit get to be kickers first for next game.

**Coaching Points:** Dribble with your head up. Keep the ball close to you. Inside for accuracy.