

STEVE WATSON'S FUN SOCCER GAMES



**“My must-have
games for
successful
coaching”**

Steve Watson

INCLUDING:

**Tag Netball • The 1-0 Game
War! • Soccer Tennis**

My 'magnificent seven' games you should never be without

While it is important to plan your coaching sessions, you need to be flexible enough to change your plan or abandon it altogether if it isn't working.

But that's not easy if you don't have any 'must-have' games in your kit bag – games that your players are guaranteed to enjoy.

The games featured here are my 'magnificent seven' – games that I use when I get an unexpected number of players turn up for training or when I can't get them to engage with my carefully crafted plan.

These games are suitable for players aged from six to 16, they are easy to adapt for different numbers of players (see below), require very little in the way of equipment and, most importantly, will help your players learn and develop a range of soccer skills while they are having fun.

I suggest you print them out and keep them in your kit bag – you never know when you might need them!

ADAPTING THE GAMES

Each of these games can be adjusted to suit the players you are working with. You can make them easier for younger or less experienced players, or make them more challenging for older or more experienced players. For example, to make a game easier, reduce the pressure on players by making the playing area or the goals bigger.

You can also play 'numbers up', i.e. make the teams uneven. Just make sure you change the players around regularly so that all of them can benefit.

You can make coaching games more challenging for older and more skilful players by adding pressure. This is done by making the playing area and/or goals smaller, restricting the number of touches players are allowed to take or putting your more experienced players into the smaller teams in a numbers up situation.

Steve Watson

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Green Star Media Ltd
Meadow View, Tannery Lane
Guildford, Surrey,
GU50AB, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1483892894
Fax: +44 (0) 1483894 148

Publisher:
Kevin Barrow
Editor:
Steve Watson
Illustrator:
Steve Thorp
Customer Services:
Duncan Heard
Marketing Manager:
Paul Mortimer
Operations Director:
Toby Curthoys
Managing Director:
Andrew Griffiths

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War!

If you're looking to work on defending techniques – closing down, positioning between the attacker and the goal, and not 'diving in' – as well as shielding the ball, tackling and shooting, this is the game for you.

SET UP:

Create a 20 yards x 30 yards playing area with a goal at either end.

HOW YOU COACH THIS GAME:

1. Divide your players into two equal teams. Ask the players in each team to give themselves a number from 1 to X, where X is the number of players in each team. So, for example, if there are five players in each team, there will be a number 1 in each team, a number 2 in each team and so on to number 5. There are no goalkeepers. At the start of the game, each team waits behind one of the goals. You stand on the sideline with a number of balls.

2. Start the game by tossing the ball into the playing area and calling a number. The player with that number from each team runs round the playing area and enters from the opposite side.

3. Each player's objective is to win the ball and score in the opposition's goal. A goal = 1 point. When every player has had a turn, the team with the most points is the winner. When a goal is scored (or the ball goes out of the playing area) the players return to their starting positions and you call out another number.

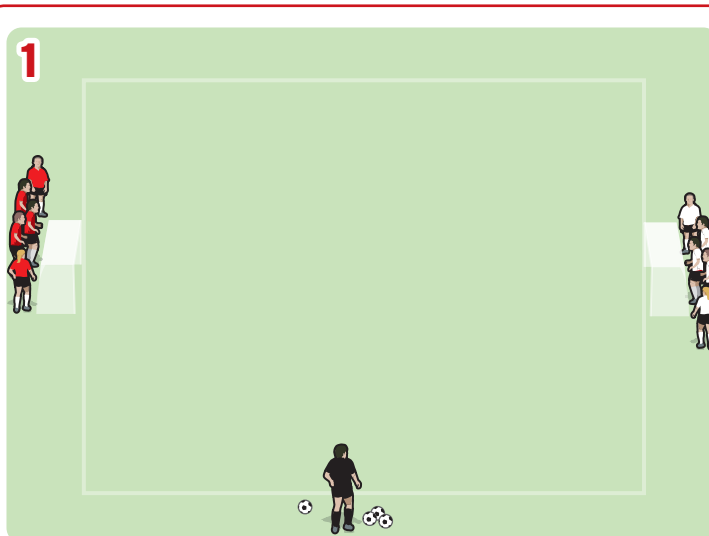
If you want to emphasise close control, make it a condition that a goal can only be scored if players have control of the ball and be no more than two steps away from it when the ball crosses the line. If they do not have control or are more than two steps away from the ball, the goal does not count. Alternatively, you can encourage quick shooting by allowing the players to shoot as soon as they get a sight of goal.

PROGRESSION:

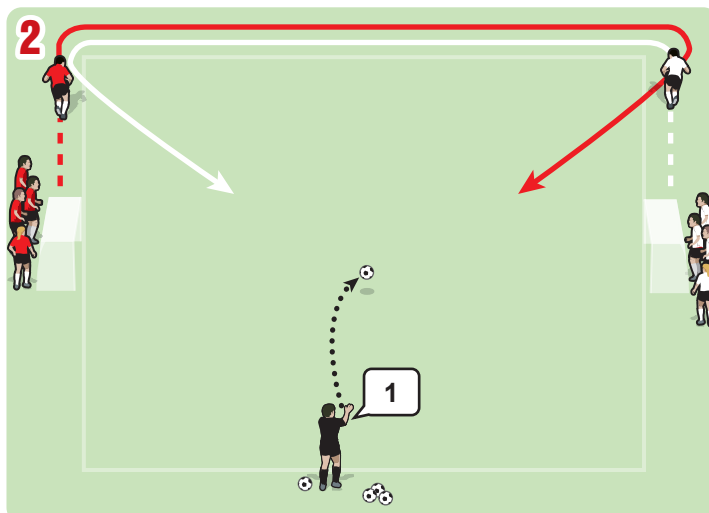
Call out a second/third number while the first pair are playing. Now you have a 2v2 or 3v3 team situation.

COACHING NOTES:

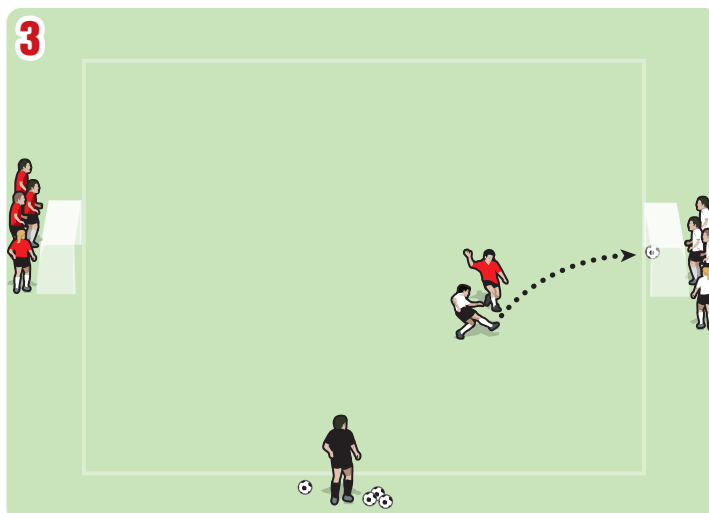
If the ball goes out of the grid, throw another ball in to keep the game flowing. Try throwing it in high so your players can practise controlling a bouncing ball.



Divide your players into two teams and line them up behind the goals. Stand on the sideline with the balls at your feet.



Toss a ball into the playing area and call out a number. The relevant players run round the area and enter from the opposite side.



Once they are in the playing area, the players try to win the ball and score in the opposition's goal.

The 1-0 Game

Paul Cooper devised this excellent small-sided game. It's a great way for your players to practise keeping possession of the ball and learn how to close a game out.

SET UP:

Create a 40 yards x 20 yards playing area with goals at either end.

HOW YOU COACH THIS GAME:

1. Divide your squad into two teams of four plus goalkeepers.

If you have more players you can play with uneven teams (for example, 4v2 or 5v4), make the teams bigger (up to 6v6) or create more than one playing area.

The basic rule of the game is that a team can only win by one goal.

Each game lasts for five minutes.

2. Play normal five-a-side rules. When a goal is scored, the scoring team must try to keep possession and can't score again. If they do, the goal is disallowed and a goal kick follows.

3. If the losing team equalise, either team can then score to make it 2-1 and then try to keep the ball until the final whistle.

PROGRESSION:

Make it a condition that all goals must be scored with a player's first touch. This will encourage players to look for passing opportunities and play with their head up, as well as encouraging them to take scoring chances quickly.

COACHING NOTES:

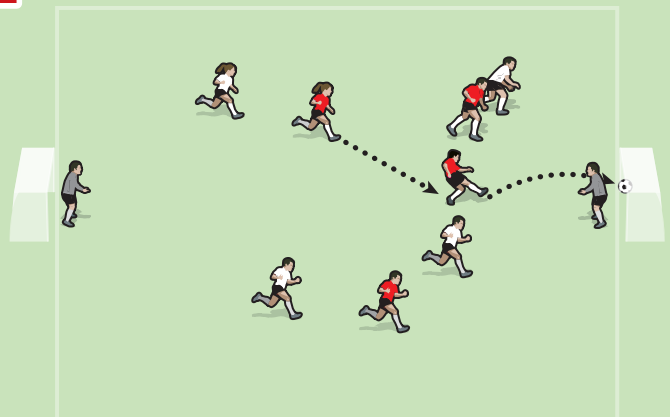
Make a point of looking for and congratulating those players who make runs to support the player on the ball.

1



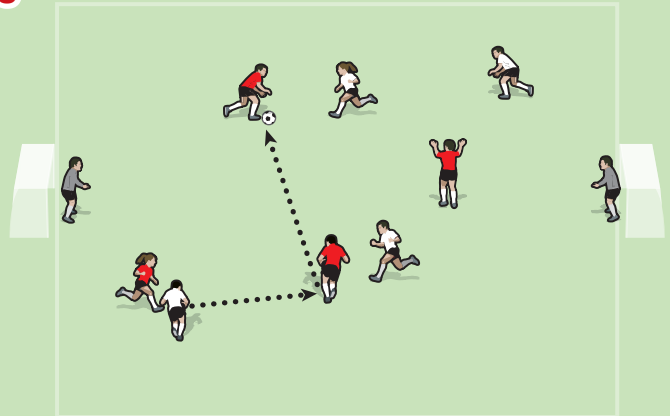
Divide you players so that you have two teams of four players. Let the players know they can only win by one goal.

2



When a team scores, they must then try and keep their one goal lead for the rest of the game.

3



The team that is leading must play keep-ball, but if the other team scores, then both must compete to score again.

Three Team Knockout

The playing area may be a bit unusual, but this game will improve your players' ball control, dribbling skills, soccer 'vision' and help them to recognise scoring opportunities.

SET UP:

Create a circular playing area that is just big enough for all your players to play soccer in. For U7s to U9s, I would use an area 20 yards across.

Place three goals, evenly spaced, around the perimeter of the playing area.

HOW YOU COACH THIS GAME:

1. Divide your players into three teams and differentiate each team using different coloured training vests. Each team is allocated one goal to defend and they start the game with five lives each.
2. The game is played with normal small-sided game rules, except that there are three teams on the pitch at once! If a team concedes a goal, they lose a life.
3. Once a team has lost all their lives they are out of the game, and the remaining two teams play out the game to decide the winner.

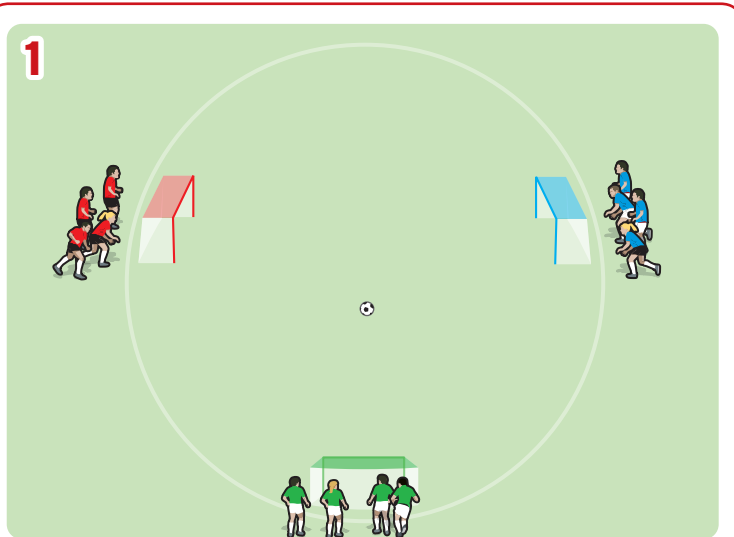
PROGRESSION:

Teams that lose all their lives are not knocked out. Instead, they must join forces with the team that has the fewest lives.

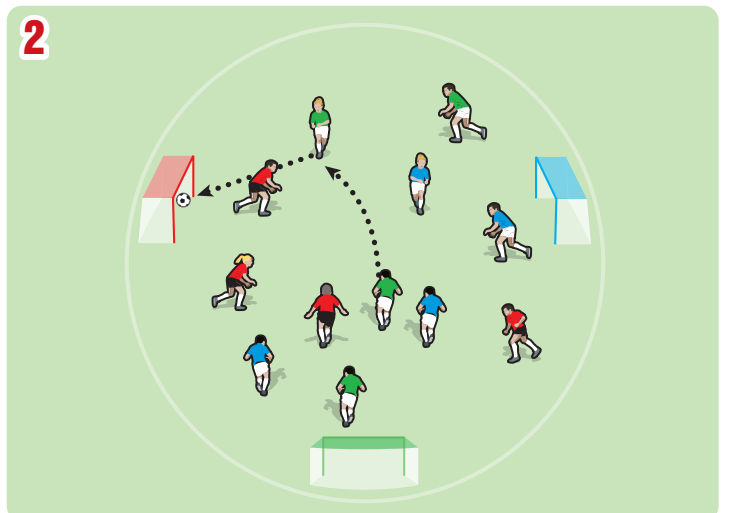
COACHING NOTES:

The congested circular playing area and chaotic nature of this game encourages close ball control and forces players to get their head up to spot an open goal.

You will also see your players working out tactics to help them stay in the game. When two teams get down to one or two lives, for example, they may decide to join forces to defeat the third team. If they succeed, the partnership is abandoned and they turn on each other!



Colour code your teams using training vests and give each team a goal to defend.



Each team must try to score in one of the other goals. When a goal is scored, the team that concedes loses a life.



When a team has lost all of their lives, they sit out the rest of the game and the remaining teams play against each other.

The Four Goal Game

Used by soccer coaches all over the world, and with players aged from six to 16, this game is excellent for encouraging players to switch play quickly and take advantage of scoring opportunities, while younger players are rewarded for not bunching and using the whole width of the pitch.

SET UP:

Place a small goal in each corner of a 30 yards x 30 yards playing area.

HOW YOU COACH THIS GAME:

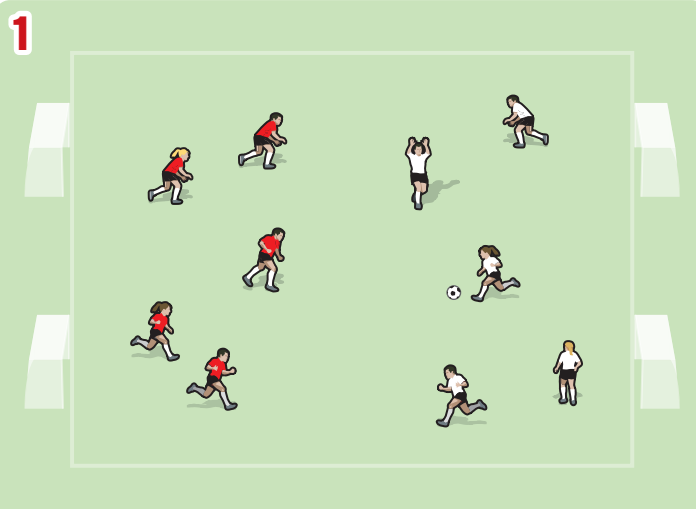
1. Divide your players into two teams. The game is best played with teams of five or six, but you can play with uneven numbers or slightly bigger or smaller teams if necessary. Each team defends two goals and tries to score in the other two goals.
2. The players should soon learn the best tactics for the game. For example, if a defending team bunches in front of one of their goals, the other team should switch play to the exposed goal.
3. If you find that one or two players are dominating the scoring, add the condition that if three different players score a goal, their team wins the game regardless of the overall score. This has the effect of encouraging assists instead of scoring.

PROGRESSION:

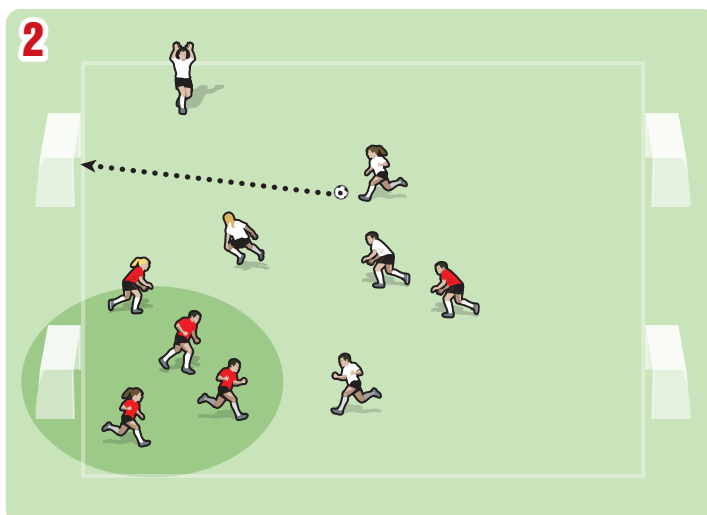
Play a timed game and make it a condition that everyone on the team has to score before a player can score a second goal.

COACHING NOTES:

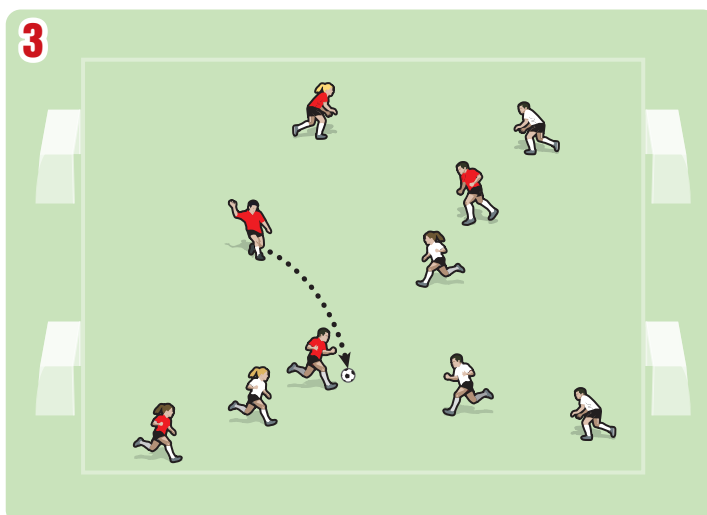
If the defending team decides to put blocking players right in front of their two goals, the game doesn't really work. If that happens, move the goals five yards beyond the goal line and tell the players they must stay on the main part of the pitch. This makes it much harder for a defender to protect a goal. It also encourages attackers to shoot from distance.



Each team defends two goals and can score in either of their opponents' two goals.



Having two goals to defend and attack should make the players think hard about their tactics and teamwork.



Teams should realise that they need to use the whole pitch to be most effective, and should share the ball amongst the players.

Tag Netball

Tag Netball improves speed of play and supporting the player with the ball, without the worry of controlling the ball with the feet.

SET UP:

Mark out a playing area measuring 30 yards x 20 yards with a goal at each end.

HOW YOU COACH THIS GAME:

1. Divide your players into two evenly matched teams, wearing bibs. The aim of the game is to score by throwing the ball into the opposition goal. You get the game under way by throwing the ball, in the air, into the playing area.
2. Teams advance the ball up the field by throwing it from player to player. Younger players can be allowed to take two or three steps with the ball before releasing it. Older players can be restricted to one step. Players without the ball should be encouraged to move and find space so that the player in possession can make a pass.
3. If the player holding the ball is tagged by an opposition player, possession goes to the other team. If the ball goes out of play, the game is restarted with a throw in. The first team to score five goals wins.

PROGRESSION:

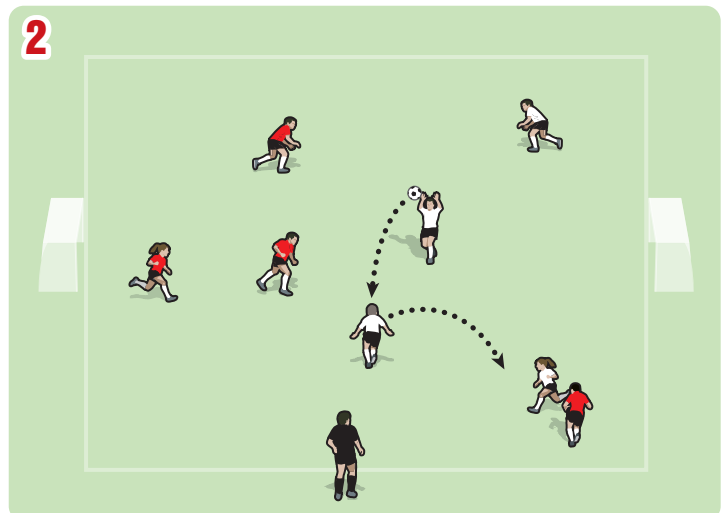
Put the ball on the ground and play Tag Soccer – players lose possession if they are tagged by an opponent.

COACHING NOTES:

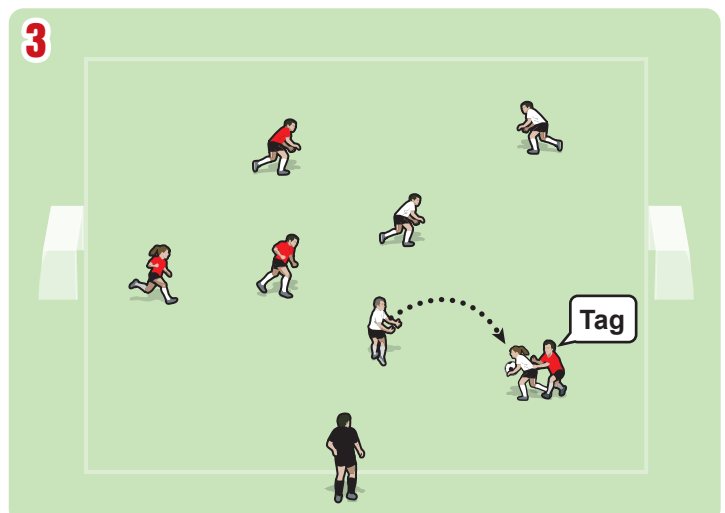
Other than tagging, physical contact is not allowed. You can stop players protecting their goal by setting the goals three yards back from the goal lines.



1 Start the game by throwing the ball into the playing area. The players run to try and gain possession.



2 Players attack by throwing the ball to each other. Movement with the ball is limited, so they have to look for the best pass.



3 The team without the ball can take possession by tagging the player with the ball – the ball then passes to them.

Soccer Tennis

This is a great, fun way to improve your players' ball skills. I often set it up before my sessions start and let early arrivals have a game while they are waiting.

SET UP:

Set up a 30 yards x 30 yards playing area with a line of cones (the 'net') across the middle. If you don't have any cones, you could use a rope tied between two poles, a line of mini hurdles, a row of ball bags... use your imagination!

HOW YOU COACH THIS GAME:

1. This game is best played 3v3 or 4v4. One team starts the game by bouncing the ball and kicking it over the net (this is the 'serve').

When it's served, the ball has to bounce in the receiving team's half of the court, just like in a real game of tennis. If it doesn't, award a point to the receiving team.

2. The receiving team must return the ball over the net before it stops bouncing, or before it bounces a certain number of times (for very young players, allow three or four bounces. Older players have just one or two).

3. If the ball stops or is allowed to go out of the playing area before it is returned, award a point to the serving team.

If the ball is kicked straight out of play without bouncing, award a point to the opposition. The first team to five points wins the game or use real tennis scoring – 15-0, 30-15 etc. – and play best of three sets.

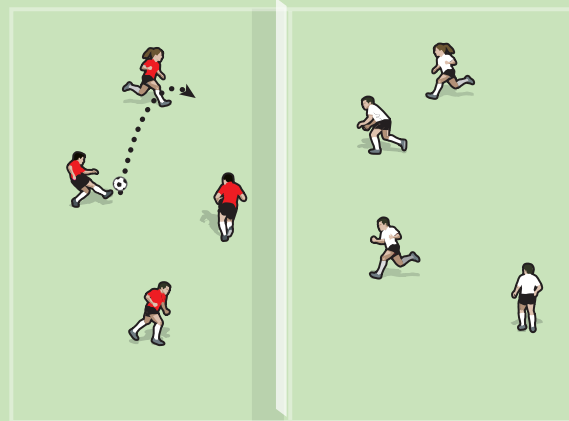
PROGRESSION:

Players must use their 'wrong' foot to return the ball and/or reduce the number of bounces allowed before the ball is returned.

COACHING NOTES:

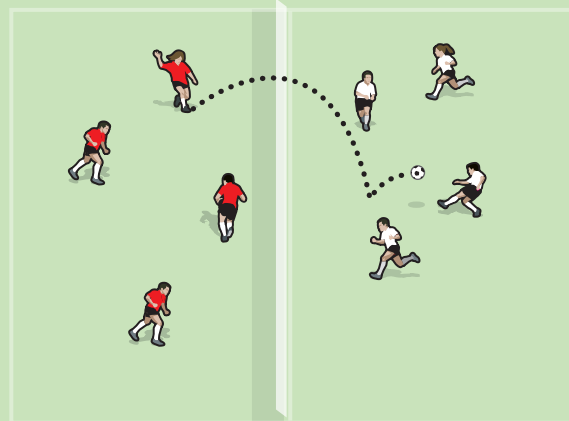
Encourage players to keep the ball moving by passing the ball in the air to each other.

1



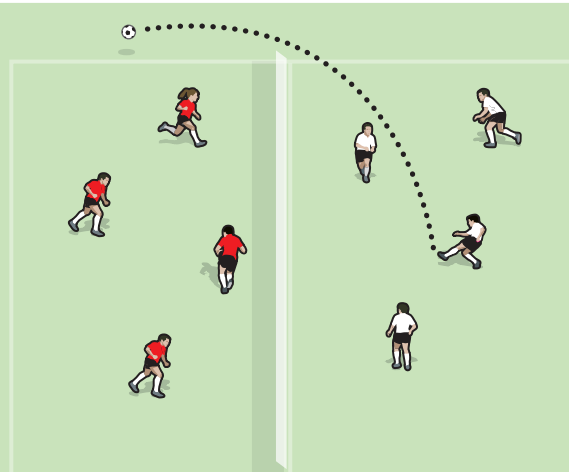
The game starts when one team serves the ball – a player bounces the ball and kicks it over the net.

2



The opposition players must try and return the ball before it stops bouncing. If they don't, the other team scores a point.

3



If the ball stops bouncing or is kicked straight out of play, the opposition scores a point.

The Playground Game

This is what's known as a "chaos" game. It allows players maximum freedom to express themselves and actively involves every player in both attack and defence.

SET UP:

Place a goal on each side of a square playing area measuring 30 yards x 30 yards.

HOW YOU COACH THIS GAME:

1. Divide your players into four teams of three players (two outfield players and one goalkeeper per team). Allocate different coloured training vests to each team.
2. Each team can score in any of their opponents' goals – it's up to the players to work together to decide which goal to attack. Play for a set time or until one team scores a specified number of goals.
3. You will usually find that two teams will join forces and you will get a 4v2v2 game – this is fine, it shows that the players are thinking about the best way to win the game.

PROGRESSION:

On your call, two or more of the teams combine to create a 4v4 situation. For example, if you call "reds and blues", these two teams join forces against the other two teams. You can also create overload situations by calling three colours, such as "red, blue and yellow", who play against the fourth team. Take away the player's coloured training vests. Now they have the added task of remembering who is on their team.

COACHING NOTES:

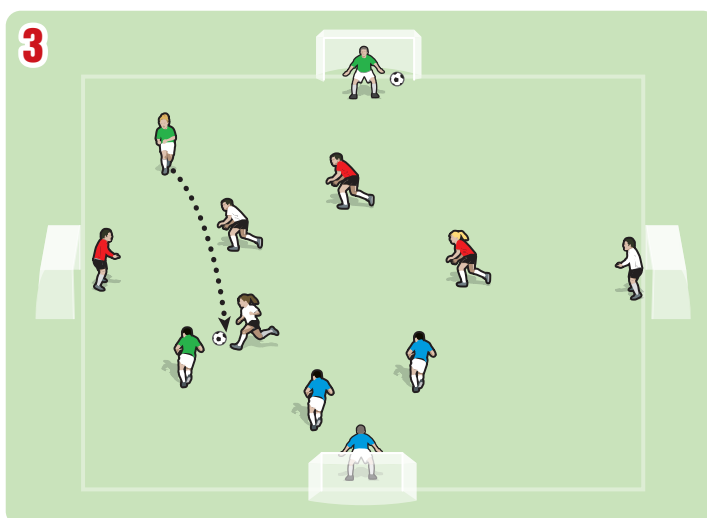
It usually takes young players several minutes to come to grips with this game but try to resist the temptation to jump in with advice. Let them work it out for themselves!



1 Divide your players in to four teams of three and allocate each team a goal to defend.



2 Each team can score in any of their opponents' goals. The key is for the two outfield players on each team to work together.



3 Often you will find that two of the teams get together to help each other eliminate the remaining teams.