



New York State West Youth Soccer
Association

Tactical practice with little kids?

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Age group: 6-12

Can we practice tactical variants of top-level soccer teams such as pressing, ball circulation and possession, quick transitioning, and speed of execution with little kids (6-12)? Yes, we can. Small games with specific rules and tasks can force players or teams to perform a specific tactical behavior.

This article will demonstrate how to practice tactics with kids in an age appropriate and multi-variant playing form. The following exercises describe how to introduce tactics to kids in small exercises in playing forms for the kids' game "today" which they can apply in the big game "tomorrow".

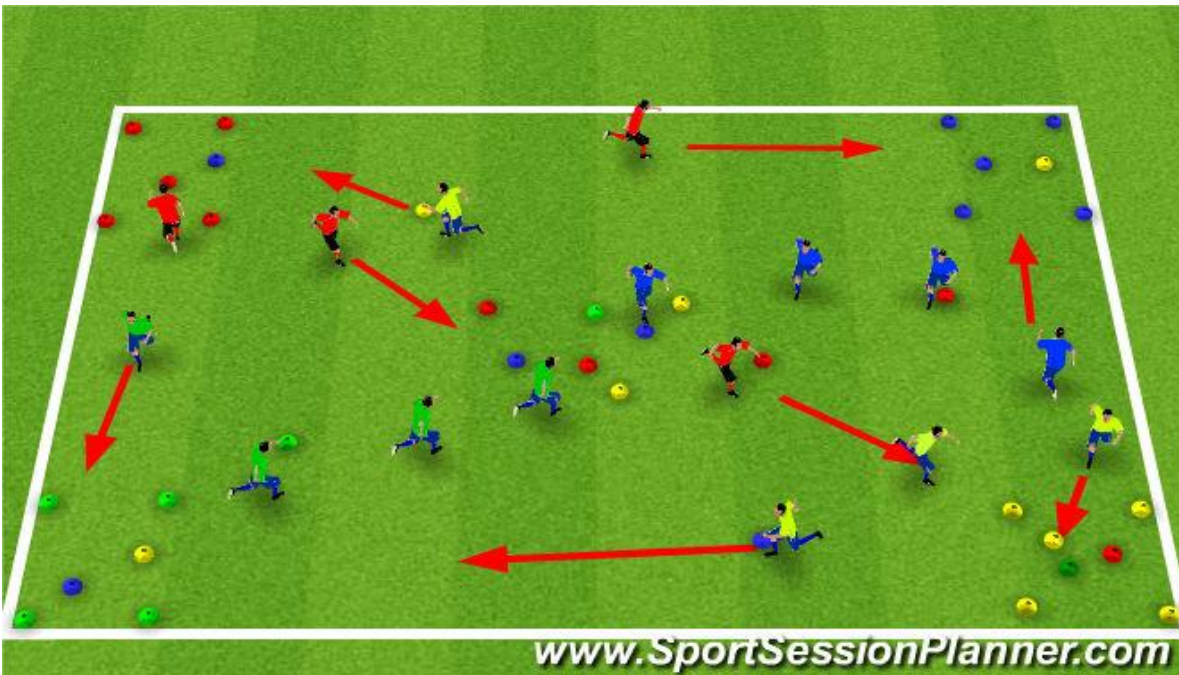
Laughing and learning will be part of every training session that is presented and will contribute a positive learning environment which enables a quick development.

We all are mesmerized by the speed of game, the high technical skills, the tactical understanding and performance of top national and international soccer teams. We all would like to see our youth teams to play the same way. But we forget that it requires intermediate steps to prepare and develop kids and youth players for modern top-level soccer.

This article will demonstrate five tactical playing forms that we break down to small age appropriate games for youth players.

The article focuses on the following top-level soccer trends (**big**) and leading ideas for the youth development (*italic*):

- **Speed of execution:** *perception and orientation games*
- **Ball circulation/possession:** *passing and combination games*
- **Quick transitioning:** *ball reversing games*
- **pressing:** *ball chasing games*
- **Fitness/conditioning:** *strength building through playful games.*



Mine-sweeping game:

Equipment:

- 16 cones
- 24 mines (small cones/plates)

Set Up:

- 22x22 square
 - 4 (4x4) squares in each corner, same color
 - 4 teams assigned to one corner
- In the center of the field 24 mines (cones at 4 different colors)

Game:

- all players start to run on the field at the same time
- the goal is to put as many mines into the other teams' corners and to sweep out their own corner
- every player is running around but can carry only one mine
- after 3 minutes: every mine in own square = -1 point, -2 point if mine is the same color as the team

Laughing:

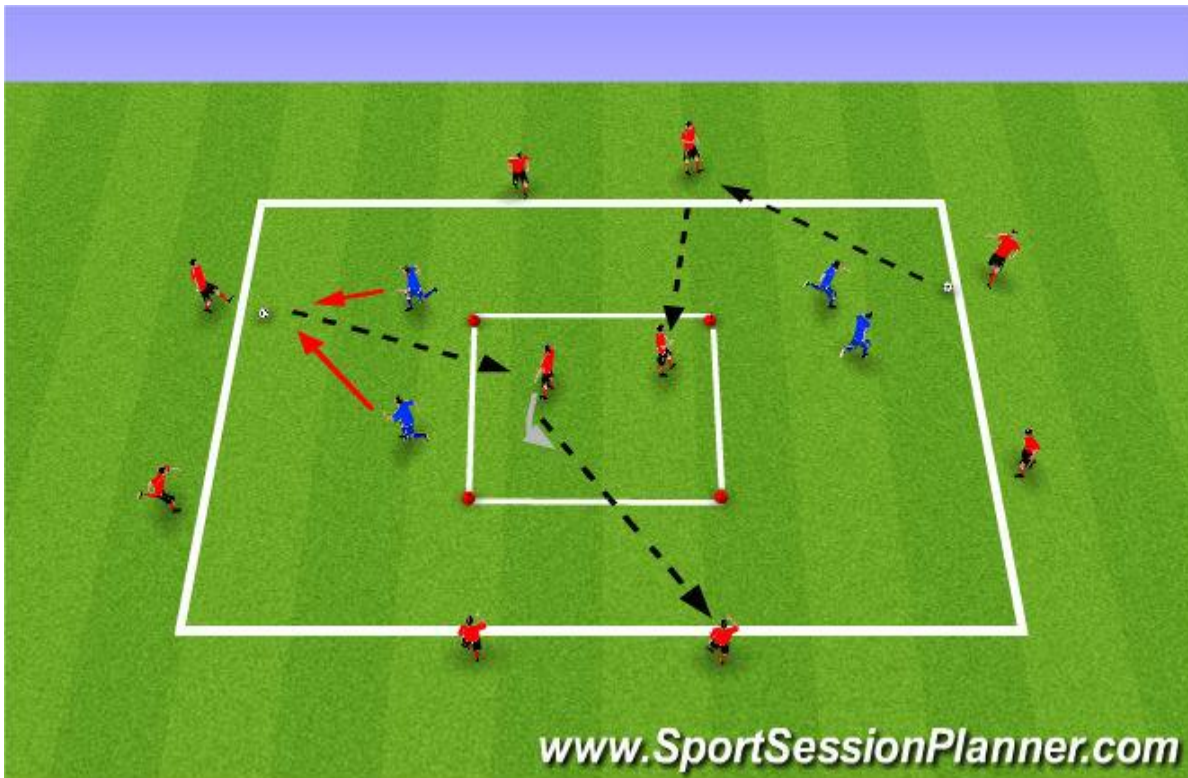
- ..., if teams intentionally or accidentally fill up one teams squares with mines
- ..., if team forgets to clean up own square
- ..., if there is no communication or misunderstanding within the team

Learning:

- speed of execution
- speed of movement
- agility/change of direction
- quick orientation ability
- cognitive ability
- communication

Performance:

- observe field and situation
- prior communication about everyone's task (cleaning/filling up)
- observe color of the mines > primarily green mines in green square



Find the Gap Game:

Equipment

- 8 cones
- 4 pinnies
- 2 balls

Set up:

- 18x18 square, 9x9 square within big square
- 2 teams: red 10 players, blue 4 players
- 8 red players outside of the big square, 2 red players in the small square
- 4 blue players spread in space between the 2 fields

Game:

- play with 2 balls: the red players outside try to pass the ball to the red players inside through combination play (1 point)
- the blue players try to avoid the passing or try to intercept the ball through smart (group) defending and shifting
- game time: 3min

Rotate and change tasks frequently

Variation:

- play with 3 balls
- direct play or only 2 touches allowed
- competition

Laughing:

- if both balls are played but the passer doesn't have eye contact to the receiver and the receiver is getting 2 balls at the same time
- competition is always fun

Learning:

- passing
- ball receiving and control
- speed of execution
- pre-orientation and anticipation
- release and get open to receive
- communication

Performance:

- combination play with patience > pass only to the center if there is a clear gap
- open up in the center in one direction > and move with the ball in that direction > no dead ball > take the ball in the direction with the first touch



Ball Chaser Game:

Equipment:

- 4 cones
- every player needs a ball

Set up:

- 17x12 field
- 4 teams of 3-4 players, each team has a color
- every team has a corner

Game:

- the coach calls a color (blue), and every player of that color runs into the field with the ball and dribbles. After a few seconds the coach calls a second color (red). One red player enters the field without the ball and tries to steal the ball from blue. A few seconds later, at coach's command another red player enters the field and tries to steal a ball as well. The coach calls the next player until all red players are on the field. The game ends when all balls are gone. If one blue player loses the ball he will stay on the field and will support his teammates to keep possession of the ball by passing and circulating. How long does the red team need to chase all balls?

Variation:

- if the first player steals a ball, then the second player can come in to help chasing.
- calling in defenders from different teams/colors

Laughing:

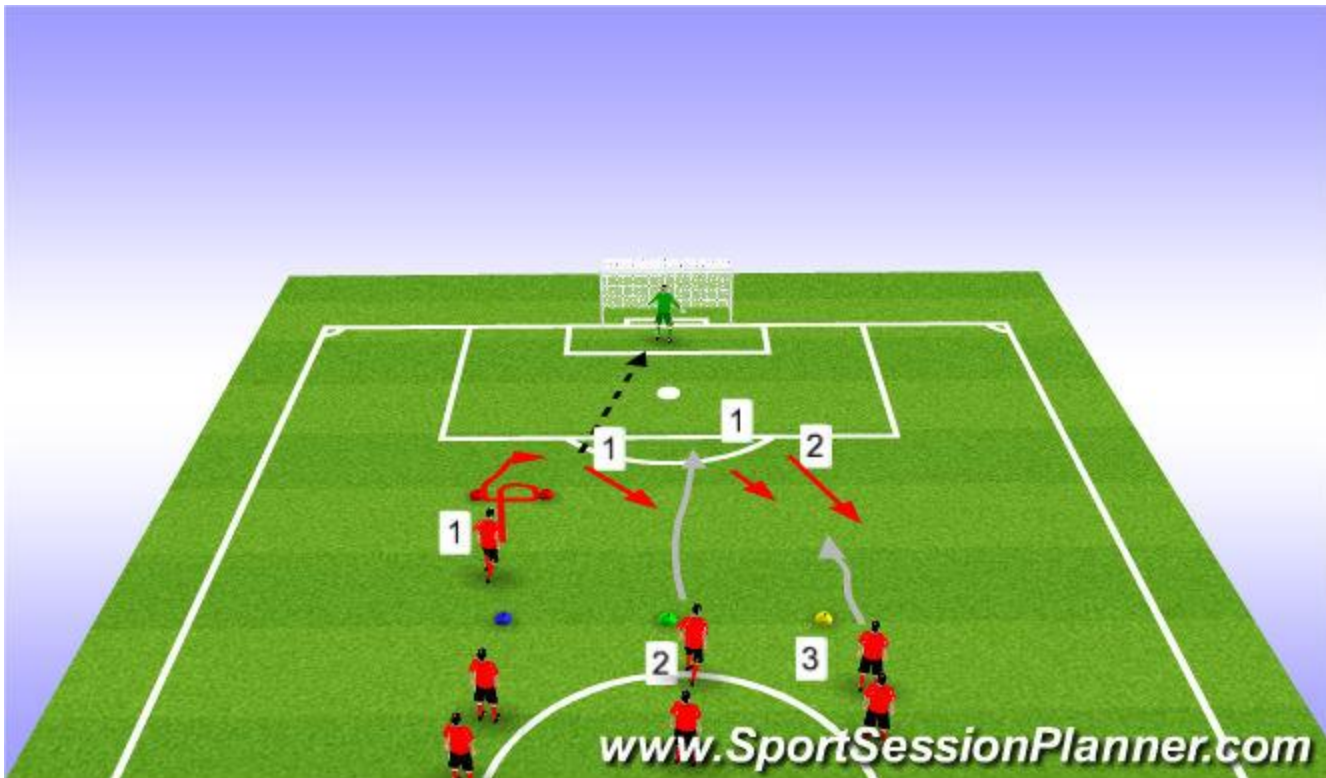
- chasing and getting chased is always fun!
- if defenders from different teams come in then the players with the ball cannot predict the direction the defender is coming from

Learning:

- confidently dribbling and ball control
- passing and possession under pressure
- 1v1 defending
- group defending (1st and 2nd defender)
- speed of execution
- orientation
- communication

Performance:

- body between defender and ball (shielding the ball)
- eyes of ball to see where defenders are coming from
- as a defender aggressively working to win the ball and force player to the outside
- group chasing if there is more than one defender > communicate



Shooting and Defending Game:

Equipment:

- 5 cones
- 6-12 players and a goalie

Set up:

- set up 3 cones in different colors 24y away from goal, set up a gate 4y after the first cone (blue)
- players line up in even numbers behind the cones (blue, green, yellow)

Game:

- first player from the blue cone starts to dribble through gate, at the gate the player performs his favorite move and shoots on the goal then. Once the player has shot on the goal, he becomes a defender and the first player from the green cone starts to dribble and tries to score, 1v1. If the player shoots or if the defender wins the ball, game is over and they both become defenders, the player from the yellow cone starts to dribble and tries to score, 1v2. If the game is finished, the players move to the next cone and the game restarts.

Laughing

- if the players don't pay attention and don't switch from attacking to defending quickly
- players can work on their favorite moves

Learning

- dribbling
- 1v1 defending
- Group defending (1v2)
- quick transition from attacking to defending
- communication

Performance

- don't wait for the defender to be ready once he finished shooting/scoring
- every player needs to pay attention to the game situation
- force the defender to the outside or to the weaker foot, don't let him come into the box
- player with the ball attacks with speed, don't wait for the defender

To sum up, tactical practice with kids develops creativity and game intelligence. The kids will enjoy any exercises in playing form and will learn quickly. The kids don't need a tactical board or theoretical instructions. They just want to play!

If you have questions or if you need more information, please feel free to contact me: dgroth@nyswysa.org.