

Spencer Soccer Club

Travel Development Program

Session Plan Guidance U12 thru U19



Focus: Physical Defending/Tackling

Time: 2 hours

Session: SSC-006

Planning:

- 1) Print out and read through Session Plan
- 2) Become familiar with the activities and Plus 1 thru 3 Skills triangles
- 3) Arrive at practice 15 minutes prior to scheduled start time
- 4) Set up nets and cones to facilitate a smooth session plan

Each Session Plan consists of the Following:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Warm-up Jog/Stretch* | 6) Activity #2: Side Block Tackle / Poke Tackle |
| 2) Speed/Conditioning Activity* | 7) Activity #3: Slide Tackle |
| 3) Controlled Juggling* | 8) Activity #4: Defenders Under Pressure |
| 4) Skills Pyramid Dynamic Dribbling Activity* | 9) Activity #5: Small Sided Game with Tackling Focus |
| 5) Activity #1: Block Tackle | |

****This plan does not include descriptions of these activities; use other session plans or your own discretion to implement***

Overview: The first 45 minutes are designed for warm-up, agility, speed, conditioning, juggling, and footwork activities. The second hour is focused on technical skills. The last 15 minutes should be spent scrimmaging. Your practice may not be two hours long, so you will need to make adjustments. Suggested repetitions and player objectives should be adjusted based on the age group at your discretion.

Session Structure:

The following five activities should be incorporated into every practice no matter how long the session. Activities not listed below can be chosen based on time and coaching preference.

Warm-Up Jog/Stretch (10 Minutes): This should be done prior to each session, an easy 3 minute jog and then 7 minutes of stretching.

Controlled Juggling (10 minutes): Yes, 10 minutes! One 5 minute session should be incorporated per every hour of practice. Juggling, specifically foot juggling, is very important in your players' soccer development.

Skills Pyramid Dynamic Dribbling (7 to 10 minutes): Reference the skills pyramids that are appropriate to your players and age group. Time should be spent moving with the ball and trying new skills at game speed.

Scrimmage: Always end practice with a scrimmage.

Stretch/Cool Down (5 Minutes): A light stretch at the end of practice

Soccer: A Contact Sport

Soccer IS a contact sport. With up to 22 players running around competing for space and the ball, the chance for either intentional or unintentional bodily contact is extremely high. Essentially, there are three types of contact in soccer: 1.) Legal Contact, 2.) Illegal Contact, and 3.) Unfortunate Contact.

Legal Contact

Legal contact in soccer is nominally described as being “shoulder to shoulder” between two opponents, as one player comes into the other, or “charges,” to challenge for the ball. The most common instance of this is two players running side-by-side, usually as they both pursue a moving ball in front of them. Shoulder-to-shoulder contact may also occur with opponents facing one another, such as in a front block tackle, or from behind, such as when one player screens the ball from the opponent. Each of these examples, when performed properly, represents a “fair charge” in soccer. FIFA’s *Interpretation of the Laws of the Game and Guidelines for Referees* states that, “The act of charging is a challenge for space **using physical contact** (emphasis added) within playing distance of the ball without using arms or elbows.”

The expectation during the performance of a fair charge is that both players will have at least one foot on the ground and that excessive force will not be used. In other words, the player making the challenge cannot just slam into an opponent who is in mid-air or barrel into him at whatever speed, even if the contact is shoulder to shoulder. A fair charge can result in a player being put to the ground, however, if one player loses his balance, timing catches an opponent on the “wrong foot,” or if another player is simply bigger or stronger. The mere fact that contact has occurred and a player winds up on the ground does not make the contact illegal.

Illegal Contact

Illegal contact in soccer starts with the fouls identified in Law 12 of the FIFA Laws of the Game, “Fouls and Misconduct,” and escalates from poor challenges during the common run of play to truly inappropriate behavior. The illegal contact in Law 12 includes kicking, tripping, jumping (at, into, or on), (improper) charging, striking, pushing, (improper) tackling, and holding an opponent.

FIFA’s *Interpretation of the Laws of the Game and Guidelines for Referees* states that, “‘Careless’ means that the player has shown a lack of attention or consideration when making a challenge or that he acted without precaution.” (This results in the simple award of the free kick.) Further, it states that, “‘Reckless’ means that the player has acted with complete disregard to the danger to, or consequences for, his opponent.” (This is supposed to bring a yellow-card caution in addition to the free kick.) Finally, it states that, “‘Using excessive force’ means that the player has far exceeded the necessary use of force and is in danger of injuring his opponent.” (This is supposed to bring a red-card ejection in addition to the free kick.)

Illegal contact can run the gamut from a mistimed slide tackle, one that misses the ball and happens to take down the opponent, all the way to assault. As such, coaches need to teach their players three major concepts: 1.) Legal and illegal contact; 2.) Respect for the opponent; and, 3.) How to try to avoid injury at the time of contact.

Physical Defending

The Three T's

Technique

Timing

Toughness

Technique:

- **Close the gap and prepare:** Quickly close the distance to the dribbler, and get in defensive position — knees are bent, feet are shoulder-width apart, weight on the balls of your feet and ready to move quickly.
- **Be balanced:** The off-foot should be firmly planted when tackling the dribbler, and weight should be over the ball. Have good body control; *don't* lunge for the ball.
- **Go through the ball:** The ankle and knee should be locked, and the defender should go through the ball with the laces or instep. Tackling should be one fluid motion, with momentum carrying you forward after gaining possession.
- **Knee faces the dribbler:** Always avoid pointing the knee or toe sideways, which can expose the knee to injury from a hard tackle.
- **Go hard but clean:** First contact should be aggressive and on the ball, not the player.

Timing:

Good tacklers don't usually stab for the ball right away when challenging an attacker. This leaves the defender exposed for a quick sidestep or lateral move that's hard to defend. Instead, tacklers should think containment by directing the tackler toward a teammate or the out-of-bounds line. The best defenders wait for the attacker to show too much of the ball; by letting it get away from the body. Skillful dribblers rarely release the ball far from their feet, making a hard tackle more difficult to execute. Find a balance between patience and aggression, and go for the ball hard at the first opening.

Toughness

In soccer, toughness and skill beat talent most of the time, especially when an aggressive tackler is bearing down on an attacker. Being tough in the midfield and on defense means having a willingness to do whatever it takes to gain possession and quickly move the ball up field for a counter-attack.

Key Points

- Too much space; relying on defensive tactics alone
- Too little space; relying on physical defending alone

What to teach:

- Approach with speed and purpose, timing the approach is key
- Use the forearm lightly to gain additional advantage when bumping the player off the ball, a straight arm will most always be called a foul
- Make strong tackles using balance and strength to your advantage

Some things to say to your soccer players:

- "Don't tackle too soon. You'll look foolish. Don't tackle too late, the ref could be angry."
- "Tackle at just the right moment and you'll win the ball nine times out of ten."
- "When you tackle, give it your full attention. Focus on the ball and getting it under control. Everything else is irrelevant."

Instruction: Block Tackle

This tackle is very effective when the attacker comes directly toward the defender, especially when space is limited as in a crowded penalty area. This tackle is a powerful movement, and when done well, not only stops the attacker but gives the defender a reasonable chance of winning possession. To generate sufficient force to overcome the momentum of the attacker, the defender's body has to be crouched to lower the center of gravity, the instep of the striking foot has to move as if to go through the ball rather than stop it, and the leading shoulder has to move powerfully forward as the foot strikes the ball (see figure 11.15a). A player whose body position is similar to that shown in figure 11.15b will never win a tackle because he is pulling away from the situation and is off balance.

Activity #1: Block Tackle



Figure 11.15 Block tackle: (a) correct and (b) incorrect.

The block tackle is mainly used when confronting an opponent head on. As with all tackling, timing is crucial, so players have to recognize the best moment to make a challenge. That could be when the attacker is:

- off balance
- has allowed the ball to run too far in front
- is looking at the ball.

If any of these situations arise, use the drill to coach your players in the following technique:

- Plant the non-tackling foot firmly on the ground to provide an anchor.
- Let the tackling foot make contact with the middle of the ball – like a side-foot pass – and be in an L-shape.
- Get all their strength and weight behind the ball.
- Head down over the ball.
- Eyes on the ball.
- Bend the knees.
- Lock solid the knee and ankle – to maintain strength and to avoid injury.
- Be well balanced.
- Show a committed attitude.
- Ideally, put a foot under the ball to lift it away.

Tell your players to try not to make contact with the top of the ball because they will find it tough to put any force behind the challenge, and also risk missing the ball and fouling the attacker. Also, if they are too low on the ball, it tends to roll over the tackling leg, leaving the attacker with the ball.

Instruction: Side Block Tackle/ Poke Tackle

Using the front block tackle is one way to deal with an attacker who brings the ball directly toward a defender. To stop the player who is moving past the defender diagonally or who is already past, there are two main techniques—the sliding tackle, which will be discussed in the next section, and the side block tackle. Teaching the side block tackle first allows the defender to stay upright and also provides a very useful introduction to the sliding tackle.

The side block tackle is best considered in four stages. First, the defender runs hard, possibly on a recovery run to move to a position alongside the attacker (see figure 11.16a). Next, the defender turns inward toward the attacker using the foot nearer the attacker and turning the hips and shoulders in that direction (see figure 11.16b). The defender then crouches down and hooks the inside of the tackling foot around the ball (see figure 11.16c) and completes the turn while hooking the ball until it breaks clear from the attacker's foot (see figure 11.16d). Ideally, the defender gains possession of the ball; in reality, the defender often stops the attacker while the ball bounces free. With beginners, it is important that the defender be still standing upright after the tackle and can attempt to continue to pressure the attacker.



Figure 11.16 Side block tackle.

Activity #2: Poke Tackle / Side Block Tackle

Note: These drills should be adjusted for use with the side block tackle as well. See the previous page for guidance and make adjustments accordingly.

When defenders have players running at them in 1v1s, they often just need to touch the ball out from their opponent's feet to gain control for themselves. The poke tackle gets players to knock the ball away from the attacker so it either goes out of play or they win it for their team. It concentrates on 1v1 defending and getting the ball off an opponent who is shielding it.

Players in this soccer drill need to:

- Approach attacker from the side or behind.
- Get close to the attacker.
- Use the foot nearest to ball.
- Focus on the ball.
- Extend foot from side or through opponent's legs.
- Stab ball away using toes to kick near its centre.
- Do not make contact with opponent.
- Keep their body balanced to make the tackle.
- Try and make the tackle with good timing or they will give away a foul.
- If the ball is in play, can the defender win possession by putting their body between it and attacker?

Soccer drill set up

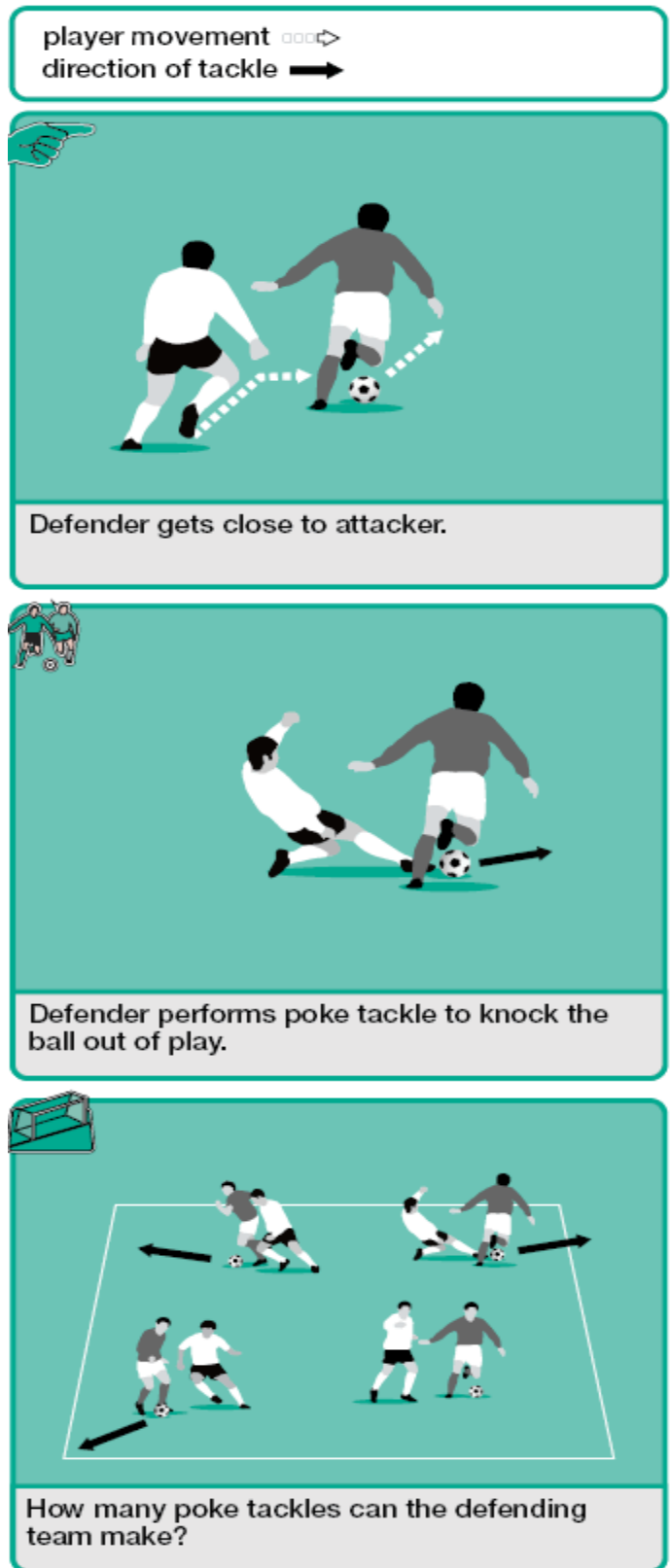
In this drill both players start at one end, with the attacker close to the touchline. At half pace to begin with, the attacker dribbles the ball towards the opposite end, allowing the defender to practice executing the poke tackle. After several attempts, the players switch roles. Make sure players practice using first their right foot, then their left foot.

Develop the soccer drill

To progress the drill, the attacker must attempt to dribble at full speed to the end line, begin to practice the skill of the poke tackle at match pace.

Play a small-sided game

Mark a grid of approx 25 x 25 yards and split players into two teams. Each member of the attacking team has a ball inside the grid, while the defending team remains outside. On your signal, the defending team enters the grid and tries to knock as many balls out of the playing area as possible. An attacker who loses their ball must retrieve it and re-enter the grid. The defending team gets a point for every ball kicked out of play. After a set period, the teams switch roles.



Instruction: Sliding Tackle

A good defender stays on his feet as long as possible and only uses the sliding tackle as a last resort. If it fails, that defender is temporarily out of the game. Nevertheless, on many occasions the sliding tackle is the only way to stop an attacker who has broken through; for this reason it is an essential skill for every player. Moreover, because this tackle is a spectacular and exciting achievement when executed successfully, all players enjoy practicing it, provided the ground is soft and the players wear protective clothing. Never allow your players to practice sliding tackles on hard, dry ground without protection; more harm than good will result.

The sliding tackle contains three stages: the chase, the slide, and the sweep. The tackling player chases the ball until confident that his lead foot will overtake the ball. The near leg leads, allowing the player to sink down onto the left leg, which curls beneath the seat of the defender. The far leg swings around in a wide sweep, with the foot hooked, toward the ball. The tackling leg sweeps through the ball and either traps it with the hooked foot or, more usually, plays the ball away. Most defenders love the sliding tackle, especially when the surface is soft and they come out with the ball!



Key soccer coaching tip: to carry out the slide tackle, coach your players to:

- Approach from the side and tackle across the path of the opponent – REMEMBER, THE TACKLE FROM BEHIND HAS BEEN OUTLAWED.
- Decide early whether to knock the ball out of play or 'hook' it to win possession.
- Be decisive and committed.
- Tackle using the leg furthest from the ball and keep it slightly bent.
- Tuck the leg nearest the ball underneath the backside and ideally slide on the outer thigh.
- Kick through the ball, or get the ball on the shoelaces (instep) and swing the leg around in a wide sweep to 'hook' or trap the ball with the foot.
- Meet the ball solidly and make contact with the centre to top half of the ball so it doesn't roll over the foot.
- GET BACK UP as quickly as possible, whether the tackle has been successful or not.

Key soccer coaching tip: the slide is a last resort tackle, only to be used when any other form of tackle won't do the job.

Activity #3: Slide Tackle

Drill tips

- Ensure players wear shin guards for the drill.
- Coach the slide tackle on a wet day, when the ground is soft.
- Make players practice sliding on both sides of their body.
- Build up the soccer drill slowly – begin with a stationary ball, then have players roll or pass a ball forward to themselves and run it down.

BE SAFE!!

Extend the drill

Finally, progress the drill to where one player dribbles forward at half speed while the other player runs in from the side and attempts the tackle.

Activity #4: Defenders Under Pressure

Use this quick turn and defend soccer (football) drill to get your soccer players winning the ball when it is coming at them from both sides. The drill puts defenders under constant pressure from attackers.

What age is this soccer drill suitable for?

- This soccer (football) drill can be used for any age group. You just have to change the defender's instructions.
- A good tip for younger age groups is that the defender should delay the attackers and try to move them out of the grid.

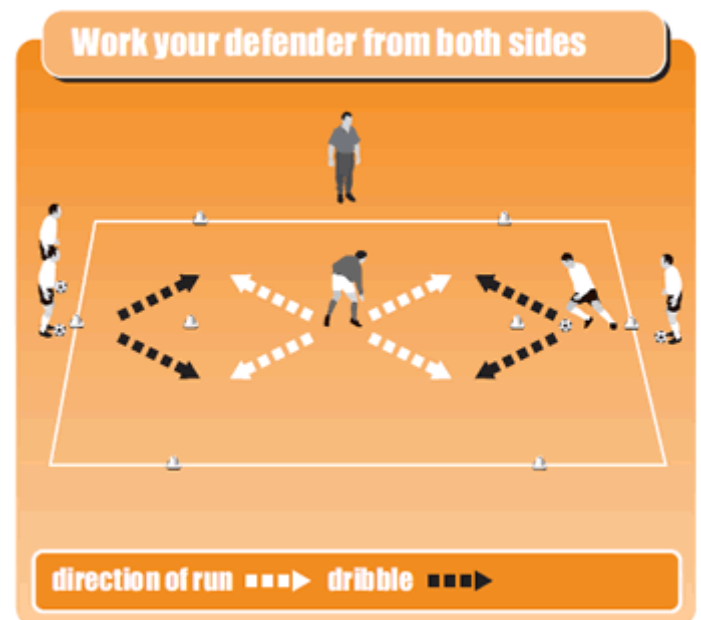
For older age groups they can use slide or block tackles as well as trying to move attackers out of the grid. However, defenders making slide tackles must get to their feet quickly to face the next attacker.

Soccer drill set up

- Set up the soccer drill as in the diagram.
- Use a 35 x 15 yard area with two end zones marked off with cones 10 x 15 yards from the end line.
- Have two players at either end of the grid and a defender in the middle grid for this drill.

How to run the soccer drill

- The defender must stay in the middle grid and stop the attacker from dribbling through the grid to the other side.
- If the attacker is successful in making it to the other side, the defender stays in the middle. However, if the defender wins the ball, the attacker becomes the defender and faces the next attack.
- Players should attack quickly from alternate ends of the grid and take on the defender.
- The defender must be quick to turn and face the attackers from either end. Only one attacker goes at a time in this drill.
- If any player gets stuck defending for too long, change them over – it can become tiring and the soccer drill can lose its effectiveness. The aim of the soccer drill is to improve your players' defending skills, not to wear them out.



Activity #5: Small Sided Game with Tackling Focus

This small-sided soccer game makes the most of 1v1 situations and works on players' tackling skills and their ability to evade tackles. The players in this game need to have good all-round soccer skills so their team doesn't lose a life.

Set up the game

You can use the centre circle of an 11-a-side pitch, or mark out a circle with cones around 30 yards in diameter.

You need four goals, as in the diagram, but you can use cones to mark out goals. Split your squad into four and line them up next to the goals.

The game works with four players on the pitch, one from each team. You have to defend your goal but attack the other three.

Any player letting in a goal has to go off the pitch and another of their team joins. Once you are off the pitch you have lost your life and cannot go back on. The team with the last player on the pitch wins.

