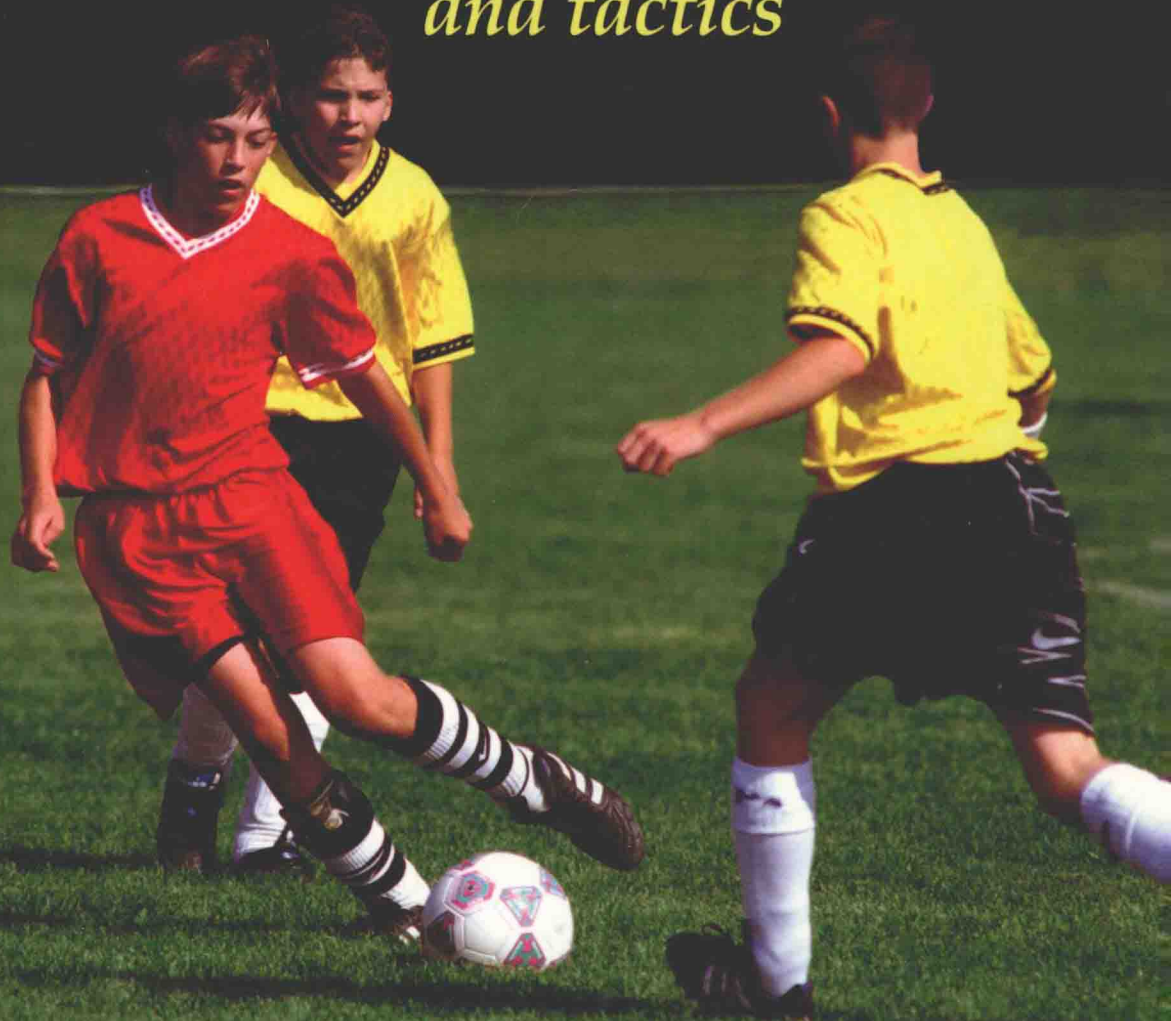


THIRDEDITION

SOCCER PRACTICE GAMES

*175 games for technique, training,
and tactics*

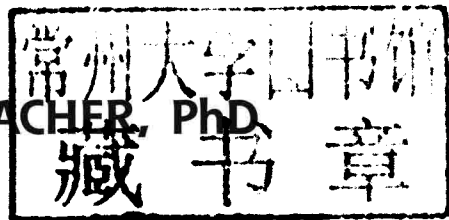


JOSEPH A. LUXBACHER

SOCCER PRACTICE GAMES

Third Edition

JOSEPH A. LUXBACHER, PhD



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To my dad and mom, Francis and Mary Ann Luxbacher, the finest parents a boy could ever hope for, who always encouraged me to pursue my passions. Their presence will always be with me. And to my children, Eliza and Travis, in hopes that they will also follow their passions and experience as much enjoyment and excitement from their chosen careers as I have with mine.

Game Finder

Game number	Game title	Difficulty rating	Number of players*	Dribbling & shielding	Tackling	Passing & receiving	Shooting	Heading	Goalkeeping	Page number
Chapter 2 Warm-Up and Conditioning Games										
1	Chain Gang		any							7
2	Hounds and Hares		(4s)							8
3	Pass and Follow		5			✓				9
4	Doctor, Doctor		15+	✓						10
5	Flag Tag		any	✓						11
6	Dribble Relay		(4s-6s)	✓						12
7	Twin Tag		any							13
8	Dribble the Gauntlet		any	✓		✓				14
9	Dribble Freeze Tag		any	✓						15
10	Shark Attack		any	✓						16
11	Team Tag		12-16	✓						17
12	Toss to Target		12-20							18
13	Nutmeg Competition		any	✓		✓				19
14	Pinball Possession		5-8			✓				20
15	Attack of the Crab Monsters		11-20	✓						21
16	Sharks and Minnows		any	✓	✓					22
17	Join the Hunt		12-20	✓		✓				23
18	Team Handball		12-20							24
19	Takeover Competition		any	✓						25
20	Pass Though the Moving Goal		any	✓		✓				26
21	Target Practice		6			✓				27
22	Running the Bases		16-20	✓						28
23	Chase the Coyote		any	✓		✓				29
24	Shooting Fish in a Barrel		any	✓		✓				30

*Parentheses indicate that players are divided into groups of the number indicated.

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Game number	Game title	Difficulty rating	Number of players	Dribbling & shielding	Tackling	Passing & receiving	Shooting	Heading	Goalkeeping	Page number
Chapter 3 Dribbling, Shielding, and Tackling Games										
25	Shadow the Dribbler		any	✓						33
26	Dribble to Retain Possession		any	✓						34
27	Release the Hounds		any	✓						35
28	Magnets		any	✓						36
29	Red Light, Yellow Light, Green Light		any	✓						37
30	Starts, Stops, and Turns		any	✓						38
31	Dribble the Open Goal		8-16	✓						39
32	Shifting Gears		any	✓						40
33	Protect Your Ball		any	✓	✓					41
34	Alleviate Pressure		any	✓						42
35	Soccer Marbles		(3s)	✓		✓				43
36	First to the Cone		any	✓						44
37	Speed Dribble Race		any	✓						45
38	Slalom Dribbling Relay		(3s-5s)	✓						46
39	Wolves and Sheep		any	✓						47
40	Tackle All Balls		any	✓	✓					48
41	Too Few Balls		20-24	✓	✓					49
42	Knockout		10-20	✓	✓					50
43	First to the End Line		10-20	✓	✓					51
44	Rob the Bank		any	✓	✓					52
45	Breakout		any	✓	✓					53
46	Navigate the Channel		any	✓	✓					54






















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Game number	Game title	Difficulty rating	Number of players	Dribbling & shielding	Tackling	Passing & receiving	Shooting	Heading	Goalkeeping	Page number
Chapter 4 Passing and Receiving Games										
47	Pass Through the Channels		any	✓		✓				57
48	Connect the Dots		(5s-8s)	✓		✓				58
49	Around the Square		12-16			✓				59
50	Find the Open Player		(4s)			✓				60
51	Tempo Passing		(4s-5s)			✓				61
52	Bump, Spin, and Do It Again		(4s)			✓				62
53	Flighted Balls		10			✓				63
54	Group Ball Juggle		(3s)			✓				64
55	Toss, Cushion, and Catch		10-14			✓				65
56	Soccer Dodge Ball		12-20	✓		✓				66
57	Find Open Space		(4s)			✓				67
58	Hunt the Fox		any	✓		✓				68
59	Perimeter Passing		9 or 12			✓				69
60	Moving Targets		12-20	✓		✓				70
61	4v4v4		12			✓				71
62	Large-Group Possession		15-21			✓				72
63	8v8 (+2) Across the Midline		18			✓				73
64	Pass to the End Zones		8-12	✓	✓	✓				74
65	Score Through Multiple Goals		10-14	✓	✓	✓				75
66	6v3 End to End		20	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	76
67	Soccer Volleyball		10-20			✓		✓		77
68	5 (+5)v5 (+5)		20-24		✓	✓				78
Chapter 5 Shooting and Finishing Games										
69	Dribble the Maze and Score		4-6	✓			✓		✓	81
70	Shooting off the Dribble		8-10	✓			✓		✓	82
71	The Golden Boot		3	✓			✓		✓	83
72	World Cup Scoring Frenzy		9-13	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	84
73	Pressure Finishing		(4s)				✓		✓	85

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Game number	Game title	Difficulty rating	Number of players	Dribbling & shielding	Tackling	Passing & receiving	Shooting	Heading	Goalkeeping	Page number
Chapter 5 Shooting and Finishing Games (continued)										
74	Serve and Shoot		7				✓			86
75	3 (+1)v3 (+1) Long-Distance Shooting		10	✓	✓	✓	✓			87
76	Score Through the Central Goal		7-11	✓	✓	✓	✓			88
77	Finishing Crosses		6			✓	✓			89
78	Score off the Breakaway		any	✓			✓			90
79	Toss and Volley to Score		3				✓			91
80	Empty Net		10-14				✓			92
81	3v1 in the Box		6			✓	✓			93
82	Scoring From Set Pieces		8				✓			94
83	Goal-to-Goal Scoring		14	✓		✓	✓			95
84	2v2 to Goal		11	✓	✓	✓	✓			96
85	Score From Distance		12	✓	✓	✓	✓			97
86	Shoot to Score		4	✓	✓		✓			98
87	Numbers-Up Scoring		12	✓	✓	✓	✓			99
88	Volley Shooting		8-12				✓			100
89	3v2 to 2v1 Transition Scoring		14	✓	✓	✓	✓			101
90	Attacking Numbers-Down		8	✓	✓	✓	✓			102
Chapter 6 Heading Games										
91	Toss and Head to Score		(3s)					✓		105
92	Jack in the Box		(3s)					✓		106
93	Heading Goal to Goal		any					✓		107
94	Heading Race Front to Back		(4s-6s)					✓		108
95	Group Head Juggle		(4s)					✓		109
96	Score off a Flighted Ball		9			✓		✓		110
97	Defensive Heading		(3s)					✓		111
98	Team Heading Competition		any					✓		112
99	Diving Headers		9-13					✓	✓	113

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Game number	Game title	Difficulty rating	Number of players	Dribbling & shielding	Tackling	Passing & receiving	Shooting	Heading	Goalkeeping	Page number
Chapter 6 Heading Games (continued)										
100	1v1 Head to Score		6			✓		✓		114
101	3v2 (+ Servers) in the Penalty Area		8			✓		✓	✓	115
102	Diving Headers on Multiple Goals		10-12					✓		116
103	Toss, Catch, and Head to Score		12-16					✓		117
104	5v2 to 5v2 Score by Headers Only		10			✓		✓		118
Chapter 7 Individual and Small-Group Tactical Games										
105	1v1 to Common Goal		any	✓	✓					121
106	Defend the End Line (1v1)		any	✓	✓					122
107	1v1 to Minigoals		4	✓	✓					123
108	Simultaneous 1v1 (+Support)		8	✓	✓					124
109	Attack the Goal Least Defended		6-8	✓	✓	✓				125
110	Attack 1v2		7	✓	✓					126
111	Numbers Down in the Box		5	✓	✓		✓		✓	127
112	Play the Wall (2v1)		(3s)	✓	✓	✓				128
113	Attack the End Line 2v1		3	✓	✓	✓				129
114	2v1 (+1) Transition		4	✓	✓	✓	✓			130
115	Triangular Support (3v1)		(4s)	✓	✓	✓				131
116	Last Player in Defends		5	✓	✓	✓				132
117	2v2 With Support		8	✓	✓	✓				133
118	2v2 (+Targets)		6	✓	✓	✓				134
119	3v2 (+1) Transition		6	✓	✓	✓	✓			135
120	Split the Defense		6	✓	✓	✓				136
121	Possess to Penetrate		8	✓	✓	✓				137
122	Deny Penetration		6	✓	✓	✓				138
123	4v2 (+2) to Four Goals		8	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	139



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Game number	Game title	Difficulty rating	Number of players	Dribbling & shielding	Tackling	Passing & receiving	Shooting	Heading	Goalkeeping	Page number
Chapter 7 Individual and Small-Group Tactical Games (continued)										
124	3v3 (+1) Possession		7	✓	✓	✓				140
125	Quick Counterattack		8	✓	✓	✓	✓			141
126	Two-Sided Goals		10	✓	✓	✓	✓			142
127	Score to Stay		10	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	143
128	Three Zone		12	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	144
129	Zonal Defending		8	✓	✓	✓	✓			145
130	Flank Attack		12	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	146
131	5v5 (+2) on Six Goals		12	✓	✓	✓				147
Chapter 8 Large-Group and Team Tactical Games										
132	6v4 (+4) Possession		14	✓	✓	✓				151
133	Team Attack and Defense (7v5)		13	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	152
134	Dribble the End Line to Score		12-16	✓	✓	✓				153
135	Tactical Dribbling		12-16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	154
136	Four-Goal Contest		22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	155
137	Defend the Counter		19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	156
138	6v6 (+6) to Goal		20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	157
139	Attack With Numbers		18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	158
140	Stretching the Field		20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	159
141	10v5 (+5)		20	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	160
142	4v4 Transition to End Zones		16	✓	✓	✓				161
143	10v5 Breakout		15	✓	✓	✓				162
144	4v6 Transition to 6v4		22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	163
145	9v9 on Six Minigoals		18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		164
146	4 (+4)v4 (+4) to Full Goals		18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	165
147	Long Service		20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	166
148	Play to Targets		20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		167
149	Hold the Lead		20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	168

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Game number	Game title	Difficulty rating	Number of players	Dribbling & shielding	Tackling	Passing & receiving	Shooting	Heading	Goalkeeping	Page number
Chapter 8 Large-Group and Team Tactical Games (continued)										
150	6v4 Finishing	🏐🏐🏐	22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	169
151	Scoring From Distance	🏐🏐🏐	16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	170
152	Three-Sided Goals	🏐🏐🏐	20	✓	✓	✓	✓			171
153	Compact the Field	🏐🏐🏐	18	✓	✓	✓	✓			172
154	Pressing to the Attack	🏐🏐🏐	18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	173
Chapter 9 Goalkeeping Games										
155	Toss and Catch	🏐	any						✓	177
156	Saving Skippers	🏐🏐	any						✓	178
157	Catching Pingers	🏐🏐	any						✓	179
158	Handing Low Balls	🏐🏐	10	✓			✓		✓	180
159	Set and Save	🏐🏐	2				✓		✓	181
160	Reaction Saves	🏐🏐	4				✓		✓	182
161	Rapid-Fire Shoot and Save	🏐🏐	6				✓		✓	183
162	Play the Angle	🏐🏐	6	✓			✓		✓	184
163	Distribute by Throwing	🏐🏐	6			✓			✓	185
164	Distribution Circuit	🏐🏐	4						✓	186
165	Control the Goal Box	🏐🏐🏐	16	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	187
166	Goalie Wars	🏐🏐🏐	any				✓		✓	188
167	Dive to Save (5v2 + 2v5)	🏐🏐🏐	16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	189
168	Defend the Two-Sided Goal	🏐🏐🏐	10	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	190
169	High-Ball Repetition Training	🏐🏐🏐	7			✓		✓	✓	191
170	Aerial Wars	🏐🏐🏐	18			✓	✓	✓	✓	192
171	Save the Breakaway	🏐🏐🏐	any	✓			✓		✓	193
172	Score on Breakaways Only	🏐🏐🏐	7	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	194
173	Shooter Versus Goalkeeper	🏐🏐🏐	12-16	✓			✓		✓	195
174	Four-Sided Goal	🏐🏐🏐	10	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	196
175	Organizing the Back Line	🏐🏐🏐	14	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	197

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Foreword

S*occer Practice Games* is a “must have” for youth soccer coaches and parents everywhere. Creating an environment for young players that is conducive to learning and having fun is crucial to their technical and tactical development and to their success playing the game. Coach Joe Luxbacher shows you how it’s done.

This book is organized in a very easy-to-follow format. Coach Luxbacher provides essential information on planning effective practice sessions and follows it with age appropriate gamelike activities that facilitate the physical, technical, and tactical development of young players. The games are clearly described and accompanied by illustrations and photos to help you select those that will benefit your players the most.

Soccer Practice Games emphasizes the games approach to training youth soccer players. Soccer is a free flowing game with no consistent down time (no time outs); it requires players to make many decisions in a short time span—and to make them on the fly. Therefore the best way for players to master the game is to be immersed in activities that replicate the game. In other words...*young players get better at playing soccer by playing soccer!*

The use of regimented drills that force players into lines to perform choreographed movements slows the pace of player development. And it’s a lot less fun!

As the former US Youth Soccer National Director of Coaching Education, I completely support and endorse the games approach to training. As the current Director of Training and Evaluation for Massachusetts Youth Soccer, I implement training programs with games like these on a daily basis. I recommend *Soccer Practice Games* to anyone who coaches youth soccer or who has a child that plays soccer.

Congratulations to Coach Joe Luxbacher on the creation of a great coaching aid!

Tom Goodman, M.Ed.
Director of Training and Evaluation
Massachusetts Youth Soccer

Preface

Soccer! The game evokes an outpouring of passion and emotion rarely Sealed within the realm of competitive sport. Known internationally as football, soccer provides a common language for peoples of diverse backgrounds and heritages, creating a bond that transcends political, ethnic, religious, and economic barriers. The national game of nearly every country in Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America, soccer is played daily by more than one billion men, women, and children. More than 150 million registered athletes, including more than 10 million women, play the sport on an official basis. Countless more kick the ball around on an unofficial basis, on sandlots, in playgrounds, and on the back streets of small towns and large cities. These impressive participant numbers are dwarfed by the number of avid fans worldwide who follow the sport on television. In 2006, the average viewership for each match of the month-long (64 matches) World Cup was 93 million. More than three times that number tuned in for the final between Italy and France. To illustrate the magnitude of soccer's following, an estimated 97.5 million people watched the 2008 NFL Super Bowl, generally considered to be America's biggest game.

Soccer's universal appeal does not rest on it being an easy game to play. In fact, soccer may demand more of athletes than any other sport. The game is played on a larger field than any sport except polo (where horses do the bulk of the work!). Players must perform a variety of foot skills under the match pressures of restricted space, limited time, physical fatigue, and determined opponents challenging for the ball. There are no official time-outs during a typical 90-minute match, and substitution is limited. Knowledge of tactics and strategies is essential for successful performance. Decision-making skills are constantly tested as players must respond instantly to changing situations during play. With the exception of the goalkeeper, there are no specialists on the soccer field. Each player must be able to play a role in both defense and attack. And although soccer players don't have to be any particular size or shape, all must have a high level of fitness and athleticism. Field players may run several miles during the course of a match, much of that distance at sprintlike speed. The physical and mental challenges confronting players are many and great. Individual and team performance ultimately depends on each player's ability to meet these challenges.

Once considered a "foreign" sport by North Americans, among team sports in the United States today soccer is second only to basketball in the number of participants. Participation in youth soccer continues to grow internationally as an increasing number of boys and girls ages 6 to 18 are playing the game each year. The expanding pool of players at all age levels has, in turn, created a need for more soccer coaches. While some may have grown up playing the game, many are volunteers with little or no playing experience

in the sport and even less experience teaching the game to youngsters. As a consequence, coaches new to the game are faced with what would appear to be an overwhelming challenge as they try to provide a good training environment for their respective teams. In reality, however, despite having had little or no exposure to the sport when they were younger, many of today's youth coaches are outstanding. They have become excellent teachers of the game by educating themselves, attending clinics, participating in coaching courses, reading books, and watching high-level soccer games. *Soccer Practice Games* will add to their body of knowledge.

Novice and experienced coaches alike are constantly searching for innovative exercises to use in their practice sessions. This third edition of *Soccer Practice Games* provides coaches with a variety of games designed to nurture the technical, tactical, and physical development of players. All exercises will challenge players and will keep them active, interested, and involved. The games are competitive and fun to play, and they can be easily adapted to a wide range of ages and abilities. Players of all ages respond more favorably if they are excited and enthusiastic about what they are doing—in short, if they are having a good time in the process. The games described here create such a positive training atmosphere. This does not imply that standard drills have no place in the team's practice regimen. The optimal learning environment should include a balance between typical soccer drills and the games found in this book.

As coaches, we should never underestimate the fundamental wisdom contained in the adage "The game is the best teacher." Many of the greatest players in soccer's rich history developed the foundation for their exceptional talent while playing in pick-up games, the so-called street soccer of their youth. Their eventual development into the best that soccer has to offer was not a direct result of years of training in a highly structured, coach-dominated practice routine, but rather from player-organized games in which the participants and the game itself were the dominant factors. Coaches never were and never should be the central driving force behind player development; rather, we should view ourselves as facilitators of such development. Toward that end, practices should be coach guided rather than coach directed. We can do so by providing players with practices that are game oriented, practices that constantly challenge them to take initiative and make decisions, and practices that ultimately encourage players to accept responsibility for their success. The games in this book will help you to create such a training atmosphere and, at the same time, provide players and coaches alike with an enjoyable and memorable experience.

Acknowledgments

The teamwork required in producing a successful soccer team can be likened to the collective effort that goes into the writing and publishing of a high-quality book. You simply cannot do it alone. In that regard, I am deeply indebted to many people for their help with this project. Although it is not possible to mention everyone by name, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the following people:

The staff at Human Kinetics, particularly Carla Zych, offered valuable insight and advice in developing the book and finalizing the manuscript.

Tom Heine, acquisitions editor, was willing to consider the concept and initiate the process.

The staff coaches of Shoot to Score Soccer Academy shared their thoughts and ideas with me.

Special thanks go to the young soccer players who volunteered their time and effort to model many of the photos that accompany the text: Gabriella and Ronaldo Del Duca, Danny Ferris, Jonny Geisler, Jeff Howard, Eliza and Travis Luxbacher, Ethan Marsh, Meredith and Elizabeth McDonough, and Jonathan Pyles. I sincerely hope they continue to enjoy the game for many years to come.

My sincere appreciation is also extended to Tom Goodman, a valued member of the coaching fraternity, for his willingness to provide the foreword to *Soccer Practice Games*. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my beautiful wife, Gail, the love of my life, for her support and encouragement of my many interests and projects.

Introduction: Make Practice Games Work for You

Planning a practice that challenges players to achieve a higher level of performance, a practice that motivates them to work hard, improve their game, and at the end of the day beg for more, is a fundamental responsibility of the soccer coach. Players of all ages and abilities want to be excited, enthusiastic, and active while they learn the game. Most will not respond well to long-winded lectures, standing in line, or anything that spells boredom. Young soccer players in particular will derive the most benefit from practices that are challenging and fun; from exercises that are activity oriented; from games in which they are constantly moving, touching the ball, and scoring goals. This third edition of *Soccer Practice Games* will assist you, as a coach, in achieving that goal.

The book contains 175 gamelike activities that you can use in creating a rich and varied practice environment. The practice games described in each chapter focus on mastery of the skills and tactics required for becoming a more complete soccer player. Players are placed in controlled, competitive situations that provide everyone involved with an opportunity to succeed. The games are particularly useful for beginning and intermediate players and can be easily adapted to accommodate more traditional training with older, more experienced players.

The book contains nine chapters, each with a specific theme. Chapter 1 explains how to best use the material presented in the book to organize good training sessions. Chapter 2 describes a variety of games that will physically and mentally prepare players for practice and match competition. Chapters 3 through 9 present games that deal with specific skills or tactical concepts (such as dribbling and shielding, passing and receiving). Although the games are categorized based on their primary focus, most actually emphasize two or more essential elements of the sport. For example, all the individual and small-group games in chapter 7 require players to rehearse tactical concepts while dribbling, passing, or receiving the ball as they move throughout the playing area, in some cases against challenging opponents. As a result, players can derive fitness, skill, and tactical benefits all within the same exercise. When possible, the games included in each chapter are loosely organized in a progression of increasing complexity. The ordering assists you in selecting games that are most appropriate for your players. Expose novice players to the most basic games first so that they are not overwhelmed and can achieve

some degree of success. As players become more confident and competent, you can progress to more mentally and physically challenging situations. Experienced players will derive greater benefit from games that require them to perform under conditions that they will actually face in match situations, gamelike pressures that include limited space and time, physical fatigue, and challenging opponents.

Each game is categorized as beginning, intermediate, or advanced based on its perceived level of difficulty. Beginner games focus primarily on technique (skill) development. These exercises are competitive and fun to play, introduce players to the gamelike pressures of restricted space and limited time, and involve repetition of the specific skill coupled with player movement with and without the ball. Intermediate games also require players to execute skills under gamelike conditions but couple that aspect of performance with individual and group tactical play. These games are characterized by an increased emphasis on speed of repetition and speed of play. The pressure of challenging opponents is also introduced in some of these exercises, but to a limited extent only. Advanced games focus primarily on tactical development at the group and team level. Players must already have a fundamental mastery of all soccer skills in order to derive the greatest benefit from these exercises. Hence, these exercises are not appropriate for beginning or even intermediate performers. Games in this category are typically performed under match conditions in order to expose players to the actual pressures they will encounter in a competitive game. Such pressures involve increased physical demands, reduced time and space in which to execute skills and make tactical decisions, and the determined challenge of opponents competing for possession of the ball. Keep in mind that the categorization of games is somewhat subjective; most games are extremely versatile and, with a few minor adjustments, can usually be adapted to accommodate the age and the ability of players involved. For example, you can make a beginner game more challenging for your players by doing the following:

- Impose restrictions on players; for example, require one- or two-touch passing only, or designate a specific type of pass only.
- Manipulate the size of the playing area (reducing the area increases the degree of difficulty since players must perform the same skills in less time and space).
- Increase the physical demands of the game by requiring more running and player movement.
- Incorporate skill and tactical aspects into the same exercise; for example, require players to choose the best of several options when deciding when and where to pass the ball.
- Add the ultimate challenge—the pressure of determined opponents competing for the ball.

Best of all, whether the game is shaped to test the novice or challenge the experienced player, it remains fast-paced and functional for everyone