



Games that build on the basics

Training basic ball handling: receiving and controlling the ball by Heike Völker, University of Göttingen, Germany

This article shows you how to help very young players get more comfortable with the ball. The top priority here is a holistic approach to training. Some of the exercises intentionally deviate from what we ordinarily think of as soccer training, allowing players to use their hands as well as their feet. All exercises are structured to give players plenty of repetitions without becoming boring.

“Get the ball under control, don’t let it bounce, get your body between it and your opponent!” Instructions like these can be heard from the sidelines at every age and ability level, at practice sessions and serious matches. Confidence in receiving and controlling the ball is often the key to preventing an own goal, and your overall performance on the field depends to a great extent on your ball-handling skills. The fact is, the better a player handles the ball, the more opportunities he or she has to help the team score and win.

That’s why we should start teaching players how to receive and control the ball at an early age, in a fun and playful way. Monotonous exercises in which most of the kids just stand around are boring — avoid them! Instead, give your players the chance to have a broad range of experiences with the ball. Tip: Use different types of balls, e.g. rubber balls and footballs. A kid who can control a football should have no trouble handling a soccer ball.

The following exercises were designed to keep all players constantly involved, providing plenty of touches for everyone. Players under eight should practice the basic sequences without opponents.

All players will learn to:

- stop the ball with the inside, outside and sole of the foot, and
- receive low and high flighted balls on the thigh, chest and head before controlling them on the ground and taking them in a given direction.

Players over eight can also practice doing fakes while receiving and controlling the ball, which can provide a critical edge in 1 v. 1 play. Games of tag are a great way to start.



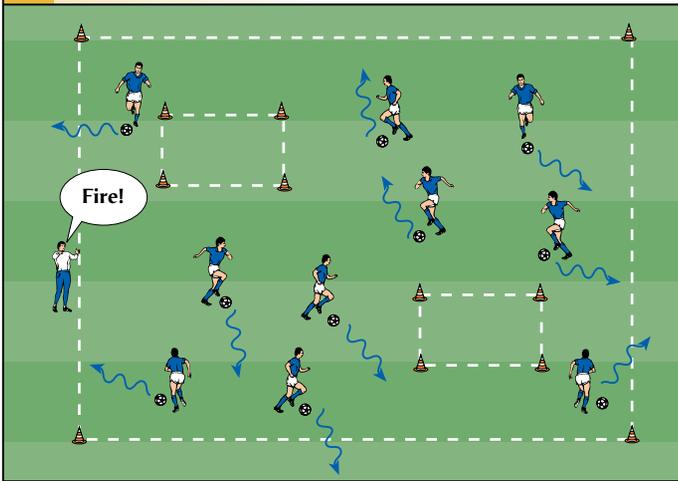
**Kids want to learn how to handle the ball, and that
— like so many things in life — takes practice!**

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GAMES AND EXERCISES

1 Fire, flood, lightning, snow



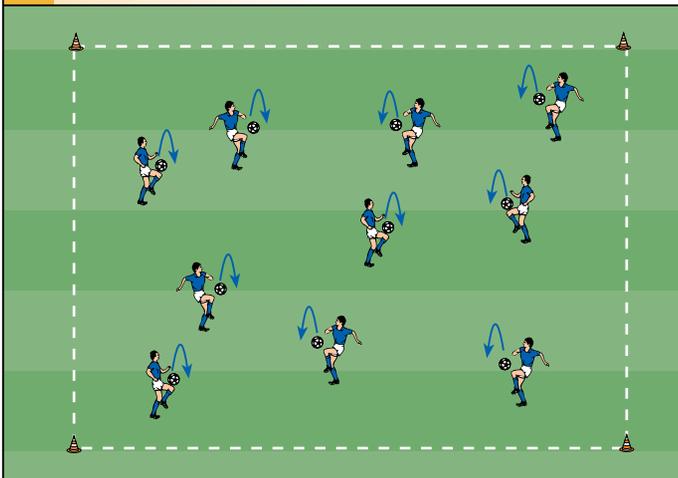
Setup

- Mark out two small fields inside a bigger one.
- Each player has a ball.

Sequence

- Players dribble around inside the big field.
- The coach calls out “fire,” “flood,” “lightning” or “snow”:
- On “fire,” players have to save themselves by dribbling out of the big field and trading balls with another player.
- On “flood,” they have to dribble onto the small fields (“islands”) and trade balls there.
- On “lightning,” they immediately stop their balls (with the sole, knee or buttocks) and then lie on their stomachs.
- On “snow,” they pick up the balls and throw them at each other (aim only at legs or use soft balls).

2 Juggling contest



Setup

- All players are inside a field; each one has a ball.

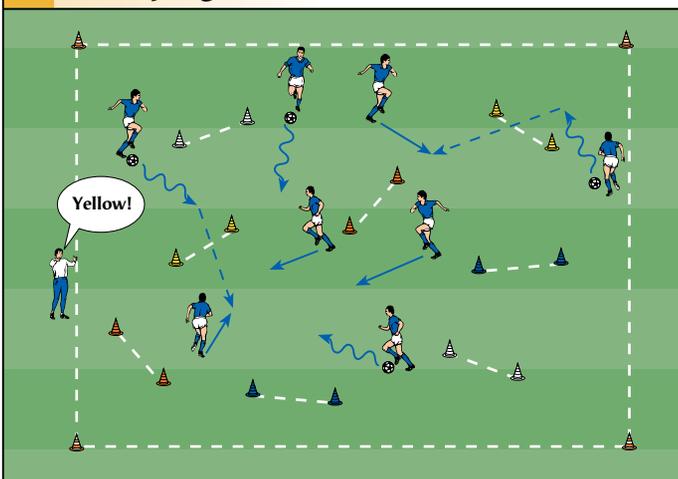
Sequence

- Who can bounce the ball off the knee twice and then catch it (see diagram)?
- Who can bounce the ball with the sole of the foot? Note: Find a hard surface (parking lot, track, gym floor, etc.).
- Who can bounce the ball off the foot, thigh or head and then stop it with the sole?

Tip

- Be sure to adapt these exercises to each child’s ability level. This allows you to challenge advanced players and help beginners (who can also use a balloon).

3 Cone jungle



Setup

- Using cones of different colors, mark out several small goals inside a field.
- Divide players into pairs (one ball per pair).

Sequence

- Partners dribble and pass to each other inside the field.
- The coach calls out a color, and each pair tries to pass through all the goals of that color as fast as they can.
- Which pair finishes first?

Variations

- Players pass and receive as directed (e.g. only with the left foot).
- Players do takeovers on the goal lines.
- Players under six should roll the ball to each other and do takeovers.