

U/12 LESSON PLANS & PRACTICE IDEAS

7-Week Plan | Ages 9-12 | Two Practices Per Week | 60 Minutes

WEEK BY WEEK

THE U/12 COACHING PHILOSOPHY

At U/12, players are ready for more than simply learning how to perform a soccer skill. They can begin to understand why they are making a particular choice, when to use a skill, and how their decision affects the rest of the game. Our goal isn't to turn 9-12-year-olds into miniature professional players.

Our goal is to help them become:

- Comfortable and confident with the ball.
- Able to control the ball while moving.
- Able to receive the ball under pressure.
- Willing to take players on.
- Willing to pass when passing is the better option.
- Able to recognize and attack space.
- Able to defend an opponent 1v1.
- Able to support teammates.
- Able to transition quickly between attacking and defending.
- Comfortable using both feet.
- Comfortable making mistakes.
- Able to make decisions without waiting for the coach to tell them what to do.
- Excited to compete, learn and play.

The golden rule: *Teach the player, not the play.*

We want players thinking:

Can I go forward? Can I beat someone? Can I pass? Where is the space? Where is the pressure? Where can I support my teammate? What happens if we lose the ball? Can we win it back?

Rather than: "Stand here." "Run there." "Pass every time." "Don't dribble." "Get back to your position."

At this age, we want players learning to see → decide → execute.

PRACTICE STRUCTURE

A consistent one-hour structure makes practices easier for coaches and players. New coaches should use this structure as their starting point, but the times are a guide rather than strict rules.

0:00–0:08 — Ball Mastery / Arrival Activity

Every player should have a ball whenever possible. Players should begin moving as soon as they arrive.

0:08–0:18 — Technical Skill

Introduce or reinforce the day's primary skill.

0:18–0:30 — Skill Game

Turn the technical skill into a competitive activity and begin adding decisions or pressure.

0:30–0:42 — Small-Sided Game

Add teammates and opponents.

0:42–0:55 — Conditioned Game

Create a game that encourages the day's theme.

0:55–1:00 — Free Play / Finish

Let them play. Use minimal coaching and allow players to make their own decisions.

Important: These times are a guide, not handcuffs. If an activity is working brilliantly, keep it going. If players are standing around, change the activity.

COACHING THE MIXED U/12 GROUP

Because this program combines ages 9–12, coaches should expect differences in physical development, experience, confidence and technical ability. Do not automatically make an activity easier simply because some players are younger. Instead, adjust the challenge for the individual player. For example, if everyone is working on dribbling: A newer player might use their stronger foot and have more space. A more experienced player might be required to use both feet, change direction, perform a move, or have a defender apply pressure. This allows everyone to work on the same skill without requiring completely different practices.

Focus on:

Lots of touches. Confidence. Repetition. Simple decisions. Clear demonstrations. Smaller numbers. Plenty of opportunities to succeed.

Add:

More pressure. Faster decisions. Weaker-foot challenges. More realistic defenders.

Combination play. Tactical questions. Increased responsibility.

Coach the player in front of you, not the number on their birth certificate.

WEEK 1 — "I HAVE THE BALL"

Theme

Ball mastery, first touch, dribbling, changing direction, changing speed and attacking space
At U/12, players should already have some experience dribbling. This week isn't about starting over.

We're asking: Can you control the ball while moving? Can you recognize when to slow down, speed up or change direction? Can you keep the ball when pressure arrives?

Introduce:

- Close control.
- Inside/outside touches.
- Using both feet.
- Change of speed.
- Change of direction.
- Turns.
- First touch into space.
- Looking up.
- Dribbling into space.
- Protecting the ball.
- Recognizing pressure.

PRACTICE 1A — "FIND THE SPACE"

0:00-0:08 — Ball Mastery

Every player has a ball.

Players dribble freely inside a designated area.

Coach calls:

Right foot.

Left foot.

Inside.

Outside.

Sole.

Stop.

Turn.

Fast.

Slow.

Then begin combining commands:

"Right foot → left foot → turn → accelerate."

"Slow → look up → fast."

"Inside → outside → change direction."

Coaching Points: Keep the ball close when surrounded by players. Take a bigger touch when there is open space. Use both feet. Look up regularly rather than staring at the ball. Change speed after changing direction.

Coach Phrase: "Small touch, small touch, BIG touch and go!"

U/9-10 Adjustment

Give players plenty of room and allow them to perform the movements at their own pace.

U/11-12 Challenge

Require players to use their weaker foot for portions of the activity. Add passive defenders or ask players to perform a change of direction every time they encounter another player.

0:08-0:18 — "Traffic"

Create a 25x30-yard grid. Every player has a ball.

Players dribble around the area while avoiding other players.

Coach calls:

-GREEN: Accelerate into space.

-YELLOW: Slow down and maintain close control.

-RED: Stop the ball under control.

-BLUE: Turn.

-PURPLE: Change direction.

Now add visual awareness:

Coach holds up a number while players dribble. Players must call out the number they see.

What We're Teaching

This is more than a dribbling exercise.

Players are learning:

See → Decide → Execute

They must control the ball while also paying attention to what is happening around them.

Coaching Points: "Can you look up?" "Where is the space?" "Can you see another player before you run into them?" "Can you change speed after you see space?"

Progression

Add a few passive defenders who attempt to close space without tackling.

Then make the defenders active.

0:18-0:30 — "Gates Challenge"

Create 10-15 small gates throughout the playing area.

Players dribble through as many gates as possible.

Round 1: Any gate.

Round 2: Cannot use the same gate twice.

Round 3: Must change speed after every gate.

Round 4: Must use a different foot to exit the gate.

Round 5: Coach calls: "LEFT FOOT!" Players must enter and exit using their left foot.

Coaching Points: Encourage players to keep their heads up and identify their next gate before they reach the current one. Don't let the activity become simply "run through cones." We want players thinking: Where can I go next?

Challenge

Give advanced players a defender who can protect several gates. The attacker must recognize which gate is open.

0:30-0:42 — "Sharks"

Create a grid. Most players have a ball. Two players begin as defenders without balls. Defenders attempt to win a ball. If a defender wins the ball, they immediately become the attacker and the player who lost the ball becomes the defender. Nobody sits out.

Coaching Points "Where is your escape?" "Can you turn away from pressure?" "Can you protect the ball?" "Can you accelerate away after your turn?"

Important U/12 Coaching Point: Do not immediately tell players which direction to go. Ask: "Where was the space?" Allow them to recognize the answer.

0:42-0:55 — 4v4 / 5v5

Set up small-sided fields with small goals. No fixed positions initially. Encourage players to:

- Dribble forward.
- Attack open space.
- Recognize pressure.
- Change direction.
- Change speed.
- Look for opportunities to beat defenders.
- Condition

A goal scored after a player successfully dribbles past an opponent counts as an extra point. Do not require players to dribble every time. The purpose is to encourage them to recognize opportunities to attack, not blindly take on defenders.

Coach Observation

Watch for: Who looks up? Who attacks space? Who changes speed? Who protects the ball? Who is afraid to take on defenders? Who can recognize when pressure is coming?

0:55-1:00 — Free Play

Let them play. Minimal coaching. Try to avoid stopping the game.

End-of-Practice Question

Ask:

"When should you take a big touch?" Desired answer: "When I have space."

PRACTICE 1B — "BEAT THE PRESSURE"

Theme

Protecting the ball, turning away from pressure and attacking space

The second practice builds on Practice 1A. Players now have to make decisions with an opponent applying pressure.

0:00-0:08 — Ball Mastery

Players dribble freely.

Coach calls:

- Inside/outside.
- Sole rolls.
- Pull-push.
- Change direction.
- Stop-and-go.
- Turn.
- Accelerate.

Introduce a few simple moves:

- Scissors.
- Step-over.
- Inside-out.
- Outside-in.

Do not spend five minutes teaching a move.

Demonstrate → players try → play.

Coaching Point: The move itself isn't the objective.

The objective is: Can the move help you create space?

0:08-0:18 — "Pressure Box"

Create several 10x10-yard boxes. One attacker has a ball and one defender applies light pressure. The attacker attempts to maintain possession for 20 seconds. The defender initially does not tackle. Progress to live defending.

Attacker's Objectives: Keep the ball close. Use their body to protect it. Change direction. Change speed. Find space.

Defender's Objective: Apply pressure without simply diving in.

Coaching Questions

"Where is the defender?" "Can you turn?" "Can you protect the ball?" "Can you escape into space?"

0:18-0:30 — "1v1 Gates"

Create several small channels with a gate at the attacking end. Attacker starts with the ball. Defender starts several yards away. Attacker scores by dribbling through the gate under control. Defender scores by winning the ball and dribbling out. Rotate quickly.

Coaching Points for the Attacker: Attack the defender with speed. Make the defender commit. Use a move or change of direction. Accelerate after getting around them.

Coaching Phrase: "Beat the player, then accelerate!"

U/9-10 Adjustment

Give the attacker more space and have the defender start farther away.

U/11-12 Challenge

Allow the defender to apply immediate pressure and make the gate smaller.

0:30-0:42 — "2v2 to Goals"

Create multiple small fields. 2v2 with small goals. Players must decide: Dribble or pass? Do not tell them the answer. Let the game provide the problem.

Coach Questions: "Was there space to dribble?" "Was your teammate open?" "Where was the defender?" "What could you do differently next time?"

0:42-0:55 — "Numbers Game"

Create two teams. Coach calls a number.

"ONE!" → 1v1.

"TWO!" → 2v2.

"THREE!" → 3v3.

Players must quickly recognize: How many teammates they have. How many defenders they have. Where the space is. Whether they should dribble or pass.

This activity begins connecting individual skills to game awareness.

Coaching Point: Don't tell players what decision to make. Ask them afterward: "What did you see?"

0:55-1:00 — Free Game

Let players play. Minimal coaching.

Primary Observation: Are players becoming more comfortable making decisions when an opponent is close?

WEEK 1 COACHING NOTES

The goal of Week 1 is not for every player to perform advanced dribbling moves perfectly. The goal is for players to become: More comfortable with the ball. More aware of space. More confident changing direction. More confident changing speed. More willing to attack a defender. Better at protecting possession. Better at looking up. A player losing the ball while attempting to beat a defender is not necessarily making a bad decision. At this age, we want players to learn when and why an attacking decision works. Praise the attempt. Then help them understand the next step. Instead of: "You lost it!"

Try:

"Great idea. Next time, can you take your first touch away from the defender?"

WEEK 1 COACH CHECKLIST

By the end of Week 1, look for progress rather than perfection.

Ball Skills

- ☐ Can dribble with reasonable control.
- ☐ Can use both feet.
- ☐ Can change direction.
- ☐ Can change speed.
- ☐ Can stop and restart.
- ☐ Can perform at least one change-of-direction move.
- ☐ Can protect the ball.

Awareness

- ☐ Begins looking up while dribbling.
- ☐ Recognizes open space.
- ☐ Recognizes when pressure is coming.
- ☐ Understands that a bigger touch can be useful in open space.

Attacking

- ☐ Willing to attack a defender.
- ☐ Attempts to change direction or speed.
- ☐ Understands that beating a defender requires acceleration afterward.
- ☐ Begins recognizing when passing may be a better option.

Confidence

- ☐ Wants the ball.
- ☐ Is willing to make mistakes.
- ☐ Attempts new skills.
- ☐ Enjoys competing.
- ☐ Wants to come back to the next practice.

WEEK 2 — PASS AND RECEIVE

Theme: Can I help my teammate?

At U/12, passing should become more than simply kicking the ball to a teammate. Players should begin to recognize when a pass is useful, where to pass, how hard to pass, and what to do after they pass. The goal is not to create players who pass every time they receive the ball. Players should still recognize when they can dribble, turn, protect, or attack.

Key Ideas: Receive with the first touch away from pressure when possible. Pass with purpose. Look before receiving. Give the player with the ball a passing option. Move after passing. Create angles rather than standing directly behind a defender. Ask: Can I go forward? If not, can I find a teammate?

Coach Language

Instead of: "PASS!"

Try: "Where is your teammate?"

Instead of: "Stand over there."

Try: "Where could you move to help?"

Instead of: "One-touch!"

Try: "What does the space give you?"

PRACTICE 2A — PASS, MOVE, RECEIVE

0:00-0:08 — Ball Mastery

Players work individually in a defined area.

Have them perform:

Inside/outside touches

Foundations

Pull-push

Sole rolls

Dribble with both feet

Change direction

Change speed

Add a reaction:

Coach calls "GO!" and players accelerate into open space.

Coaching Points: Keep the ball close when surrounded. Push the ball farther when accelerating. Look up frequently. Use both feet.

0:08-0:18 — Partner Passing

Players work in pairs, 8-12 yards apart.

Start with:

-Pass with inside of foot.

-Receive across the body.

-Take first touch into space.

-Pass back.

Progress to:

-Two-touch passing.

-One-touch if appropriate.

-Receive with right foot, pass with left.

-Receive with left foot, pass with right.

Coaching Points

1. Passing

Plant foot beside the ball.

Toe points toward target.

Strike the middle of the ball.

Follow through toward teammate.

2. Receiving

Relax the receiving foot.

Cushion the ball.

First touch should have a purpose.

Get body positioned before the ball arrives.

0:18-0:30 — PASS AND FOLLOW

Create several passing stations using cones. Player A passes to B, then follows the pass.

B receives and passes to C. C passes to the next player.

Progression:

-Players must check away before checking toward the ball.

-Receiver calls for the ball.

-Add a passive defender.

-Defender becomes active.

Coach Note: The important part is not the pattern.

The important part is:

Pass → move → create a new option.

If players become focused only on following cones, stop the activity and ask:

“Where could you move if that teammate was being defended?”

0:30-0:42 — 3v1 KEEP-AWAY

Create small grids. Three attackers attempt to keep the ball from one defender. Rotate defender frequently.

Progressions:

-Maximum 3 touches.

-Players must move after passing.

-Defender gets a point for winning the ball.

-Attackers get a point for completing 5 passes.
Younger Players: Allow unlimited touches and larger spaces.
Older Players: Reduce space and encourage quicker decisions.

0:42-0:55 — 4v4/5v5 GAME

Normal game.

Add:

Bonus point for a goal following a pass and movement.

Do not require the bonus.

Watch for:

- Players standing after passing.
- Players hiding behind defenders.
- Players forcing passes when they could attack.
- Players not looking before receiving.

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

Let them play with minimal interruption.

Finish with: "What helped your team keep the ball?"

PRACTICE 2B — PLAY AWAY FROM PRESSURE

0:00-0:08 — Ball Mastery With Turns

Players dribble freely.

Coach calls:

"Turn!"

"Change speed!"

"Left foot!"

"Right foot!"

"Find space!"

Introduce:

Inside cut

Outside cut

Pull-back

Cruyff turn

Drag-back

Players should choose the turn rather than automatically performing one specific move.

0:08-0:18 — RECEIVE AND TURN

Pairs work with a server. Player receives with defender behind them.

Player must decide: Can I turn? Can I protect? Should I play back? Can I play away from pressure? Progress from passive defender to active defender.

Coaching Point: Receiving does not always mean turning.

Sometimes the best decision is:

Protect → connect → move.

0:18-0:30 — 2v1 TO GATES

Create a small field with two gates at the attacking end. Two attackers play against one defender. Attackers score by dribbling through a gate or passing through it to a teammate. Rotate roles. This teaches: When to dribble. When to pass. When to support. When to move away from the defender.

Coach Questions: “Where is the defender?” “Who has the advantage?” “Can you go forward?” “Can your teammate help?”

0:30-0:42 — 3v2 ATTACK

Three attackers attempt to score against two defenders. Start each ball from the coach. Encourage players to recognize: Width. Forward passes. Supporting angles. 1v1 opportunities.

0:42-0:55 — CONDITIONED GAME

4v4 or 5v5.

Condition:

A team earns an extra point if they complete a pass after successfully moving away from pressure. Remove the condition if it starts making the game unnatural.

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

Let the players finish by playing.

WEEK 3 — BEAT THE DEFENDER

Theme: Can I attack 1v1?

Players at this age should be encouraged to attack defenders rather than becoming afraid of losing the ball. The objective is not to teach ten fancy moves. The objective is to help players understand: Can I beat the defender with speed, direction, deception, or space?

Key Ideas

- Attack the defender with confidence.
- Dribble at defenders rather than sideways whenever possible.
- Use changes of speed.
- Use changes of direction.
- Get the defender moving.
- Once you beat the defender, accelerate.

-If you cannot beat them, protect or combine.

PRACTICE 3A — 1v1 ATTACKING

0:00-0:08 — Ball Mastery

Players work individually.

Include:

Inside/outside.

Scissors.

Step-over.

Body feint.

Stop-and-go.

Change direction.

Challenge:

Perform the move, then accelerate for 5–7 yards.

Coaching Phrase: “Beat the player, then accelerate!”

0:08-0:18 — MOVE + EXPLODE

Set up cone lines. Players dribble toward a cone, perform a move, then accelerate past it.

Progress:

Coach becomes passive defender. Then coach applies real pressure.

Focus on:

Approach under control.

Get close enough to influence defender.

Sell the move.

Explode away.

0:18-0:30 — 1v1 GATES

Create several small fields with a gate at each end. Attacker starts with ball. Defender attempts to win it. Attacker scores by dribbling through either gate. Rotate quickly.

Coaching Points: Head up before attacking. Attack front foot. Change speed. Change direction. Protect the ball after beating the defender.

Younger Players: Give attackers more space.

Older Players: Start defender closer or make the field narrower.

0:30-0:42 — 1v1 TO GOAL

Attacker receives from coach and attempts to score. Defender starts beside or slightly behind attacker. Progress to defender starting level with attacker.

0:42-0:55 — 2v2 GAME

Normal game with bonus: Goal after a successful 1v1 = bonus point. Do not force players to dribble. Reward good decisions.

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

PRACTICE 3B — ATTACK WITH A PURPOSE

0:00-0:08 — Ball Mastery

Players choose their own moves. Coach challenges: “Show me a move you can actually use in a game.”

0:08-0:18 — ATTACKING SPACE

Set up two end zones. Players dribble from one side to another while avoiding defenders.

Progress: Defenders can win the ball.

Players receive a point for: Beating a defender. Finding open space. Changing speed effectively.

0:18-0:30 — 2v1 TO GOAL

Two attackers versus one defender. Teach the player with the ball to recognize:

Defender comes to me → pass.

Defender stays back → attack.

Defender is beaten → accelerate and shoot.

0:30-0:42 — 2v2 TO GOAL

Now both attackers and defenders are active. Encourage creativity.

0:42-0:55 — 4v4/5v5

Condition: A goal following a successful 1v1 receives a bonus. Again, the goal is not to make every attack a 1v1.

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

WEEK 4 — DEFEND 1v1

Theme: Can I win it back?

At this point players should begin understanding that defending is an individual skill, not something reserved for a particular position. Every player defends. Every player attacks.

When possession is lost, players should begin reacting immediately.

Key Ideas: Get close quickly. Slow down before reaching the attacker. Stay balanced.

Stay between attacker and goal. Force the attacker where you want them to go. Watch the ball and attacker. Do not dive in unnecessarily. If you lose the ball, react.

PRACTICE 4A — DEFENSIVE 1v1

0:00-0:08 — Ball Mastery

Individual touches followed by quick changes of direction.

Coach occasionally calls:

“Defend!”

Players stop their ball and get into an athletic defensive stance.

0:08-0:18 — DEFENDING FOOTWORK

Players work in pairs. Attacker moves side to side. Defender mirrors.

Progress:

Attacker can attempt to dribble past.

Defender focuses on:

Close → Slow → Stay in front → Win.

0:18-0:30 — 1v1 GATES

Attacker attempts to score through either gate. Defender earns a point by winning the ball and dribbling out.

Coaching Points: Sprint to pressure. Slow down as you arrive. Do not run straight past the attacker. Stay balanced. Be patient. Tackle when the ball is exposed.

Common Mistake: Defender dives in immediately.

Correction:

“Can you stay in front first?”

0:30-0:42 — DEFENDER’S TREASURE

Create a small area with several balls. Attackers attempt to dribble a ball out. Defenders attempt to win it and return it.

Rotate roles.

This keeps defending competitive and fun.

0:42-0:55 — 2v2

Normal 2v2 game. Award defensive points for: Winning possession.

Blocking a shot. Forcing play out. Good recovery defending.

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

PRACTICE 4B — DEFEND AND TRANSITION

0:00-0:08 — BALL MASTERY + REACTION

Players dribble. On coach's signal they must:

Stop.

Turn.

Accelerate.

Protect.

Change direction.

0:08-0:18 — 1v1 DEFEND AND ATTACK

Attacker attempts to score through a gate. If defender wins the ball, they immediately become the attacker and score through the opposite gate.

This teaches the transition:

Win it → look forward.

0:18-0:30 — 2v1

Two attackers attack one defender. If defender wins the ball, they attack the opposite goal.

Ask players:

“What happens when we win it?”

0:30-0:42 — 3v3 TRANSITION

Small field with goals. When a team wins the ball, they have 5 seconds to try to attack.

Do not make this a rigid rule. Use it to encourage quick reactions.

0:42-0:55 — 4v4/5v5

Normal game. Coach observes:

Who reacts when possession is lost?

Who pressures the ball?

Who recovers?

Who communicates?

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

WEEK 5 — PLAY TOGETHER

Theme: Can we help each other?

Players now have individual attacking and defending tools. The next step is understanding how teammates make the game easier.

Introduce:

-Support.

-Width.

-Depth.

-Angles.

-Movement after passing.

-Combination play.

Avoid assigning rigid positions. Teach players to recognize where they can help.

PRACTICE 5A — SUPPORT THE BALL

0:00-0:08 — BALL MASTERY

Individual ball work. Every few seconds: “Look up!”

Players should practice dribbling while scanning.

0:08-0:18 — PASS AND MOVE

Groups of three. Player passes and immediately moves to a new space. Do not allow players to simply follow the ball.

Challenge:

“Can you move somewhere the defender cannot cover both you and your teammate?”

0:18-0:30 — 2v1 SUPPORT

Two attackers versus one defender. The player without the ball should find a useful angle.

Teach:

Don't stand directly behind defender.

Don't stand too close.

Don't stand too far away.

Give the ball carrier a clear option.

0:30-0:42 — 3v2

Three attackers versus two defenders.

Encourage:

Width.

Depth.

Movement.

Quick support.

0:42-0:55 — 4v4

Bonus point for a goal following:

pass → movement → receive → attack.

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

PRACTICE 5B — WIDTH, DEPTH AND COMBINATION

0:00-0:08 — GATES MOVEMENT

Set up multiple gates. Players dribble through a gate and immediately find another gate.

Add teammates. Players must avoid occupying the same space.

Coaching Question: "Can you make the field bigger for your teammate?"

0:08-0:18 — TRIANGLE PASSING

Groups of three form triangles. Pass and move. Progress:

Two-touch.

One-touch when appropriate.

Add defender.

0:18-0:30 — 3v1 / 4v1 KEEP-AWAY

Focus on:

Angles.

Supporting distance.

Movement.

First touch.

Scanning.

0:30-0:42 — 3v2 TO GOAL

Attackers attempt to score. Defenders attempt to win and counter.

0:42-0:55 — 4v4/5v5

Let the game be the teacher. Coach only when necessary. Look for moments where you can stop briefly and ask: "Where could you have helped?"

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

WEEK 6 — WIN IT / LOSE IT

Theme: What happens next? This week connects attacking and defending. Players should begin understanding that soccer changes quickly. When we lose the ball? Can we win it back? When we win the ball: Can we attack before the other team gets organized?

Key Ideas

-Immediate reaction after losing possession.

-Pressure the ball.

-Recover if you cannot win it.

-First thought after winning: Can we go forward?

-Support quickly.

-Finish attacks.

PRACTICE 6A — TRANSITION

0:00-0:08 — BALL MASTERY

Players dribble.

Coach calls:

“Lose it!”

Players stop their ball and immediately sprint 3–5 yards to pressure an imaginary opponent.

Then:

“Win it!”

Players collect their ball and accelerate.

0:08-0:18 — 1v1 TRANSITION

Attacker tries to score. If defender wins it, defender immediately attacks the opposite goal.

Rotate quickly.

0:18-0:30 — 2v2 TRANSITION

Two teams attack opposite goals. When possession changes, players immediately switch roles.

Coach emphasizes:

Lose it → react.

Win it → look forward.

0:30-0:42 — 3v3 WITH TRANSITION

Small-sided game. After winning the ball, team has 5 seconds to attempt a forward attack.

0:42-0:55 — CONDITIONED GAME

4v4/5v5.

Coach gives no constant instructions. Track good transition moments rather than just goals.

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

PRACTICE 6B — WIN IT AND FINISH

0:00-0:08 — SHOOTING/FINISHING WARM-UP

Players dribble toward goal and finish.

Encourage:

-Accuracy.

-Both feet.

-Quick preparation.

-Shoot when the opportunity is there.

0:08-0:18 — RECEIVE AND SHOOT

Player receives from coach or teammate and finishes.

Progress:

Receive across body.

Defender applies pressure.

One-touch finish when appropriate.

0:18-0:30 — 2v1 TO GOAL

Two attackers versus one defender. Encourage quick decisions.

0:30-0:42 — 3v2 TO GOAL

Add another defender. Now players must recognize:

Shoot.

Pass.

Dribble.

Support.

0:42-0:55 — BIG GAME

4v4/5v5.

Condition:

Teams receive bonus recognition for goals scored quickly after winning possession. Do not overemphasize the scoring condition. The real lesson is: Can we recognize the moment?

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

WEEK 7 — PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Theme: Can I make the game my own?

No major new skill is needed this week. Players should demonstrate what they have learned:

Ball mastery.

Dribbling.

Passing.

Receiving.

Attacking 1v1.

Defending 1v1.

Supporting teammates.

Transition.

Finishing.

Decision-making.

The coach's role becomes less about directing every action and more about observing, questioning and encouraging.

PRACTICE 7A — PLAYER CHOICE

0:00-0:08 — BALL MASTERY

Let players choose their favorite moves. Challenge them to use both feet.

0:08-0:18 — TECHNICAL CHALLENGE

Set up stations:

Dribbling.

Turning.

Passing.

Receiving.

Shooting.

Players rotate.

0:18-0:30 — 1v1 / 2v2

Allow players to compete. Encourage creativity.

0:30-0:42 — 3v3

Small-sided game. Coach observes rather than constantly stopping play.

0:42-0:55 — 4v4/5v5

Let players solve problems.

Ask questions during natural breaks:

“What did you see?”

“Why did you choose that?”

“Where was the space?”

0:55-1:00 — FREE PLAY

PRACTICE 7B — CHAMPIONSHIP DAY

Make this practice feel different.

The players have worked for seven weeks. Finish with competition, energy and fun.

Challenge 1 — Ball Mastery

Players complete a timed or technical challenge.

Challenge 2 — Dribbling

Players race through a cone course.

Reward:

Control.

Creativity.

Change of speed. Not just speed.

Challenge 3 — Shooting

Players take turns finishing from different positions. Encourage both feet.

Challenge 4 — 1v1 Short competitive games. Keep games moving quickly.

Challenge 5 — 2v2 / 3v3

Small-sided competition. Rotate teams. Final Game

4v4/5v5.

Minimal coaching. Let players play.

Celebrate: Creativity. Effort. Good decisions.

Teammates helping teammates. Players recovering after mistakes.

FINAL U/12 COACHING CHECKLIST

BALL SKILLS

Players should be developing the ability to:

Control the ball with both feet.

Change direction.

Change speed.

Turn away from pressure.

Protect the ball.

Dribble into space.

Attack defenders.

Keep the ball close when needed.

Take a bigger touch when accelerating.

ATTACKING

Players should begin to:

Recognize space.

Attack 1v1.

Know when to dribble.

Know when to pass.

Shoot when opportunities appear.

Support teammates.

Create width and depth.

Move after passing.

Look for forward options.

PASSING AND RECEIVING

Players should be developing:

Accurate inside-foot passing.

Appropriate weight of pass.

First touch with purpose.

Receiving away from pressure.

Looking before receiving.

Moving after passing.

Finding useful passing angles.

DEFENDING

Every player should understand:

Everyone defends.

Pressure the ball.

Slow down near the attacker.

Stay balanced.

Stay between attacker and goal.

Be patient.

Recognize opportunities to win the ball.

React quickly after losing possession.

TRANSITION

Players should begin to recognize:

What happens when we lose the ball?

Can we win it back? If we cannot win it, can we recover?

What happens when we win it?

Can we attack before the opponent organizes?

GAME UNDERSTANDING

Players should increasingly understand:

Which direction we attack.

Which goal we defend.

Where the space is.

Where teammates are.

Where opponents are.

When to dribble.

When to pass.

When to support.

When to defend.

When to transition.

COACHING LANGUAGE

Replace:

“PASS!”

with:

“Can you find a teammate?”

“DON’T DRIBBLE!”

with:

“Is there space to go forward?”

“GET IN POSITION!”

with: “Where could you go to help?”

“WHY DIDN’T YOU PASS?”

with:

“What did you see?”

“YOU LOST THE BALL!”

with:

“Can we win it back?”

“SHOOT!”

with:

“Can you finish?”

“GET WIDE!”

with:

“Can you make the field bigger?”

“MARK UP!”

with:

“Who can you help us defend?”

NEW COACH REMINDERS

1. You do not need to stop every mistake. Mistakes are part of learning. Give players opportunities to solve problems themselves.
2. Avoid coaching from the sideline every second. If you tell players exactly what to do, they may become dependent on the coach. Ask questions. Let them think.
3. Keep players moving. Avoid long explanations. Demonstrate quickly, let them try, then make corrections.
4. Use small-sided games.

Players get more touches, more decisions, more attacking opportunities and more defensive opportunities.

5. Adjust the activity before blaming the player.

If everyone is struggling: Make the field bigger. Reduce defenders. Simplify the rule.

Slow the activity down.

If everyone is succeeding: Make the space smaller. Add pressure. Reduce touches.

Add another defender. Increase the decision-making challenge.

6. Coach the player, not the position.

Players ages 9-12 are still developing. Do not lock players into one position for an entire season. Give them opportunities to attack, defend and experience different parts of the game.

AGE 9-10 ADJUSTMENTS

For younger players: Use larger spaces. Allow more touches. Reduce defensive pressure.

Give more repetitions. Demonstrate rather than over-explain. Keep competitions short. Give players time to understand the activity.

Focus especially on:

Control → Confidence → Decision.

AGE 11-12 ADJUSTMENTS

For older players:

Increase pressure.

Reduce space when appropriate.

Encourage scanning before receiving.

Introduce quicker decisions.

Challenge weaker foot.

Add defenders.

Increase tactical questioning.

Expect players to recognize more situations independently.

Focus especially on:

Scan → Decide → Execute → React.

THE 7-WEEK PROGRESSION

WEEK 1

Me + The Ball

Ball mastery, first touch, dribbling, turning and attacking space.

WEEK 2

Me + A Teammate

Passing, receiving, movement and playing away from pressure.

WEEK 3

Me vs. Defender

1v1 attacking, creativity, speed and direction changes.

WEEK 4

Me vs. Attacker

Defending 1v1, pressure, patience and winning the ball.

WEEK 5

Me + Teammates + Space

Support, width, depth, angles and combination play.

WEEK 6

Win It / Lose It

Transition, reacting to possession changes and finishing quickly.

WEEK 7

Put It All Together

Decision-making, game understanding, confidence and fun.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL

At the end of the season, the goal is not simply that players can perform a list of soccer skills. We want players who:

Want the ball.
Are comfortable receiving it.
Can attack space.
Are willing to take on defenders.
Can recognize when to pass.
Can support teammates.
Are willing to defend.
React when they lose the ball.
Look forward when they win it.
Are comfortable making mistakes.
Can make decisions without waiting for the coach.
Enjoy playing soccer.

Teach the player, not the play.

The best U/12 player is not the one who follows the coach's instructions perfectly.

It is the player who begins to see the game, recognize the problem, make a decision and act with confidence.