



Welcome to Wider Game FC

I'm Ritchie Semple, founder of Total Football Experience. Over the years, I've come across countless ideas, resources and opportunities that could help recreational, grassroots and competitive youth soccer coaches and clubs.

Wider Game FC brings some of those ideas together in one useful monthly newsletter, covering practical coaching, player development, club growth, recruitment and retention, soccer opportunities, useful resources and more.

The aim is simple: to share realistic ideas that can help coaches and clubs create better experiences for their players.

Welcome to Wider Game FC.



Why Player Development Goes Beyond Training and Matches



Player development is about far more than what happens during a training session or on matchday. Young players also grow through new experiences, different environments, stronger relationships and opportunities that challenge them in different ways.

Travelling with teammates, playing unfamiliar opposition, learning from different coaches and simply spending more time together can help build confidence, independence, communication and team spirit.

For recreational, grassroots and competitive youth players, these experiences can be just as important as technical improvement. The more positive, varied and memorable experiences a player has within the game, the more likely they are to stay engaged, enjoy their soccer and continue developing both as a player and as a person.

DRIBBLING TO FINISH

A simple session to improve dribbling, awareness and finishing for young players.



SESSION SNAPSHOT



AGE

U8-U12



PLAYERS

8-12



DURATION

35-45 mins



FOCUS

Dribbling, shooting, field awareness



EQUIPMENT

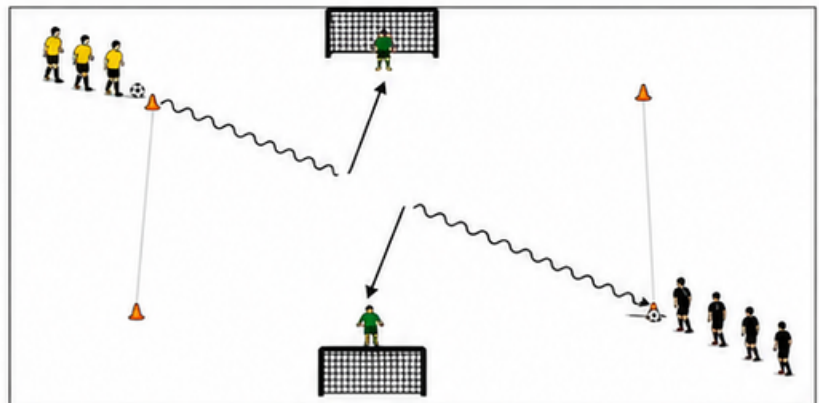
Balls, cones, 2 goals, bibs, goalkeepers if available

1. Dribble and Shoot

Set up 2 goals facing each other, 25-30 yards apart. Split players into 2 equal groups, one beside each goal. The first player from each line dribbles diagonally toward the middle, then continues forward and shoots at the opposite goal. After shooting, players join the line at the far end.

COACHING POINTS

- Keep the ball close at speed
- Scan the space ahead
- Take a positive final touch
- Shoot with control
- Recover quickly

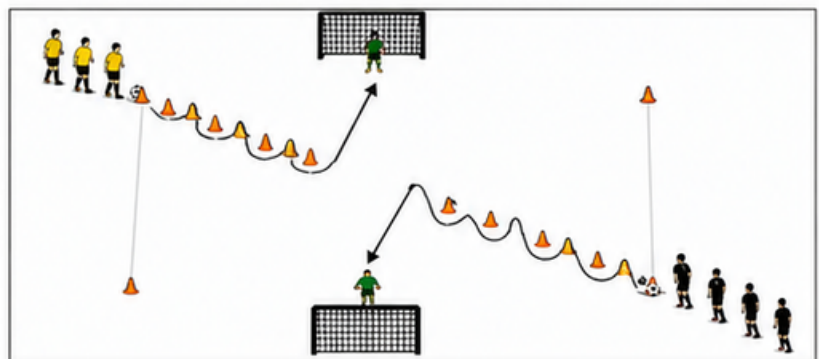


2. Slalom Dribble and Finish

Keep the same 2-goal setup. Add a short slalom of 5-7 cones in front of each line. Players dribble through the cones, accelerate out, and finish at the opposite goal before joining the line at the far end.

PROGRESSIONS

- Use weaker foot
- Change cone spacing
- Add a move at the final cone
- Set a time challenge

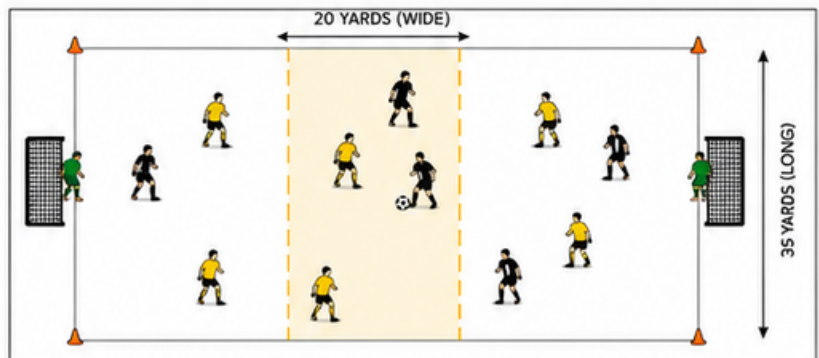


3. Small-Sided Game: Dribble to Create

Play a 4v4, 5v5 or 6v6 small-sided game on a 20 x 35 yard field with 2 goals. Encourage players to dribble positively by awarding 2 points for a goal scored after a successful dribble or after carrying the ball through the middle zone.

GAME RULES

- Normal goal = 1 point
- Dribble-led goal = 2 points
- Encourage bravery in 1v1 moments



WHY IT MATTERS

Player development goes beyond team training.

Repeated dribbling, decision-making and finishing moments help young players build confidence, control and game awareness.

Simple Ways to Improve Player Retention at Your Club

Keeping young players at a soccer club is not just about results. For most recreational, grassroots and competitive youth players, enjoyment, friendships, confidence and feeling that they are improving all play a major part in whether they want to come back next season.

A positive environment starts with fun and low pressure. Young players need to feel that mistakes are part of learning, not something to fear. Coaches who focus on effort, bravery and improvement rather than only winning help create a healthier atmosphere.

Players also need to feel that they are getting better. Activities should be challenging enough to help them improve, but not so difficult that they become frustrated. Equal opportunities to play, take part and try different roles are important too. Few things damage motivation faster than regularly feeling left out.

Giving players a little voice and choice can also help. This does not mean letting children run the session, but simple things such as allowing them to choose between two activities, asking what they enjoyed, or encouraging them to reflect on what they did well can make them feel more involved.



The coach-player relationship matters enormously. A few words of encouragement, remembering something a player has worked on, or simply making time for every child can help them feel noticed and valued.

Parents also play an important part. Clubs should encourage parents to support effort and enjoyment rather than adding pressure after games. The journey home should not feel like another coaching session.

Finally, variety matters. Young players benefit from different activities, positions, challenges and experiences. Soccer should be an important part of their development, but it does not need to become their entire sporting life.

Player retention often comes down to one simple question: Does this child enjoy being here, feel valued and believe they are improving?

If the answer is yes, there is a much stronger chance they will want to stay.

“Football is about joy. It’s about dribbling.”

Ronaldinho

For Players: 3 Simple Habits That Can Help You Improve Between Team Sessions

Improvement does not only happen at team training. A few simple habits between sessions can make a big difference over time.

Spend more time with the ball. Even 15–20 minutes of ball work can improve touch, control and confidence. A programme such as 1,000 Touches gives players a simple structure they can follow at home.

Use both feet. Practise passing, dribbling, turning and controlling the ball with your weaker foot as well as your stronger one.

Set yourself challenges. Count touches, practise a new move or try to beat yesterday's score. A little purposeful practice, repeated regularly, can add up to a lot of improvement.



For Parents: The Car Ride Home



The journey home after a game can be a great opportunity for a young player to reflect, but it should not feel like another coaching session. Instead of immediately discussing mistakes, try asking questions that encourage your child to think:

What did you enjoy today?

What do you think you did well?

What was difficult?

Is there anything you would like to improve next time?

Some players will want to talk immediately; others may need a little time. If you noticed effort, bravery, teamwork or improvement, tell them. Winning and losing will always be part of soccer, but the most important question might simply be: "Did you enjoy it?"

For Referees: It's More Than Making Decisions

At youth level, refereeing is about more than simply applying the Laws of the Game. The referee can have a huge influence on the atmosphere, the behaviour of players and coaches, and the overall experience of everyone involved.

A smile before kick-off, a calm tone of voice and clear communication can immediately help young players feel more comfortable. Many are still learning the game, so a quick explanation such as "That was a push", "Keep your arms down" or "Wait for my whistle" can help them understand a decision without turning the referee into another coach.

Good refereeing at youth level is also about knowing the age and level of the players. Managing a recreational U9 game should not necessarily feel the same as refereeing a competitive U17 match. Younger or less experienced players may benefit from a little more patience and explanation, while older players will usually expect firmer, quicker game management.

Referees should still be fair, consistent and confident, but they can do that while being approachable and respectful. The best youth referees do not make themselves the centre of the game. They help create a safe, positive environment and allow the players to enjoy playing. Youth soccer exists for the players.

Featured Opportunity: Could a Soccer Tour Benefit Your Team?

A soccer tour gives young players much more than matches. It creates shared experiences, stronger team bonds and opportunities to learn from different opposition, coaches and soccer cultures.

For clubs, it can also give players and families something exciting to look forward to and help strengthen recruitment and retention. A great tour can create memories that last long after the final whistle.

Interested in exploring a soccer tour to England? Total Football Experience creates fully customised soccer tours for youth teams from the USA and Canada.

www.totalfootballexperience.com/



Partner Spotlight



Feedz is an AI-powered platform designed to make player feedback fast, personalized, and impactful. Coaches simply record a quick voice note, and Feedz instantly converts it into a structured, professional report for players and parents, saving hours each week while improving engagement and performance. Harry Maguire of Manchester United & England is an Investor & Co-Founder.

www.feedz.club/

Free Resources

These guides are written for rec and parent soccer coaches who care more about the experience than the score. They focus on the environment adults create around the game, including behavior, communication, and enjoyment. Each guide offers perspective and practical language to support coaches working with kids ages 4 to 8, without drills, tactics, or instruction.

www.totalfootballexperience.com/rec-soccer-coach-guides



Final Whistle

Thanks for reading the first issue of Wider Game FC.

The aim is to share useful ideas, practical advice and opportunities for everyone involved in youth soccer — from players and parents to coaches, referees and club officials.

If you found something useful, please feel free to share the newsletter with someone else in the game.

See you next time.

Wider Game FC — Ideas, insight and opportunities from across the wider game.