

THE COMPLETE COURSE

How to become a great youth soccer coach

Fourteen lessons, a season plan and the printable sheets, for the volunteer who said yes and now has twelve children waiting on a Tuesday.

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What is in here

Fourteen lessons. Each one is short enough to read on the drive to training and concrete enough to use when you get there. The last five pages print on their own and live in your ball bag.

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Before you start

You do not need a badge to read this, and you do not need to agree with all of it. Take the parts that fit your club and your children. Coaching is a craft, and crafts are learned by doing the thing badly for a while and paying attention.

LESSON 1

The job nobody described to you

Somebody asked whether you could help out. You said yes, and now twelve children are waiting on a Tuesday. Here is the job you actually took.

There is a version of youth coaching that is about winning on Saturday. It is the version most new coaches assume they signed up for, because it is the version they see on television, and because the league table is the only number anybody prints.

It is the wrong job. Not because winning is bad - children should try to win, and a coach who pretends the score does not matter is fooling nobody - but because winning at eleven predicts almost nothing, and the things that do predict something are entirely within your control.

The three things you are actually for

- 1. They still want to play in five years.** Drop-out in youth football is enormous and it is concentrated in the years you are coaching. Every child who stays is a small victory that compounds. Every child who quietly stops coming because they never played is a loss you will never see on any table.
- 2. They get better.** Not the team - them. Individually. The measure is not whether your side beat the village down the road, it is whether the child who could not receive a ball in September can do it in March.
- 3. They learn how to be part of something.** Turning up when it rains. Passing to the child who is having a bad day. Shaking hands after losing. This is not a soft extra on top of the football, it is most of what football is for at this age.

If you are still doing all three in May, you had a good season, whatever the table says.

The honest arithmetic

You get about two hours a week with them, in a season of maybe thirty-five weeks. Seventy hours. In seventy hours you cannot make a professional, and anyone selling you a curriculum that promises otherwise is selling you something.

What you can do in seventy hours is enormous in a different way: you can be the reason a child loves this game. That is not a consolation prize. Ask any adult who still plays five-a-side on a Wednesday who their first coach was. Most of them can tell you.

What good looks like on a Tuesday

Children arriving early because they want to. Nobody standing in a queue. A lot of noise. The ball moving. You talking for less than five of the sixty minutes. Everybody sweaty. Somebody trying something they could not do last week and getting it wrong, loudly and happily, in front of everyone.

The five habits of coaches children remember

1. They learn every name in the first week and use them constantly.
2. They are set up before the first child arrives.
3. They are the same person after a 6-0 defeat as after a 6-0 win.
4. They notice the quiet ones. Especially the quiet ones.

5. They are honest. Children detect manufactured praise instantly and discount everything else you say afterwards.

LESSON 2

How children learn football

Almost every mistake a new coach makes comes from teaching football the way it was explained to them, rather than the way it is actually learned.

Football is not a body of knowledge. It is a set of skills executed under time pressure, in chaos, against people actively trying to stop you. That has consequences for how it is taught, and they are not obvious.

Learning happens in the doing, not the telling

A child who is told how to receive on the back foot understands the sentence. A child who has been put in fifty situations where receiving on the back foot was the only way to survive has learned to receive on the back foot. Those are completely different states, and only one of them survives Saturday.

This is why the design of your exercise matters more than the quality of your explanation. If the thing you want keeps happening naturally in the practice, you barely have to coach at all. If it does not, no amount of talking will put it there.

The test for any exercise

Watch it for two minutes without speaking. Does the thing you are trying to teach happen often, by itself, because the exercise makes it happen? If yes, the design is right. If you have to keep stopping the practice to remind them, the design is wrong - change the space, the numbers or the rules, not the volume of your voice.

Repetition without repetition

Blocked repetition - the same action, the same way, forty times in a row - looks efficient and produces fast improvement inside the session and very little that lasts. Varied repetition - the same idea, in a different set-up, from a different angle, against different pressure - feels messier and produces the thing you actually want.

Practically: keep the theme for six weeks, change the exercise every week.

Struggle is the mechanism, not the obstacle

A practice where everything works is a practice where nothing is being learned. Aim for roughly a two-in-three success rate: often enough that they stay interested, rarely enough that they have to solve something. If a game is too easy, take away space or add a defender. If nobody can do it, do the reverse, immediately, without making a speech about it.

Attention is short and that is not a discipline problem

Eight-year-olds have roughly the concentration span you would expect of an eight-year-old. Plan for it: nothing longer than fifteen minutes, everything with a ball, and every instruction under thirty seconds. A child who is fidgeting during your explanation is giving you accurate feedback about the length of your explanation.

They copy what you do, not what you say

If you want a team that reacts calmly to a bad decision, be visibly calm when the referee gets one wrong. If you want them to encourage each other, be the loudest encourager on the field. If you shout at a mistake, you have taught them that mistakes are shameful, and a child who is afraid of mistakes stops trying things, and a child who stops trying things stops improving.

Everything you tolerate, you teach. Everything you model, you teach twice.

LESSON 3

The age map

The same drill is brilliant at fourteen and pointless at seven. A rough map of what to spend your seventy hours on, at each age.

Children are not small adults, and a twelve-year-old is not a large eight-year-old. Physically and cognitively they are different animals, and the football that suits them changes accordingly.

Six to eight: the ball is a toy

Everything is individual. Every child has a ball for most of the session. Dribbling, running with it, stopping it, turning, and games that involve chasing something. Positions do not exist and should not be mentioned. Do not coach passing as a system - they will pass when they see a reason to.

- Ball each, always
- Games with a story - sharks, traffic lights, tag with a ball
- No queues, no laps, no lines
- Sessions of 45 to 60 minutes, four or five short blocks

Nine to eleven: the golden window for skill

Coordination is developing quickly and children at this age can pick up technique faster than at any other point. This is the age to be greedy about ball mastery, one-against-one and first touch. Small groups start to matter: two against one, combinations of three, the pass and the movement afterwards.

It is also the age at which they start to understand simple team ideas - make the pitch big when we have it, small when they do. One idea at a time.

Twelve to fourteen: the awkward, brilliant years

Bodies change at wildly different rates. The child who was dominant at eleven may be physically overtaken in a year, and the small one may grow twenty centimetres. Expect coordination to wobble in children who are growing fast - it is temporary and it is not laziness.

Tactically they can now hold more: pressing triggers, defending as a unit, what to do in the seconds after losing the ball. Keep the technical work going - it is not finished, it just stops being the only thing.

Fifteen and up: intensity and responsibility

Now you can train at something close to match intensity, work seriously on physical qualities, and hand over real responsibility - let them run a warm-up, let them solve the tactical problem before you offer your version.

Formats and ball sizes

Grassroots formats in England, as a reference point. Your own country and league rules always take precedence, and the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish pathways differ slightly.

Age	Format	Pitch (yards)	Ball	Match length
Under 7 - Under 8	5 v 5	40 x 30	Size 3	40 min
Under 9 - Under 10	7 v 7	60 x 40	Size 3 / 4	60 min
Under 11 - Under 12	9 v 9	80 x 50	Size 4	80 min
Under 13 - Under 14	11 v 11	90 x 55	Size 4	100 min

Heading: the rules have changed

Guidance on heading for children has tightened considerably, and if you learned the game twenty years ago this will not be what you remember. In England the current position is roughly this:

Age	In training	In matches
Under 7 to Under 11	No heading practice at all	Deliberate heading being phased out, with an indirect free kick against
Under 12 to Under 13	One session a week, maximum five headers each, light balls, unopposed	Permitted
Under 14 to Under 16	One session a week, up to ten headers each, varied distances	Permitted
Under 18 and adult	One session a week, up to ten headers, contested work introduced	Permitted

Check your own association

These are the England Football guidelines and the phased match dates run across several seasons. Every association publishes its own version and they are not identical - look up yours before the season starts, because it is the kind of rule a parent will ask you about on the touchline.

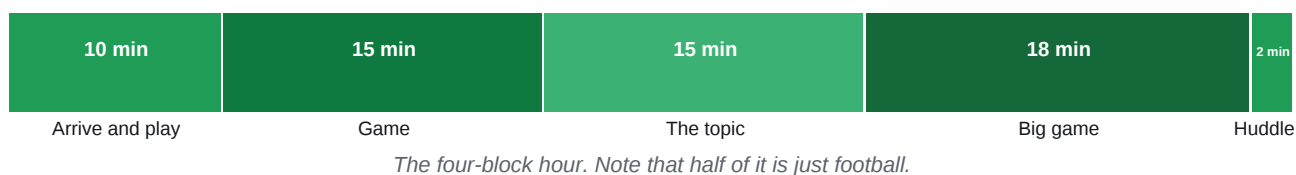
LESSON 4

Designing a session

One template, used every week, with the content changed. Predictable for the children, ten minutes of planning for you.

The best session plan is one you can build in ten minutes on a Monday evening after work, because that is when you will actually be building it. Complexity is the enemy of consistency.

Use the same four blocks every single week. The children learn the rhythm, which means less organising and more football, and you only have to decide what goes inside each block rather than inventing a structure from nothing.



Block 1 - Arrive and play (10 minutes)

Every child gets a ball the moment they arrive, inside a marked square. No waiting for stragglers, no organised warm-up, no laps. Children who arrive early get more football, which is the only punctuality system you will ever need. You use these minutes to greet every child by name and to see who has arrived in what mood.

Block 2 - A game with one rule (15 minutes)

Small-sided, four against four or three against three, small goals. Add exactly one rule that nudges towards tonight's topic. This block warms them up, gets them playing, and shows you where the team currently is on the thing you are about to coach.

Block 3 - The topic (15 minutes)

One topic. The practice should be game-like - defenders, direction, a way to score. Introduce it in fifteen seconds, then let it run. Stop it a maximum of three times, for twenty seconds each, and only to make the same point in a better place.

Block 4 - The game they came for (18 minutes)

A proper match. You are almost silent. This is where you find out whether anything from block three survived, and it is the block the children would keep if you made them choose. Never cut it short because block three overran - cut block three.

Huddle (2 minutes)

Three specific things you saw, with names. One sentence about next week. Done.

The card in your pocket

Write the four blocks and their times on an index card. It costs nothing and it is the difference between a session that flows and a coach standing in the middle of a field trying to remember what comes next while twelve children invent their own entertainment.

Organising without losing five minutes

- **Pick teams before you arrive.** Never in front of them, never by captains choosing.
- **Use bibs, always.** Two colours, handed out as they arrive.
- **Set up the next exercise inside the previous one.** Cones for block three go down while block two is running.
- **Have a plan for odd numbers.** A neutral player who always joins the team in possession solves almost every awkward count.
- **Never send anyone to fetch a ball** from behind the goal on their own - keep spares in a net at the side.

LESSON 5

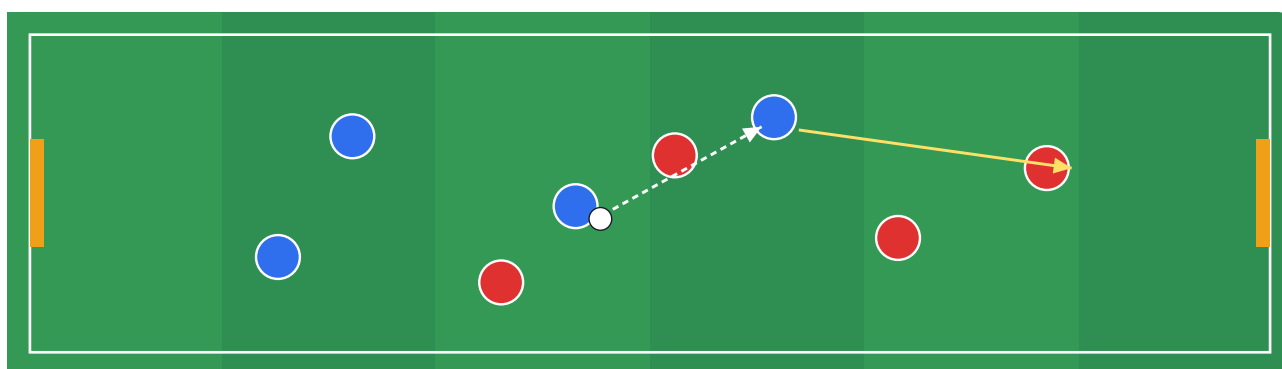
The exercises that earn their place

Four set-ups that cover most of what a youth team needs, with the numbers, the rules and what to look for.

You do not need a library of two hundred drills. You need a handful of set-ups you know intimately, that you can adjust on the spot, and that produce football rather than queuing.

1. Four against four, two small goals

The workhorse of youth football. No keepers, small goals, an area roughly twenty-five by twenty metres for eleven-year-olds. Everything happens in it: passing, dribbling, defending, transitions, and about five times the touches of a queue-based drill.

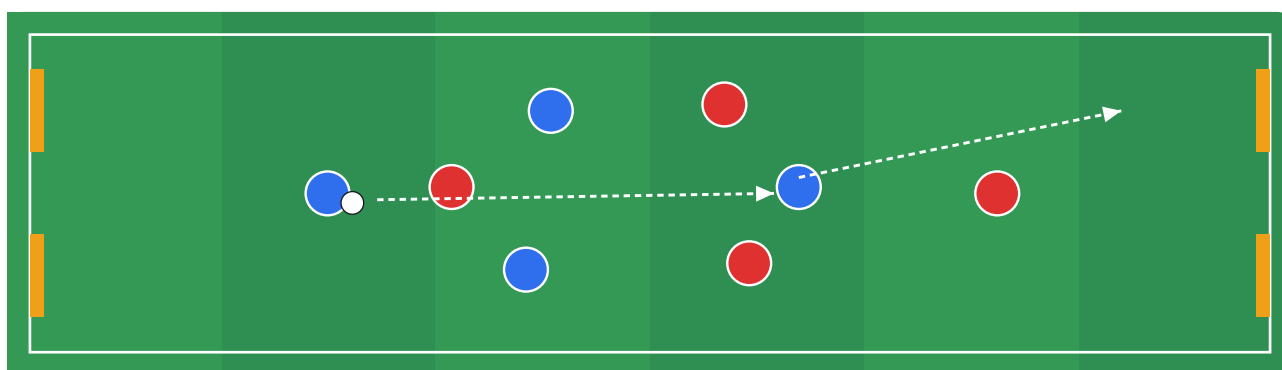


Blue in possession. The dashed line is the pass, the yellow line the run after it - the habit worth more than any pattern.

Make it harder: shrink the area, or two-touch. **Make it easier:** widen it, or add a neutral player who always plays with the team in possession.

2. The four-goal game

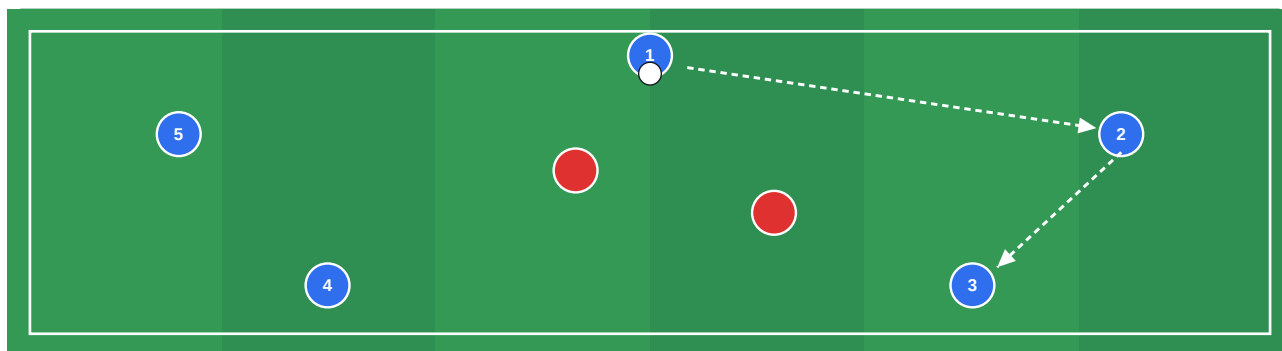
Same numbers, but each team attacks two goals placed wide apart. Suddenly the whole team has to keep its head up and switch the point of attack, and you never have to say the words "switch the play" out loud.



Two goals each, wide apart. The second pass is the one you are hoping to see.

3. The rondo, done properly

Five outside, two in the middle. The size decides everything: if the ball is never lost the area is too big, if it never survives three passes it is too small. Aim for a turnover roughly every twenty seconds.

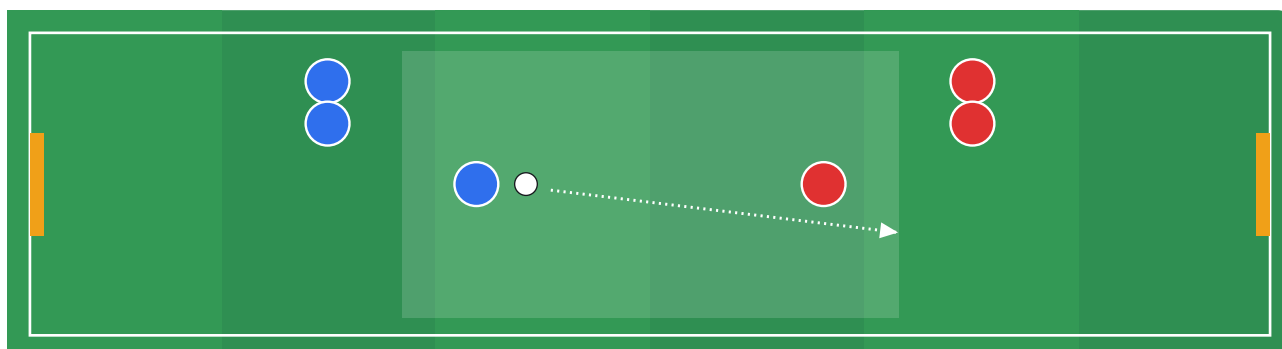


Five against two. The middle players are swapped the moment they win it, not on a timer.

- Two touch as the default. One touch scores double.
- No return pass to whoever just passed to you - it kills the lazy two-player rally.
- A point for splitting the two defenders, which is what you actually want them hunting.
- Coach the players **without** the ball. The problem is almost never the pass, it is the angle and the body shape of the two who thought they were available.

4. One against one

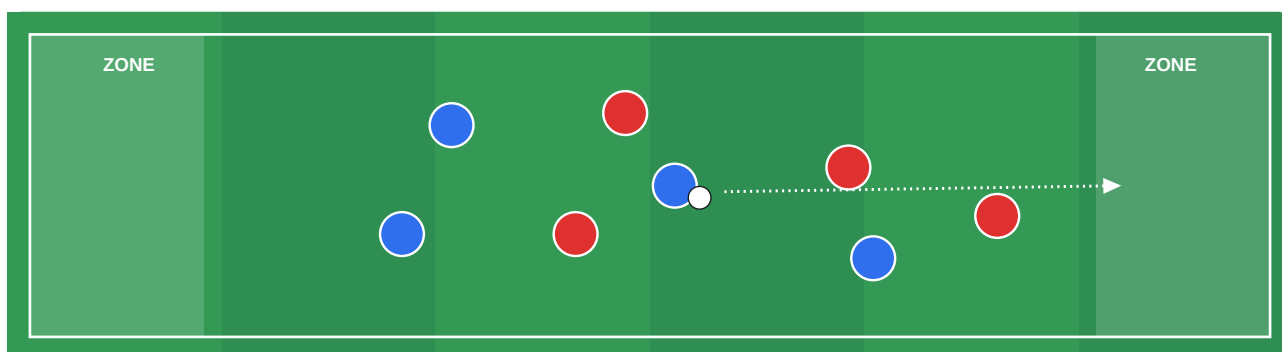
The most under-used exercise in youth football and the one children ask for. Two lines, a small pitch, one goal each end, first to score wins and the loser goes to the back. Short, intense, competitive, and it builds the courage to take somebody on - which no possession game will ever build.



One against one to two goals. Everyone else waits for eight seconds, not eight minutes.

5. The end-zone game

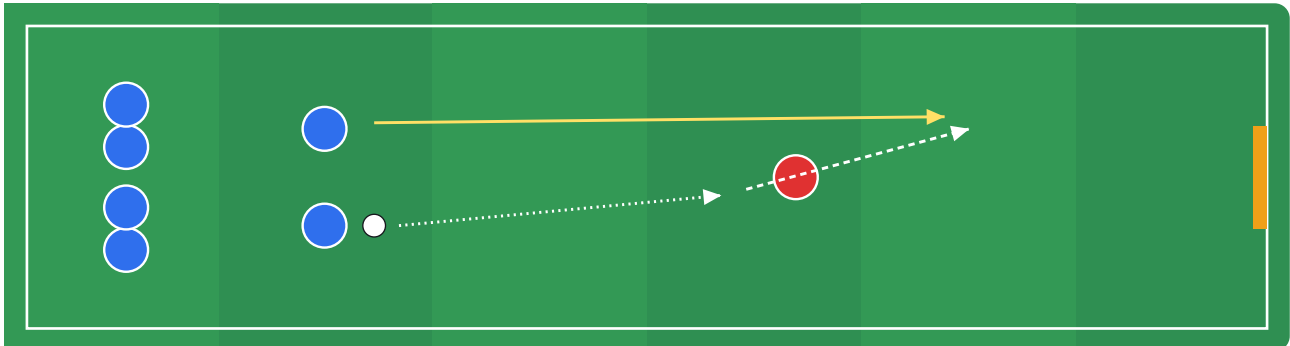
No goals at all: a team scores by running the ball under control into the zone at the far end. It rewards driving forward with the ball, which almost every other game under-rewards, and it removes the shooting lottery that decides most small games.



Dribble it in under control to score. Cheap to set up, impossible to play passively.

6. Two against one, in waves

The most useful overload in youth football, because it teaches the two things a young attacker never does by instinct: run at the defender before deciding, and time the pass to the moment the defender commits. Run it in waves so nobody queues for more than a few seconds.



Attack the defender first, pass late. If the pass comes early the defender simply covers both - which is the lesson, and they learn it by losing.

The transition game (steal this one)

The single best set-up for teaching what happens the moment the ball changes hands: play four against four, and whenever a team wins the ball they have **six seconds** to score. Count it out loud. Nothing teaches "look forward first" and "everybody sprints back" faster, and children find the chaos of it genuinely thrilling.

LESSON 6

Coaching in the moment

The hardest skill in coaching is not knowing what to say. It is knowing when not to.

A busy touchline coach produces well over a hundred instructions in an hour. Almost none of them land, because a child under pressure with a ball at their feet has no spare capacity to process incoming audio, and the instruction arrives after the decision was already made.

Worse, a constant voice trains the player to look at you instead of the pitch, and takes away the decision that was the whole point of the exercise.

The three-intervention rule

In any game, allow yourself three interventions. Just three. It changes how you watch, because now you are hunting for the one moment worth spending an intervention on rather than narrating everything you see. And when you do speak, it lands, because it is rare.

Ask, do not tell

A question makes the player replay the moment and find the answer themselves, and that is the part that sticks. Four that do a lot of work:

1. **What did you see?** - not what did you do. This gets at scanning, which is underneath most bad decisions.
2. **What else could you have done?** - accepts what happened and opens the alternatives without judging.
3. **Where was your team-mate?** - moves attention off the ball, where it lives by default.
4. **How do we make that happen again?** - use this after something good, so that being noticed is not always bad news.

Then wait. Count to five in your head. The silence is uncomfortable for you and productive for them.

The words to retire

Instead of	Try	Why
"Man on"	Nothing, or "time"	They have to learn to look for themselves - a child told "man on" for four seasons never builds the scanning habit
"You are not trying"	"That looked hard - what were you seeing?"	It is almost never true; what looks like not trying is usually not knowing
"How many times have I told you"	A different exercise	If the answer is many, that is feedback about your coaching, not their ears
"Unlucky"	Silence, or something specific	Overused into meaninglessness
"Well done everyone"	"Bram, that turn, that is the thing"	Specific praise is information; general praise is noise

Praise the person publicly, correct the action privately

A nine-year-old does not separate "that pass was poor" from "I am poor". Corrections land far better one to one, quietly, while collecting the cones. That walk to the bag at the end of the session is the most under-used coaching moment in the sport.

Coaches who talk constantly are watching the ball. Coaches who talk rarely are watching the game.

LESSON 7

The four moments of the game

A map that stops you coaching the same topic all season. Just never say these words out loud to an eleven-year-old.

Every coaching course hands you the same diagram: in possession, out of possession, transition to attack, transition to defence. It is a genuinely useful map - and a terrible thing to say to a child.

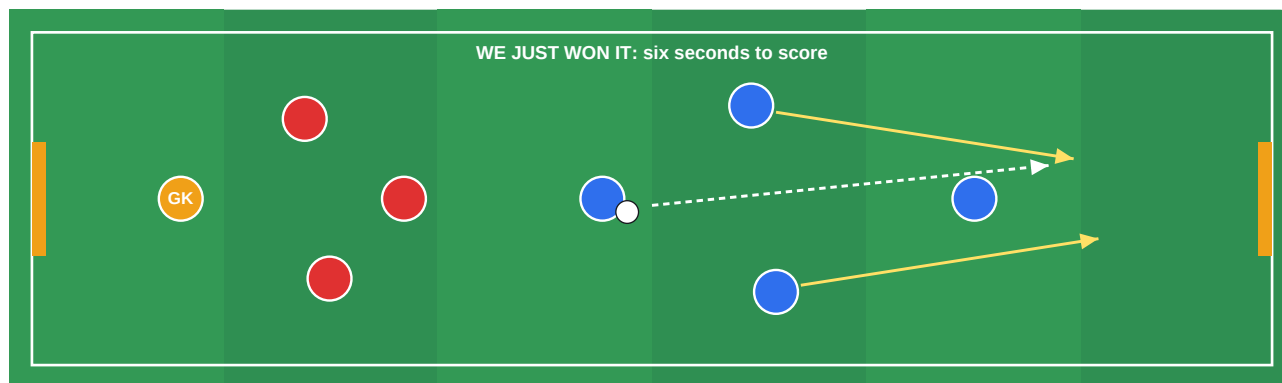
The map is for you. The translation is for them:

The course says	You say	One idea to coach
In possession	We have the ball	Make the pitch big - get wide, get long
Out of possession	They have the ball	Make the pitch small - get near your man
Transition to attack	We just won it	Look forward first
Transition to defence	We just lost it	Nearest player presses, everyone else runs back

Why the two transitions deserve more of your time

Count the possessions in a youth match that last more than four passes. At under-twelve it is a handful. The ball turns over constantly, which means the seconds right after a turnover make up a large part of the actual game - and they are where matches are decided, because a team is most disorganised just after losing the ball and most dangerous just after winning it.

Most youth training spends almost no time there. Flipping that is the single cheapest improvement available to you.



The transition game. Win the ball, six seconds on the clock, everybody forward.

One idea per moment, all season

Resist the urge to give each moment three principles. A team of twelve-year-olds who genuinely sprint back the second they lose the ball is a good team, and that is one idea, taught for a whole winter.

The one-word coaching that comes later

Once the language is shared, coaching in a match becomes very short. A player loses the ball and stands still. You say "just lost it". They start running. No sentence, no explanation - because the teaching happened on Tuesday and Saturday is only for reminders.

LESSON 8

Match day

Selection, minutes, half time and the fifteen minutes afterwards that matter more than the ninety before them.

Playing time is not a reward

Take two eleven-year-olds of equal ability in September. One plays full games, the other gets the last ten minutes when it is safe. By March the first has played forty more hours of competitive football. Nobody closes that gap on the training pitch.

So the weaker player gets relatively weaker, which justifies fewer minutes, which makes him weaker still. The selection decision manufactures the evidence that the selection decision was right.

At this age, playing time is not a reward for development. It is the mechanism of development.

A rotation nobody argues with

Plan it before the game, not during it - when you improvise while losing you always leave your best players on. Use quarters, write it on a sheet, and pin it where the parents can see it.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Timo (GK)	GK		GK	
Milan (GK)		GK		GK
Bram	X	X	X	
Sem	X	X		X
Daan		X	X	X
Luuk	X		X	X
Finn	X	X	X	
Cas	X		X	X
Noud		X	X	X
Teun	X	X		X

Ten players, four quarters, seven on the pitch: two keepers on two quarters each, everyone else on three. Twenty-eight shirts, exactly filled.

- Rotate positions as well as minutes - fifty minutes at right back is not the same fifty minutes as fifty across the front.
- Track the totals across the season, not the game. Some weeks will not work out; correct the drift next week.
- Everybody goes in goal at some point, including the child who is very good and would rather not.

The half-time talk

You have about three minutes and roughly forty words that will be remembered. Spend them in this order:

1. **Thirty seconds of nothing.** Water, breathing, no talking. The highest-value part of the interval and the one every coach skips.

2. **One true positive.** It must be real - manufactured praise is detected instantly.
3. **One change.** One. Said as a picture, not an instruction.
4. **Who does what.** Substitutions and positions, plainly, without justifying them.
5. **Something to win that is not the match.** "Second half is ours" gives a team that is 3-0 down a scoreboard they can still influence.

After the whistle

Keep the full-time huddle to sixty seconds: thank them, name two good things, say when training is. Whatever analysis you are burning to deliver will be better on Tuesday, and by then you will have discovered that a third of what you were going to say was wrong.

The car journey

The research on this is unusually clear and unusually ignored: the drive home is where most children lose their enjoyment of sport, because it is where the review happens. Tell your parents, in September, the single most useful sentence in youth sport - **"I loved watching you play."** That is the whole speech.

LESSON 9

Parents and the touchline

Every difficult parent conversation you will have this season is a conversation you did not have in September.

Parents are not the problem people pretend they are. They are anxious adults who love their child and cannot read your mind, so they guess - and their guess is based on the last coach they had or on what they see on television.

Twenty minutes in the first week fixes most of it. On the grass, standing, right after training, while the children play.

The agenda

1. **Who you are, in ninety seconds.** Including the fact that you are a volunteer with a job.
2. **What the season is for.** Say the actual sentence: we develop everyone, we try to win every game, we do not select on results.
3. **Playing time.** In numbers. "About half of every match, more than one position, I keep a record."
4. **Positions.** "Nobody is a defender at eleven."
5. **What you need from them.** On time, tell you about absences, and cheer rather than coach.
6. **The touchline rule.** Two voices telling a child what to do is one too many, and the second is always the one they can hear.
7. **How to reach you.** One channel, and the hours.
8. **Two minutes of questions,** then finish. Anything long, take aside.

The promise not to make

Do not promise exactly equal minutes. You will break it, and one clever parent will keep a spreadsheet. Promise the principle and the correction: "I aim for roughly equal minutes across the season, I track it, and when it slips I put it right." A smaller promise kept beats a bigger one broken.

Write it on one page and send it to the group afterwards. Half of them were not listening and all of them have a partner at home who was not there. Repeat the key three lines in January, when nothing is wrong - a reminder in calm weather lands far better than an explanation in a storm.

When it goes wrong anyway

- **Never on the touchline, never at half time.** "Not now - ring me tonight and we will talk properly" is a complete sentence.
- **Let them finish.** Most complaints deflate by half once they have been heard.
- **Talk about their child, not the team.** They did not come to discuss the team.
- **Say what you will do.** Even if it is "nothing, and here is why" - people can live with a clear no far better than a vague maybe.
- **Tell someone at the club.** Never carry a serious complaint alone.

LESSON 10

Culture, discipline and the dressing room

Standards without shouting. What you accept becomes the standard, so accept carefully.

A team culture is not a poster on a wall. It is the collection of things that reliably happen: what time people arrive, what is said when somebody misplaces a pass, whether the cones get collected by everyone or by you.

You build it in the first month, mostly by what you let pass.

Three rules is plenty

Long lists of rules are for adults who like lists. Children need very few, stated positively, and applied absolutely consistently:

- **We listen when someone is talking** - including when it is a team-mate.
- **We try things** - mistakes made while trying are free.
- **Nobody gets left out** - in a game, in a huddle, in the dressing room.

Consequences that are not punishments

Press-ups and laps as punishment teach children that football activity is a penalty. Use the currency that actually matters to them: time in the game.

- Not listening during an explanation - you stop and wait, silently. It is remarkably effective and costs nothing.
- Messing about in a game - a short spell out, then straight back in. Not the rest of the session, and no lecture in front of the group.
- Something serious - the child sits with you, you talk quietly afterwards, and the parent hears about it from you rather than from their child.

Everything you tolerate, you teach.

The quiet ones

Every squad has two or three children who never cause a problem and never ask for anything. They are the easiest to coach and the easiest to lose. Make a deliberate habit of it: pick two names each week and make sure you have a proper thirty-second conversation with each of them about something specific.

Winning and losing well

Decide in advance how your team behaves at 6-0 up, because it will happen and children take their lead entirely from you. Ours: keep the ball, everyone into a new position, no showboating, and the least-used players get the best minutes. How a team wins says more about it than whether it wins.

And at 6-0 down: same handshake, same volume, same coach. That is the whole lesson, and they are watching you deliver it.

LESSON 11

Measuring progress

The league table measures the wrong thing. Four things that measure the right one, none of which need a stopwatch.

If you only look at results you will conclude, wrongly, that a season in which your small, young squad lost fourteen games and improved enormously was a bad season.

1. Attendance and retention

The single most honest number in youth football. How many children finished the season, and how many signed up again? A squad that starts with fourteen and ends with fourteen is telling you something no result can.

2. Individual snapshots, twice a year

Not a fourteen-category scoring matrix. Three lines per child in October and three in March: what they are good at, what we are working on, one thing that changed. Fifteen minutes with a squad list and an honest memory.

Child	Strength	Working on	Changed since October
Sem	Brave in one against one	First touch under pressure	Now takes it across his body instead of into his feet
Noud	Reads the game early	Using the left foot at all	Left foot appears in training, not yet in matches
Fenna	Relentless out of possession	Wants to pass backwards first	Two forward passes in the last game - a first

3. Minutes played

Keep a running total. It is the one number that will be questioned, it takes thirty seconds a week, and having it means the conversation is about facts rather than impressions.

4. The behaviour you chose

Pick the one team habit you decided to build this season - say, everyone sprinting back the moment the ball is lost. Count it in a game in October and count it again in March. That number is your coaching, more directly than any result.

The January review

Twenty minutes, once, in the middle of the season. Three questions: what can they do now that they could not do in August, what has quietly got worse, and which two children have had the least of my attention. Then adjust the rest of the year. Do not rewrite the plan - adjust it.

LESSON 12

Your first season, week by week

Four blocks, one theme each. The whole year on a single page, which is the only kind of plan anyone actually reads twice.

A session-by-session curriculum is obsolete by week two, because half the squad had a growth spurt, two children joined and the thing you thought they could do turns out to be the thing they cannot do at all. What survives is much smaller.

Block	Weeks	Theme	What most sessions contain
1	Aug - Oct	The ball	First touch, running with it, one against one. Everything individual.
2	Oct - Dec	Small groups	Support angles, pass and move, two against one, combinations of three.
3	Jan - Mar	Without the ball	Defending in pairs and units, pressing, recovering, the seconds after losing it.
4	Mar - Jun	Putting it together	Attacking as a team, finishing, set pieces, freedom to play.

Stay on the theme longer than feels comfortable. Six weeks on the first touch is not too long - it only feels long to you, because you already understand it and you are not the one learning.

Building a week from it

On Monday you look at exactly three things: the block theme, what you saw on Saturday, and how many children you expect. Then you fill the four blocks. Ten minutes.

A worked example: block 1, week 3

Block	Minutes	What
Arrive and play	10	Ball each in a square. Two turns of their choosing, then a game of tag where everyone dribbles.
Game	15	4 v 4 to small goals. One rule: a goal after a dribble past someone counts double.
The topic	15	One against one to two goals, waves. Cue: first touch away from the defender, not towards them.
Big game	18	5 v 5, no conditions, no coaching.
Huddle	2	Three names, three specifics, one sentence about Saturday.

Where to keep it

Pin the one-page plan inside the lid of the ball bag. That is the version that survives the season. A beautiful twelve-week document in a folder at home is a plan you will read once.

The last word

You will get things wrong. You will run a session that collapses in the first ten minutes, say something at half time you regret on the drive home, and pick a rotation that leaves your best player on the bench when it mattered.

None of it is fatal. Children are extraordinarily forgiving of a coach who is clearly trying, who knows their name, and who lets them play. Be that, consistently, for a season, and you will have done the job properly - whatever the table says in May.

LESSON 13

The child in the different shirt

Goalkeepers are the most neglected players in youth football, usually by coaches who never played there and quietly hope somebody volunteers.

Two facts sit awkwardly together. Everybody should go in goal at this age, because it teaches things no outfield position teaches - and the child who is genuinely drawn to it deserves better than being left to stand alone in the cold for an hour.

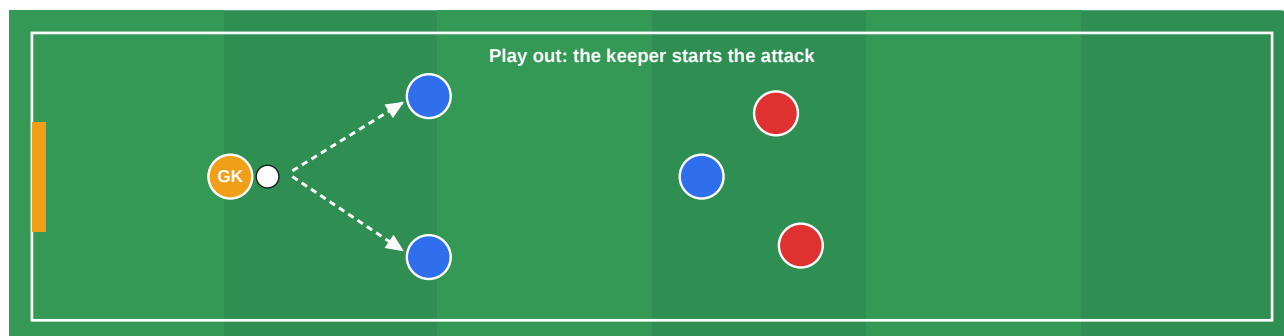
Rotate the shirt, keep the specialist

Under about twelve, every child takes a turn, including the one who is very good outfield. It builds bravery, decision making and an understanding of what a keeper actually needs from the defence. From roughly twelve, if a child has decided goalkeeping is theirs, let it be theirs - and make sure they still get outfield minutes, because modern keepers play with their feet more than their hands.

The five minutes that change a keeper's season

You do not need a specialist coach. You need five minutes at the start of each session with whoever is in goal this week, on the four things that decide almost every youth goalkeeping moment:

1. **The set position.** Feet just wider than the shoulders, weight forward on the toes, hands out in front at waist height. Half of all youth goals go in because the keeper was on their heels.
2. **Getting behind it.** Move the feet to put the body behind the ball, then catch. The hands are the second line, not the first.
3. **Starting position.** A step or two off the line, and moving with the ball. Young keepers stand on the line and let everything happen in front of them.
4. **Playing it out.** A keeper who can pass to a full back changes how the whole team can play. Practise it in every session, not as a special exercise.



Two angles, every session. The keeper is the first passer, not the last defender.

What never to say to a young keeper

"You should have had that." They know. Every goal feels like theirs, which is exactly why goalkeeping builds character and exactly why it can quietly break a nine-year-old. Find the save they made before the goal and mention that instead - and make sure the outfield players hear you do it.

LESSON 14

Safety, and the part nobody enjoys

The boring pages. Read them once, properly, because the one time they matter they matter completely.

You are responsible for other people's children for two hours a week. That is a real duty and almost all of it comes down to preparation rather than heroics.

Before every session

- **Walk the pitch.** Thirty seconds. Glass, dog mess, holes, sprinkler heads, the state of the goal nets.
- **Check the goals are anchored.** Unsecured portable goals have killed children. If it can tip, it does not get used.
- **Know your numbers.** Squad list with a parent contact for every child, on paper, in the bag - not only in a phone that runs out of battery.
- **Know where the first aid kit and the defibrillator are,** and how to describe your location to an ambulance.

The things worth knowing before they happen

Situation	What to do
A bang to the head	If in any doubt, sit them out - for the rest of the session and the next match. Tell the parent in person. No exceptions, no negotiation, no "he says he is fine".
A child left behind after training	Never wait alone with one child. Stay in a public place, ring the parent, ring a second adult from the club.
A child tells you something worrying	Listen, do not promise secrecy, write down what was said as soon as you can in their words, and tell your club welfare officer the same day. It is not your job to investigate anything.
Photos and messages	Group messages to parents, never one to one with a child. Ask before photographs go anywhere public.

Two names in your phone

Your club welfare officer and one other adult from the club. Both, today, before you need either. Coaching alone is the situation that makes every one of the above harder than it needs to be.

Weather, water and growing bodies

- Water breaks every fifteen minutes in heat, and remember that children overheat faster than adults do.
- In the cold, keep them moving and shorten your explanations further - a shivering child learns nothing.
- Children in a growth spurt get sore knees and heels. That is normal, it is not softness, and the answer is less volume for a few weeks rather than more character.
- Lightning: off the field, into a building or a car, and do not come back for half an hour after the last rumble.

APPENDIX

The printable sheets

The five pages that follow are meant to be printed, written on and lost in a ball bag. Print as many as you need.

Sheet 1 - Session plan

Date		Age group		Numbers expected	
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Block	Min	What happens	The one thing I am looking for
Arrive and play	10		
Game	15		
The topic	15		
Big game	18		
Huddle	2		

Sheet 2 - The season on one page

Block	Weeks	Theme	Notes
1			
2			
3			
4			

Squad and birthdays

#	Name	Born	Strength	Working on
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				

14				
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Sheet 3 - Match day rotation

Fill it in on Friday. Pin it to the fence on Saturday. Tick a box for every quarter a child is on the pitch, and write GK where they are in goal.

Player	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Season total

Half-time card

1. Thirty seconds of nothing. **2.** One true positive. **3.** One change. **4.** Who does what. **5.** Something to win that is not the match.

Sheet 4 - Before the first session

The week before

- ☐ Squad list with names, birthdays, and a parent phone number for each
- ☐ Team group set up, with the three things you need from parents already written in it
- ☐ Session plan on a card - four blocks, times written next to each
- ☐ Pitch or space booked, and you know how to get the key
- ☐ Balls counted and pumped, bibs in two colours, cones, a whistle you will barely use
- ☐ First aid kit checked, and you know where the defibrillator is
- ☐ You know your club welfare officer's name

On the day

- ☐ Be there fifteen minutes early, everything out before the first child arrives
- ☐ Greet every child by name at the gate - ask for it, then use it twice
- ☐ Everyone has a ball within thirty seconds of arriving
- ☐ Teams already decided, in your pocket, never picked by captains
- ☐ Spare ball at the side so nobody goes behind the goal alone
- ☐ Twenty minutes with the parents after the session

Every week after

- ☐ The plan fits on a card
- ☐ No queues anywhere in the session
- ☐ You have not spoken for more than thirty seconds at a stretch
- ☐ Everybody touched the ball in the first minute
- ☐ Two children got a proper thirty-second conversation
- ☐ The huddle named three specific things with names attached

Sheet 5 - The bag

What lives in it, permanently

- ☐ Balls - two more than you think you need, and a pump with a spare needle
- ☐ Bibs in two clearly different colours
- ☐ Twenty-four cones and a handful of taller markers
- ☐ Two pop-up goals, or four cones that will pretend to be goals
- ☐ First aid kit, ice pack, tape
- ☐ Water, and two spare bottles for the ones who forget
- ☐ A whistle, a stopwatch or phone, and a pen that works
- ☐ Laminated squad list with emergency numbers
- ☐ This booklet, with the season page pinned inside the lid

Notes

One more thing

Everything in this booklet exists as a tool at **soccer.pardaan.com**: 625 drills you can filter by skill, a session builder that prints the plan on this template, fifty free printable sheets, and a free coach app that tracks the squad, the sessions, the line-ups and the playing time so you do not have to keep it on paper. No cost, no catch.

Sheet 6 - Eight sessions, ready to run

Block 1 of the season, week by week. Same four-block hour every time - only the middle changes. Every one of these works from Under 9 to Under 13; make the areas smaller for younger children and bigger for older ones.

Wk	Theme	Arrive and play	Game	The topic	Look for
1	Everyone can move with the ball	Ball each in a square, two turns of their choosing	4 v 4 small goals - a goal after beating someone counts double	End-zone game: dribble it in under control to score	Are they lifting their head while running with it?
2	First touch away from pressure	Ball each, then in pairs: pass, receive across the body, turn	4 v 4, two touch	Rondo 5 v 2, two touch, point for splitting the defenders	Does the first touch go into space rather than under the foot?
3	One against one, front foot	Ball each - fakes and feints, no defenders	3 v 3 small goals	1 v 1 to two goals, waves, first to score	Do they attack the defender before deciding what to do?
4	The pass and the move after it	Ball each, then pairs passing while walking	4 v 4 four goals	2 v 1 in waves to a goal - pass late, not early	Does the passer move immediately, or admire the pass?
5	Making the pitch big	Ball each in a wide square	4 v 4, a goal counts double after the ball has been on both sides	5 v 5 on a deliberately wide pitch, two wide goals each	Do the far-side players stay wide when the ball is away from them?
6	We just lost it	Ball each, ending with a tag game	4 v 4 - six seconds to score after winning it	Same game, now counting how quickly everyone gets back	Who reacts in the first second, and who watches?
7	Finishing without a queue	Ball each, shooting at a wall or spare goal	3 v 3 to two goals with keepers	Two goals, two teams, continuous - shoot within four seconds of receiving	Are they shooting early rather than taking the extra touch?
8	Everything, in a game	Ball each, their choice	4 v 4 with no conditions	A tournament: three teams, three minutes a game, everyone referees once	What has changed since week 1? Write down two names.

And the other three blocks?

Same eight-week shape, different theme: small groups in block 2, defending and the moment you lose the ball in block 3, attacking as a team in block 4. The library at soccer.pardaan.com filters 625 drills by skill, and the session builder prints a plan on the template from sheet 1.