



# U12 PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

QUICK NAVIGATION

## Use this page like a menu.

Ages 11-12 | Advanced 9v9 technical and tactical development

### PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

60-75 minute practices | 9v9 | goalkeeper | offside | referees and standings | Size 4 | guided 1-3-3-2 formation

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

FORMATION / TEAM SHAPE

HEADING & PLAYER SAFETY

COACH QUICK REFERENCE

ACTIVITY LIBRARY INDEX

## 8-WEEK CURRICULUM

### WEEK 1

FIRST TOUCH, SCANNING &  
BALL MASTERY

### WEEK 2

PASSING, RECEIVING &  
POSSESSION

### WEEK 3

BUILD FROM THE BACK &  
SWITCH PLAY

### WEEK 4

DEFENDING AS INDIVIDUALS &  
AS A TEAM

### WEEK 5

CREATING CHANCES &  
COMBINATION PLAY

### WEEK 6

FINISHING, HEADING & SET  
PIECES

### WEEK 7

TRANSITION, PRESSING & GAME  
MANAGEMENT

### WEEK 8

TEAM SHAPE & 9V9 MATCH  
APPLICATION

Tip: open your PDF viewer's Bookmarks/Outline panel for a collapsible list of every week and activity. External SoccerXpert and SoccerDrive links remain live throughout the guide.



# U12 PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

## ACTIVITY LIBRARY INDEX

Click an activity to jump directly to its field-ready reference page.

**BALL MASTERY + SCANNING**

**FIRST TOUCH GATES**

**1V1 CORNER ESCAPE**

**4-GOAL GAME**

**Y PASSING / OPEN BODY RECEIVING**

**4V2 RONDO**

**SPLIT THE DEFENDERS**

**5V3V1 RONDO**

**GK + BACK THREE BUILD-UP**

**4 + GK V 4**

**2V2 PRESSURE & COVER**

**3V3 + 2 POSSESSION**

**2V2 + TARGET PLAYERS**

**3V2 BOTH WAYS**

**4V2 SOCCER GAME TO GOAL**

**DIAGONAL SHOOTING**

**CROSS / CUTBACK & FINISH**

**GOALKEEPER FOOTWORK & DISTRIBUTION**

**CONTROLLED HEADING TECHNIQUE**

**SET-PIECE WALK-THROUGH**

**CONDITIONED 9V9 MATCH PLAY**

**QUICK NAV**

**WEEK 1**

**OVERVIEW**

# U12 Player Development

9v9 soccer - advanced technical development, team understanding, and game application

## Program structure

|                    |                                                                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Typical session    | Approximately 60-75 minutes                                               |
| Frequency          | Normally 1-2 practices per week, plus regularly scheduled games           |
| Game format        | 9v9                                                                       |
| Goalkeepers        | Yes; develop distribution, communication and shot-stopping                |
| Game official      | Referee assigned for scheduled games                                      |
| Scores / standings | Yes; competition matters, while development remains the coaching priority |
| Ball               | Size 4                                                                    |
| Offside            | Enforced                                                                  |
| Primary formation  | 1-3-3-2, at coach discretion                                              |

The formation and weekly curriculum are coaching tools rather than rigid mandates. Coaches should adjust to the players available, opponent, match conditions, and developmental needs while maintaining the NSFC principles established in Part I.

## U12 coaching lens

- Refine first touch, passing, receiving and ball control under realistic pressure.
- Build from the goalkeeper and back three, then recognize when to play through or switch the point of attack.
- Use three midfielders and two forwards to create width, depth, support and combination options.
- Defend as a connected team using pressure, cover, balance, compactness and coordinated transition.
- Introduce finishing decisions, restart organization and simple game management without replacing technical development.

# 1-3-3-2 TEACHING FORMATION

The NSFC U12 reference shape uses one goalkeeper, three defenders, three midfielders, and two forwards. Coaches may adjust the shape based on personnel and game needs.

|    |     |    |     |    |
|----|-----|----|-----|----|
|    | FWD |    | FWD |    |
| LM |     | CM |     | RM |
| LD |     | CD |     | RD |
|    |     | GK |     |    |

**IN POSSESSION**

Make the field large. The goalkeeper and back three provide the first line of buildup; midfielders create angles in front and between pressure; wide midfielders stretch the field; and the two forwards create depth, combine with one another, or check into different spaces. Encourage players to recognize when to play through the middle and when to switch to the opposite side.

**OUT OF POSSESSION**

Make the field smaller and protect the middle. The nearest player pressures the ball, teammates provide cover and balance, midfielders recover behind the ball, and forwards help influence where the opponent builds. Teach the group to shift together rather than defend as isolated individuals.

**PLAYER ROTATION**

U12 players may begin showing positional strengths, but NSFC still encourages development in more than one role. Do not permanently lock a child into a position simply because it improves today's result.

# INTRODUCING HEADING RESPONSIBLY

Heading can be introduced at U12, but it must follow current U.S. Soccer and applicable league restrictions. Because a U12 roster may include players of different chronological ages, the coach must apply the restriction to the individual player, not simply the team label.

**CURRENT U.S. SOCCER HEADING RESTRICTION**

Players age 10 and younger may not deliberately head the ball. Players age 11-13 may practice heading for no more than 30 minutes per week. If the league or competition applies a stricter rule, follow the stricter rule. Track heading exposure across all team practices during the week.

**TECHNIQUE BEFORE REPETITION**

Use controlled, low-speed service and a small number of purposeful repetitions. Teach players to keep eyes on the ball, move their feet into line with the flight, stabilize the neck and torso, contact the ball with the forehead, and direct the ball rather than simply absorbing impact. Never use heading as conditioning or punishment.

U12 | WEEK 1

FIRST TOUCH, SCANNING & BALL MASTERY

|                                                                                                             |                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| PRIMARY FOCUS<br>Receiving under pressure                                                                   | SECONDARY FOCUS<br>Scanning and body shape |
| WEEK'S COACHING MESSAGE<br>Check before the ball arrives; your first touch should prepare your next action. |                                            |

1. Ball Mastery + Scanning | 8-10 min

Players work with a ball while responding to visual or verbal cues. Add shoulder checks before receiving commands.

2. First Touch Gates | 12-15 min

Pairs pass through gates; receiver's first touch takes the ball into a new space before the return pass.

3. 1v1 Corner Escape | 12-15 min

Receiver controls under pressure and escapes a tight area using first touch, body position, and change of direction.

4. 4v4 Four-Goal Game | 18-22 min

Use multiple goals to reward scanning, turning away from pressure, and recognizing space.  
Game connection: In 9v9, first touch quality determines whether the team can play forward, keep possession, or escape pressure.

U12 | WEEK 2

PASSING, RECEIVING & POSSESSION

|                                                                                           |                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| PRIMARY FOCUS<br>Passing through pressure                                                 | SECONDARY FOCUS<br>Support angles and communication |
| WEEK'S COACHING MESSAGE<br>Move the ball with purpose - and move yourself after the pass. |                                                     |

1. Y Passing / Open Body Receiving | 10 min

Use a Y-shaped passing pattern to reinforce receiving side-on and playing to the next line.

2. 4v2 Rondo | 12-15 min

Possession players create angles and move the ball quickly while two defenders coordinate pressure.

3. Split the Defenders | 12-15 min

Reward passes that break a defensive line and are cleanly received.

4. 5v3v1 Rondo | 15-20 min

Use a transition rondo to connect possession, pressing, and immediate role changes.

Game connection: U12 players should begin recognizing passing lanes that eliminate defenders rather than simply completing safe sideways passes.

U12 | WEEK 3

BUILD FROM THE BACK & SWITCH PLAY

|                                                                                |                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PRIMARY FOCUS<br>Goalkeeper distribution and buildup                           | SECONDARY FOCUS<br>Width, support and changing the point of attack |
| WEEK'S COACHING MESSAGE<br>If one side is crowded, can we find the other side? |                                                                    |

1. GK + Back Three Pattern | 10-12 min

Unopposed buildup from goalkeeper to back three and midfield options; rehearse width and supporting angles.

2. 4 + GK v 4 | 15 min

Build from the goalkeeper against realistic pressure and play into target midfielders.

3. 4-Goal Switching Game | 15 min

Teams attack two goals, encouraging switches when one side becomes crowded.

4. 6v4 Build-Out to Targets | 18-20 min

Numerical advantage helps players recognize when to play through, around, or back before advancing.

Game connection: The 1-3-3-2 should give the goalkeeper and defenders multiple short options rather than forcing hopeful long clearances.

U12 | WEEK 4

DEFENDING AS INDIVIDUALS & AS A TEAM

|                                                                                        |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| PRIMARY FOCUS<br>Pressure, cover and balance                                           | SECONDARY FOCUS<br>Compactness and communication |
| WEEK'S COACHING MESSAGE<br>Pressure the ball; cover your teammate; protect the middle. |                                                  |

1. 1v1 Reaction Defending | 10 min

Defender closes space quickly, slows under control, and protects the dangerous route.

2. 2v2 Pressure & Cover | 12-15 min

Defenders communicate who pressures and who provides cover.

3. 3v3 + 2 Possession | 15 min

Defending team works together to press passing lanes while attackers use neutrals to keep possession.

4. 5v5 Compact Defending Game | 18-20 min

Reward regaining the ball and keeping the team connected rather than individual chasing.

Game connection: In 9v9, defensive success depends on the group shifting together rather than the nearest player defending alone.

CREATING CHANCES & COMBINATION PLAY

|                                                                                      |                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| PRIMARY FOCUS<br>Forward passing and combinations                                    | SECONDARY FOCUS<br>Width, target play and off-ball movement |
| WEEK'S COACHING MESSAGE<br>Play forward when it's on; support quickly when it isn't. |                                                             |

1. 2v2 + Target Players | 12-15 min

Use target players to teach penetration, support and playing off a forward.

2. Wall Pass / Give-and-Go | 10-12 min

Pairs rehearse passing and immediately running beyond the defender.

3. 3v2 Both Ways | 15 min

Attack with an extra player, then transition immediately when possession changes.

4. 4v2 to Goal | 18-20 min

Forwards check toward the ball, decide whether to turn or set the ball, and combine with midfield runners.

Game connection: The two-forward shape creates opportunities for one forward to check while the other stretches or runs beyond.

U12 | WEEK 6

FINISHING, HEADING & SET PIECES

|                                                                                                                                       |                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| PRIMARY FOCUS<br>Finishing decisions                                                                                                  | SECONDARY FOCUS<br>Aerial technique and restart organization |
| WEEK'S COACHING MESSAGE<br>Choose the finish that the situation gives you - placement, power, pass, volley, or header when permitted. |                                                              |

1. Diagonal Shooting | 10 min

Use angled runs and passes to create realistic finishing from different approach lines.

2. Cross / Cutback & Finish | 12-15 min

Wide player serves into teammates arriving at different zones.

3. Controlled Heading Technique | 5-8 min

Age-eligible players receive gentle tossed service and practice safe technique within heading limits.

4. Set-Piece Walk-Through | 12-15 min

Rehearse simple corners, attacking free kicks, defensive walls, and throw-in organization.

Game connection: At U12, restart organization can be introduced without turning set pieces into complex memorized routines.

U12 | WEEK 7

TRANSITION, PRESSING & GAME MANAGEMENT

|                                                                                              |                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| PRIMARY FOCUS<br>Reaction after turnovers                                                    | SECONDARY FOCUS<br>Pressing choices and controlling game tempo |
| WEEK'S COACHING MESSAGE<br>React first: win it back, protect goal, or attack the open space. |                                                                |

1. 5v3v1 Transition Rondo | 12-15 min

Possession changes force players to instantly switch attacking and defending roles.

2. 3v2 Both Ways | 12-15 min

Continuous overload game rewards fast recognition immediately after a turnover.

3. Press or Recover Game | 15 min

Coach identifies moments to press high versus recover into compact shape.

4. 7v7 Transition Game | 18-20 min

Play a larger directional game with focus on the first few seconds after winning or losing possession.

Game connection: Game management begins with recognizing whether the team should accelerate, secure possession, press, or recover.

U12 | WEEK 8

TEAM SHAPE & 9V9 MATCH APPLICATION

|                                                                                                              |                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| PRIMARY FOCUS<br>1-3-3-2 team understanding                                                                  | SECONDARY FOCUS<br>Review and team-specific needs |
| WEEK'S COACHING MESSAGE<br>Use the shape to help each other - don't let the formation stop you from playing. |                                                   |

1. Technical Review Choice | 8-10 min

Choose a technical activity based on recent match needs.

2. 1-3-3-2 Unit Walk-Through | 10 min

Rehearse starting positions, buildup shape, defensive recovery, and movement between lines.

3. Build-Out to Chance | 15 min

Start with goalkeeper possession and progress through the team's shape to create a shot.

4. Conditioned 9v9 | 20 min

Use one simple condition tied to the season theme, then remove it.

5. Free 9v9 Play | 15-20 min

Finish with normal match play and brief coaching interventions only.

Game connection: Week 8 should connect the curriculum to the team in front of you. Revisit the problems that appeared most often in real games.

# BALL MASTERY + SCANNING

## PURPOSE

Technical control and awareness

## Setup

One ball per player in a grid.

## How It Works

Cycle through sole rolls, inside/outside touches, cuts and turns. Add visual cues behind or beside players so they must look away from the ball before changing action.

## Coach Watches For

- Quality touches with both feet
- head comes up frequently
- players scan before changing direction
- accelerate after a move.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add passive pressure, colored gates, or partner cues. Advanced players receive a pass immediately after the scanning command.

Game connection: Scanning before receiving is essential for midfielders and defenders in the 1-3-3-2.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 Ball Mastery / First Touch](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# FIRST TOUCH GATES

## PURPOSE

Receiving and directional first touch

## Setup

Pairs pass through scattered cone gates.

## How It Works

Receiver opens body and takes the first touch through or away from the gate before playing the return pass.

## Coach Watches For

- Check shoulder
- receive side-on
- first touch prepares the next pass
- use both feet
- pass with enough pace to challenge the receiver.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Make gates smaller, require back-foot receiving, or add a passive defender approaching from one side.

Game connection: Helps players receive away from pressure when playing between lines in 9v9.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 First Touch Drills](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 1V1 CORNER ESCAPE

## PURPOSE

Receiving under pressure

## Setup

Attacker receives inside a small square while a defender closes from one side.

## How It Works

Attacker scores by escaping through one of two designated exits under control.

## Coach Watches For

- Scan before ball arrives
- use body to protect
- first touch away from pressure
- recognize when to turn versus shield.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add a target teammate outside the grid or reduce space as players improve.

Game connection: Mirrors receiving with a defender tight behind a midfielder or forward.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - U12 Drill Library](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 4-GOAL GAME

## PURPOSE

Switching play and spatial awareness

## Setup

Play 3v3 to 5v5 in a rectangle with two small goals on each end.

## How It Works

Each team may score in either opponent goal.

## Coach Watches For

- Recognize which side is open
- circulate the ball quickly
- create width
- defenders communicate and cover both threats
- transition immediately.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Limit touches, add a neutral player, or award bonus for switching from one side to the other before scoring.
- Game connection: Directly teaches switching the point of attack when one side of the 9v9 field becomes congested.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - 4-Goal Game](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# Y PASSING / OPEN BODY RECEIVING

## PURPOSE

Passing, receiving and movement

## Setup

Use a Y-shaped cone pattern.

## How It Works

Player passes forward; receiver opens body and plays to one of two branches, then follows the pass.

## Coach Watches For

- Scan before receiving
- open hips to see multiple options
- first touch into the next pass
- accurate pace
- move immediately after passing.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add a defender or visual cue to determine which branch the receiver chooses.

Game connection: Builds habits for midfielders receiving from the back line and connecting forward.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - Y Passing Drill](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 4V2 RONDO

## PURPOSE

Possession under pressure

## Setup

Four attackers keep possession around a grid against two defenders.

## How It Works

Rotate defenders after a win, set number of passes, or time interval.

## Coach Watches For

- Support on different angles
- receive across body
- communicate
- move the ball before pressure arrives
- defenders work together rather than chase independently.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Reduce space, limit touches, or require a split pass before a point counts.

Game connection: Creates the quick support and pressure recognition needed in midfield buildup.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - 4v2 Rondo with Small Goals](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# SPLIT THE DEFENDERS

## PURPOSE

Penetrating passing

## Setup

Four possession players work around an area against two defenders.

## How It Works

Award a point when a pass cleanly travels between the two defenders and is controlled by a teammate.

## Coach Watches For

- Move to open passing lanes
- disguise the pass
- use proper pace
- receiver anticipates and prepares body
- defenders stay connected.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Limit touches or move the possession players inside a larger grid.

Game connection: Teaches players to recognize when a pass can eliminate a defensive line.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - Split the Defenders Passing Game](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 5V3V1 RONDO

## PURPOSE

Possession and transition

## Setup

Use the transition rondo structure: a small possession game changes into a larger numbers-up possession phase when the defender wins the ball.

## How It Works

Use the transition rondo structure: a small possession game changes into a larger numbers-up possession phase when the defender wins the ball.

## Coach Watches For

- Immediate mental transition
- quick support
- open body shape
- defenders press together and block lanes
- communication before the ball arrives.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Shrink the grid, limit touches, or award bonus for switching the ball across the grid.

Game connection: Reinforces the instant role changes that occur after turnovers in 9v9.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - 5v3v1 Rondo](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# GK + BACK THREE BUILD-UP

## PURPOSE

Building from goalkeeper

## Setup

Set goalkeeper, three defenders and three midfield targets in the 1-3-3-2 reference shape.

## How It Works

Begin unopposed, then add two or three pressing opponents.

## Coach Watches For

- Back three spread to create width
- central defender recognizes when to split or support
- goalkeeper scans
- midfielders show in different lines
- recycle rather than force play.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Progress to 4+GK v4 or require the team to play into a forward target before scoring.

Game connection: This is the foundation of playing out from the back in NSFC's 1-3-3-2.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U11/U12 Curriculum: Building Up](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 4 + GK V 4

## PURPOSE

Buildup under realistic pressure

## Setup

Four field players plus goalkeeper attempt to play out against four pressers and reach target players or an end line.

## How It Works

Four field players plus goalkeeper attempt to play out against four pressers and reach target players or an end line.

## Coach Watches For

- Goalkeeper provides an extra passing option
- defenders create angles
- avoid standing in straight lines
- use the third player
- recognize when to play long or reset.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add targets higher up field, increase pressing numbers, or use full-width half field.

Game connection: Connects goalkeeper distribution to the first and second lines of the 1-3-3-2.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 Drill Library](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 2V2 PRESSURE & COVER

## PURPOSE

Pair defending

## Setup

Two attackers play to goal or targets against two defenders.

## How It Works

Defenders must communicate which player pressures and which covers.

## Coach Watches For

- Nearest defender closes under control
- second defender provides depth and angle
- protect central route
- switch roles as the ball travels.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Progress to 3v3 with a third defender responsible for balance.

Game connection: Builds the relationships needed among the back three and midfield line.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 Defending Drills](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 3V3 + 2 POSSESSION

## PURPOSE

Team defending and support

## Setup

Play 3v3 inside a grid with two neutral players supporting the team in possession.

## How It Works

The defending team works to regain and immediately use the neutrals.

## Coach Watches For

- Attackers create triangles
- defenders pressure together
- cover passing lanes
- transition instantly
- neutrals scan before receiving.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Limit neutral touches or move neutrals to opposite ends to create direction.

Game connection: Shows how numerical support can help a team escape pressure while teaching defenders to stay connected.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 Small-Sided Possession](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 2V2 + TARGET PLAYERS

## PURPOSE

Forward play and support

## Setup

Two attackers play against two defenders with a target player on the attacking end.

## How It Works

To score, the team must play into the target and receive the return.

## Coach Watches For

- Look forward early
- target checks at useful angle
- supporting attackers move for the layoff
- defenders anticipate penetrating passes.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Allow target to turn and score, or add a second target to create choice.

Game connection: Relates directly to using the two forwards in the 1-3-3-2 as targets and combination partners.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - 2v2 with Target Players](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 3V2 BOTH WAYS

## PURPOSE

Overload attacking and transition

## Setup

Three attackers go to goal against two defenders.

## How It Works

When play ends or defenders win possession, the next group attacks immediately in the opposite direction.

## Coach Watches For

- Attack with width
- ball carrier commits a defender
- supporting players time runs
- defenders delay and protect middle
- transition immediately.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add a recovering defender or progress to 4v3.

Game connection: Creates realistic transition pictures for midfielders and forwards.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 3v2 Drills](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# 4V2 SOCCER GAME TO GOAL

## PURPOSE

Creating chances near goal

## Setup

Use target forwards near goal, midfield support underneath, two defenders, and goalkeepers.

## How It Works

Build into the target and decide whether to turn, combine, or set the ball back.

## Coach Watches For

- Forward checks shoulder
- recognizes pressure
- sets or turns based on defender
- midfielders arrive to support
- shoot when the window opens.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add a third defender or require a combination before finishing.

Game connection: Matches the relationship between the two forwards and three midfielders in NSFC's 1-3-3-2.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - 4v2 Soccer Game to Goal](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# DIAGONAL SHOOTING

## PURPOSE

Finishing from realistic angles

## Setup

Use two diagonal starting lines.

## How It Works

Player passes or dribbles into a teammate's path for a finish from an angle, then rotates.

## Coach Watches For

- First touch sets shot
- body over ball
- choose far-post or near-post finish
- follow rebounds
- goalkeeper gets realistic repetitions.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add a passive defender, cutback service, or weak-foot finish.

Game connection: U12 attackers should become comfortable finishing from more than straight-on central positions.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - U12 Shooting Drills](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# CROSS / CUTBACK & FINISH

## PURPOSE

Wide attack and finishing

## Setup

Wide player receives near the flank, drives toward end line or crossing zone, and serves to two attackers arriving at different depths.

## How It Works

Wide player receives near the flank, drives toward end line or crossing zone, and serves to two attackers arriving at different depths.

## Coach Watches For

- Wide player looks before service
- attackers separate runs
- one attacks near area while another holds for cutback
- midfielders arrive late.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add defenders, alternate crossing sides, or require an overlapping run.

Game connection: Supports the 1-3-3-2 by teaching wide midfielders to create and forwards to coordinate movement.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 Crossing Drills](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# GOALKEEPER FOOTWORK & DISTRIBUTION

## PURPOSE

Goalkeeper fundamentals

## Setup

Use short footwork patterns into ready position, controlled ground-ball handling, then immediate distribution to a defender or target.

## How It Works

Use short footwork patterns into ready position, controlled ground-ball handling, then immediate distribution to a defender or target.

## Coach Watches For

- Balanced ready position
- hands and eyes behind ball
- secure collection
- scan before release
- distribute accurately with roll, throw, or pass.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add a back-pass, pressure from an attacker, or require a switch to the far defender.

Game connection: At U12 the goalkeeper is the first attacker and should participate in buildup decisions.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - Goalkeeper Footwork & Scooping](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# CONTROLLED HEADING TECHNIQUE

## PURPOSE

Safe heading technique

## Setup

Only age-eligible players participate.

## How It Works

Coach or partner uses gentle underhand tosses from short distance. Use a small number of repetitions within the weekly heading limit.

## Coach Watches For

- Eyes open
- move feet into line
- stabilize neck and torso
- forehead contact
- direct the ball toward a target
- stop immediately if technique breaks down or player is uncomfortable.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Progress from stationary technique to a short movement onto the ball. Do not progress to high-speed aerial challenges during introductory instruction.

Game connection: Heading is a technical tool, not a conditioning drill. Follow all U.S. Soccer and league restrictions.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 Heading Drills](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# SET-PIECE WALK-THROUGH

## PURPOSE

Restarts and organization

## Setup

Use the actual field to rehearse attacking corners, defensive corners, throw-ins, free-kick walls and basic restart positions.

## How It Works

Keep patterns simple.

## Coach Watches For

- Know who restarts
- communicate assignments
- protect dangerous central areas
- attackers create movement rather than standing
- restart quickly when appropriate.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Add one or two simple corner options or an indirect free-kick pattern after players understand the basic organization.

Game connection: Helps players understand restarts without turning U12 into a set-piece memorization exercise.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerDrive - U12 Practice Plans](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

# CONDITIONED 9V9 MATCH PLAY

## PURPOSE

Full-team application

## Setup

Play 9v9 in the 1-3-3-2 or the coach's selected shape.

## How It Works

Use only one or two conditions tied to the week's theme, then remove them and finish with normal play.

## Coach Watches For

- Coach in short interventions
- reinforce spacing between lines, width, depth, goalkeeper involvement, transition, pressure-cover-balance and forward partnerships.

## Easy Progressions / Variations

- Examples: bonus for switching sides before scoring, build through a midfielder, regain within five seconds, or goal after a forward combination.

Game connection: This is where technical and tactical lessons must transfer into the actual U12 match.

## COACH RESOURCE - SEE A SIMILAR ACTIVITY

[SoccerXpert - U12 Drill Library](#)

*External examples are supplemental. Use the NSFC setup, age adaptations and coaching expectations above.*

## U12 COACH QUICK REFERENCE

# U12 Coach Quick Reference

### WHAT U12 PLAYERS SHOULD HEAR OFTEN

"Check your shoulder." | "Can we play forward?" | "Give an angle." | "Switch it." | "Pressure - cover - balance." | "Get compact." | "React when we lose it." | "Can the goalkeeper help us?"

### WHAT U12 COACHES SHOULD AVOID

Overloading players with tactical lectures; treating the 1-3-3-2 as a rigid grid; permanent positional specialization; neglecting technical repetition because standings exist; using heading beyond the applicable age limits; and stopping the game so often that players never learn to solve problems themselves.

### U12 SUCCESS

Players should leave U12 with cleaner technique under pressure, better awareness before receiving, a clearer understanding of team shape, more confident decision-making, and the ability to recognize common attacking, defending and transition moments.

COACH RESOURCE - [SoccerXpert - U12 Soccer Drills](#)

COACH RESOURCE - [SoccerDrive - U12 Soccer Drills](#)

COACH RESOURCE - [SoccerDrive - U12 Practice Plans](#)