

## Practice Games & Drill Ideas for U6 Players

### Numbers Game

This game one is set up like Red Rover, where you divide the team in half (2 groups) and number them 1 to 5. You separate them on either side of a grid marked by cones (across from one another in a ~30 feet long grid). You call a number out like "1", and the two kids numbered "1" race out from separate side lines of the grid to get the ball you drop within the grid and they try to control the ball, dribble it, and kick it beyond the side line of the other team on the other side to 'score a point' with those remaining players using their feet to 'block' the kicks. Then you can call out more than one number at a time like "2's and 3's" and all four kids with these numbers run out and the 2 & 3 from the one group work together to try to control the ball and get it to cross the other side's line. So on and so forth. Probably available online as well if you want a better description and give a player 2 #'s if you have an odd number of players at practice.

### Steal the Flag

Do you have yellow pennies for the kids by chance (not sure what comes in the coaches bag)? If so, putting them in their back pockets or back of shorts you can create "tails" and then they can go around dribbling trying to 'steal' each other's pennie/tail until only one is left. Teaches them to look up while dribbling, which is good stuff...

### Sharks & Minnows

1 shark (first game coach can be shark to explain rules to the kids) and the rest of the players are minnows. Mark out a grid (rectangle) and have all the kids on one side and they try to dribble their ball across the grid (aka "ocean") to the other side without getting "caught" by the shark who is trying to kick every player's ball away. Once they are 'caught', they become a shark as well until you have just one kid left that the rest of the team is trying to stop. Then that child becomes the shark to start the next game and so forth. Best if played a few times in a row with the kids.

### Dribble Dribble Dribble

Mark off a grid with cones and let the kids all dribble for 60 sec within the grid ( trying not to run into each other) this will help them learn to touch the ball and look up as well. Periodically say "Freeze", they have to stop the ball with the ball of their foot quickly and then move to their weak foot or just the outside of their favorite foot, etc. and continue on for no more than 5-10 minutes. Do dribbling drills EVERY practice to get the kids to touch the ball. Learning the feel of the ball is important.

### Throw-ins

Sometimes I break the team into 2 groups to focus on specific drills like learning throw-ins, particularly if I have a parent willing to help with the other kids during practice. That way you only have 4 to 5 kids at a time to keep busy. The others can use the time to dribble in a small square area marked by cones and try to 'keep away' or another parent keeping an eye on them while you show proper throw in techniques. Either pair up the kids to throw back and forth (first practice or two, this is okay) and ensure they understand the throwing motion, keeping their feet on the ground. Or perhaps line the 4-5 kids in a line using cones to represent the side line and get the lead in the line to go down the "side line" and point towards the goal and the thrower practices throwing 'down the line' until they understand. If you do this several times through the season for 5-10 minutes each, a few will actually build some of these good habits. Personally, I consistently use the defender on that sideline in a game to throw the ball in so they start to know what to expect and the forward goes down the line and they keep REPEATING the SAME formation for EVERY throw-in. Keep it simple. I ensure we do that EVERY game so it teaches them this habit, so they expect it and get comfortable with it.

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### Aim and shoot

Practice shooting is fun if you line up 3 cones (if they are flat cones) in front of the net (net not required, it just helps in the chasing of the balls if needed although a parent works fine too!) and place a ball on top of each flat style cone. Place the kids close enough so they can kick the ball and at least half the kids have the ability to consistently kick one or more of the balls off of the cones with a single kick. Give each player a point for each success and see who scores the highest for a 'high five'. Then let the "winner" collect all the balls that roll behind the net or area where you are kicking or a helpful parent can assist. Consider doing the same with their weak foot being the focus; move them closer to the targets to make this a fair challenge compared to their strong foot.

### Relay dribbling runs

Break into fair groups of 3 – 4 players each (equalize abilities per team). Set up cones to run relays with all players on same end. Have them dribble down and back as a relay race. Alternate feet as well as the length of races throughout season. Good for when they are rambunctious! As they get better with this activity you can specify surface area of the foot to use too (ball of foot, inside of foot, outside of foot, etc.), and you can specify that individually if you have any kids at the more advanced end of the spectrum as well while the others use whatever surface works best for them.

### Turn the coach into an animal

Create a square-ish area designated by cones. Each kid has his/her own ball and coach is in the square as well. Kids try to kick their ball and hit the coach while coach tries to avoid being hit by running, jumping, etc. On the third time coach is hit by someone, anyone, with the ball, that kid picks an animal and coach has to act like that animal for a moment. For example, kid selects elephant and coach makes an elephant noise and swings her trunk. It is really funny and the kids have fun coming up with different animals for you to become. The more bizarre the animals, the more fun this is.

### Space invaders

This game is a play on the classic video arcade game. 1-2 kids have balls in a grid with the perimeter marked by cones. They aim and kick the ball while the other kids run around the space to avoid getting hit. Typically play until one player remains, that kid is the winner. Only challenge is most of the kids are not using balls and some are sitting out. So vary it up as needed to keep the others engaged.

### Race against the coach

A good drill is take one of the balls and dribble to the other side and back and have the players try to 'race you' with dribbling their own balls; give them a chance to win on occasion however. Encourage their weak foot usage but don't require it much, they will use what they are comfortable with and continue to give them opportunity.

### Run Dribble Shoot

Line up the players on a line created by cones. In groups of 2 throw their own balls up in the air in front of them and they run towards their ball, dribble to get it under control and shoot on the net (or goal marked by cones and a parent perhaps as a 'goalie'). This teaches them finishing and forward movement on the field while paying attention that they don't collide with the other player in the same space.

### 2v1, 2v2, 3v2, 3v3 variations

Based upon # of players at practice you can create small equal areas for small sided play to get the kids to start to work together and try to pass as the numbers increase per side. Encourage high fives and positive feedback for good passes,

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etc. You don't have to have goals set up for this – it can be a keep away variation or goal oriented with goal area marked by cones/balls, etc. If keep away you can have them compete to get the highest number of successful passes between the kids on their own teams.

### Busy-busy bees & Tigger

The key to this age is keeping them busy, they lose focus easily and need a variety of things. Lots of running and action is good for the kids. They don't really need any warm-ups as this age is already limber, muscles warm, and ready to go at the drop of a dime; unless of course it is really cold outside. Save stretching/warm-ups for older groups you eventually work with in your coaching career. This age needs to be ACTIVE.

If they are exceptionally rambunctious have them pretend they are Tigger (from Winnie the Pooh) and have bouncy tails and form a single line and lead them jumping up and down around the field doing crazy things by mimicking you (hopping on one foot or the other, shaking your head, wagging your finger, clapping your hands, etc.). It is a lot like "Simon Says" without the penalty for messing up. It is tiring (your calves will hurt so don't do it for more than 5 minutes).