

Anything Goes:

Bob Christensen, September 2000

Focus: Getting used to physical contact.

Age: U12 and up.

Equipment: Pinnies, balls, access to a small field with full goals, or cones and flags to create a small, pressure-cooker type of field.

Players: Typical team of 16 or so.

Space: Pressure Cooker Field (small field 30x30 - 40x40 or so, with full sized goals).

Introduction: Physical play is part and parcel of the game of soccer. Getting players used to “mixing it up” is a necessary part of team preparation. This game focuses on preparing the players for physical contact in a game setting. It is NOT meant to teach or condone physical contact that is against the Laws of the Game. But it is meant to teach the players how to “play through” such contact when they encounter it. “Play through” refers to using your body and skills to allow you to continue the play without injury and while maintaining an attack.

Setup: A small, pressure-cooker style field, which measures anywhere from 30x30 to 40x40 with full sized goals. You can also use corner flags to create appropriate goals, and cones to delineate a field of appropriate size. Split the team into 2 equal groups, each identified by a different colored pinnie.

Execution: Keeper plays in each goal. Each team protects a goal. Essentially, this is an 8v8 (or similar numbers) game played in a very small space. Explain the purpose of the exercise: To prepare them to play physically, within the Laws of the Game, and to react appropriately (not retaliate) when they encounter overly physical play. Conditions for this game are that the defensive players can use their hands, push, shove, pull shirts, anything safe to try to win the ball from the ball carrier. Girls and boys typically react differently to this exercise. With boys it will start out with shirt pulling and holding of the arms, and quickly degenerate to full blown NFL style tackling. This is OK as long as it is being done safely. DO NOT allow hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, or tripping. Girls do not naturally take to this type of exercise with their teammates. You need to encourage them to hold, pull, push, etc. for the exercise to have good effect.

You should see the physical play break down the technical skills of the ball holder initially. The ball holder must become aggressive as he or she protects the ball. And as the defensive players close down on the ball carrier, knowing when to pass the ball, rather than try to hold it against the extreme defensive pressure becomes important. As does moving to support the ball carrier, and the ball carrier knowing at all times where his available passing options are located, and which direction they are moving. The number of players on the small field should create an environment where there is immediate, intense pressure brought to bear on the ball carrier after every pass. It should also create a crowded environment where passing is quite difficult, resulting in the ball carrier having to work through traffic (and intense pressure and physical play) himself, or herself.

Coaching Points:

- 1) Keep a low center of gravity and a wide stance to keep from being pushed off the ball.
- 2) When being held, especially if it is shirt or shorts grab, it is often best to quickly and decisively move away and break the hold, rather than try to steadily pull against it.
- 3) Always have a plan: What would you do with the ball RIGHT NOW, if you received it from a teammate. Where would you put the ball with your first touch, and what are your shooting or passing options?
- 4) Try to play the ball into space with your first touch (there should be precious little space available to do this), and sprint onto it.
- 5) Use your first touch to set yourself up for a shot with your second touch.
- 6) Try to receive the ball in an area outside the reach of any defenders.
- 7) Try to place all passes in such a way that your teammate is either outside the reach of any defenders, or can immediately one-touch a shot on goal.
- 8) Don't coach the defenders. You don't want them thinking that you condone this type of play. Make certain they understand that you will not condone the type of defending that you are encouraging in this exercise!