

Backyard Training Activities

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Often, you will find that you are alone or with one or two of your friends in the backyard or at the playground. The following activities are challenging soccer activities that will, not only keep you and your friends busy, but will help you improve your skills and your decision making.

Dribbling

Multi-Cone Dribbling

Throw some cones (or soda cans, etc.) around the yard haphazardly. Dribble your ball around the yard touching it to one of the cones. When you touch a cone with your ball, quickly pull the ball away from the cone with the bottom (sole) of your foot and dribble off to another cone. Continue this activity for 30 seconds. Try it at different speeds. Build your speed up gradually, but always try to perform the skill at top speed...this is referred to as technical speed.

Throw some cones around the yard haphazardly. Dribble your ball around the yard in between the cones, but don't allow your ball to touch a cone. Continue this activity for 30 seconds. Try it at different speeds. Build your speed up gradually, but always try to perform the skill at top speed...this is referred to as technical speed.

Multi-Goal Dribbling

Set up small goals with cones about 1 step apart. Place many of these goals around your yard at different angles. Dribble your ball through as many of the goals as you can in 30 seconds (ask your mom or dad to time you). The next time you do it, try to increase the number of goals that you dribble through in 30 seconds by at least one.

Nutmeg

Set up small goals with cones about 1 step apart. Place many of these goals around your yard at different angles. Dribble your ball toward a goal and push your ball through the goal. While the ball travels through the goal, you must run around the goal and retrieve the ball on the other side (nutmeg). As soon as you regain control of the ball, dribble at one of the other goals and nutmeg again. Nutmeg as many goals as you can in 30 seconds (ask your friend, mom or dad to time you). The next time you do it, try to increase the number of goals that you nutmeg in 30 seconds by at least one.

Combat

Set up a goal with cones about 4 steps wide. You stand behind one of the cones with the ball and your friend stands behind the other cone without a ball. Both of you face the same direction. You must throw or kick the ball about 10-15 yards out into the area that you and your friend are facing. The instant the ball is struck, both of you must attempt to get it (gain possession of the ball) and dribble it back through the goal. Play for 20-30 seconds. Alternate the server each time. If your Mom or Dad is available, they can serve the ball from a position away from the goal and keep time. This is a great 1 versus 1 activity.

Options: - Mom serves (kicks) the ball out into the yard and you and your friend compete to get the ball back to her, instead of going through the goal. This is a great activity to work on playing with pressure from behind. Thus the players must shield the ball often, escape the pressure of their opponent and create a space large enough to pass the ball back to the coach.

Kicking (Wall Skills)

If you have access to a wall that you can kick your soccer ball against, consider the following soccer activities:

Straight On

Kick your ball directly against the wall at different speeds (pace or weight) and from different distances. Use different surfaces of the foot. Try to keep the ball on the ground. Receive the rebound with different surfaces of the foot, always trying to keep the first touch within playing distance (about 1 or 2 steps from you). Receive the rebound with a controlling touch or two and then kick it against the wall again. Keep the ball moving and keep your feet moving at all times.

Kicking surfaces: inside of the foot, outside of the foot, instep (laces), heel, toe.

Receiving surfaces: inside of foot, outside of foot, sole of foot

Angles

Position yourself about 10 yards away and at one end of the wall. Kick your ball on the ground toward the middle of the wall (about 45 degrees). Immediately after kicking the ball, run to receive it as it rebounds from the wall to the opposite end. Perform a change of direction move and repeat the activity in the opposite direction. Experiment with the pace and the angles of your kicks, as well as your receiving surfaces and number of controlling touches. Always try to keep the ball moving.

Change of Direction Moves: Pull back with sole of one foot and push behind other foot; chop with inside or outside of foot.

Tennis

Volley your ball against the wall with one or two bounces in between each volley. Eventually, keep the ball going with only one bounce in between volleys. Vary your distance from the wall as you play. See how many times you can keep the ball going as you move closer to and farther from the wall. Use different surfaces of your foot and develop a rhythm. Set up a rectangular court out from the wall and play soccer tennis against the wall with a friend. Set up your own rules with regards to services and bounces, etc.

Squash

This game is played with more than one player. You can set up a rectangular court or play in open an area. After a kicking order has been determined, the player #1 kicks the ball off the wall. The player #2 must get to the ball before it stops and immediately kick (1-touch) the ball against the wall. If there are more than 2 players, the game proceeds accordingly until all the players have kicked the ball against the wall, at which time the first player is up again. You get a point if the player that follows you allows the ball to stop before she kicks it or if she misses the wall on her kick. Play begins with the next player in the order striking the ball against the wall.

This is a great game for scheming (strategy)...putting the right pace on the ball so that it barely moves after hitting the wall or rebounds off the wall with great speed. Passing angles become a strategic threat in this game as well.

Other Backyard Activities

Juggling

Juggle the ball with all parts of your body (left and right sides). Try not to have more than 5 consecutive juggles with the same body part (i.e. feet, things, head etc.). This helps your touch on the ball and trapping ability. When comfortable, play juggling games with friends in which the person who drops the ball gains a letter (such as in the basketball game 'horse'). You may play 1 or 2 touch juggling in a group as well.

1 vs 1

- a) Only use one foot—the ball cannot touch your other foot;
- b) Have a goal (or a cone) which you can score upon from all sides;
- c) Same as b), but have the same goal for both players;

- d) Have two goals for each player, one on an end line and one on a sideline;
- e) Have three goals for each player, one on an end line and one on each sideline

Benefits:

- a) Obviously helps with ambidexterity
- b) Increases offensive creativeness, increases defensive responsibility a need to be in correct position (goal side) at all time
- c) Improves counteractive thinking and makes sure player who loses the ball plays defense immediately
- d) Defender should force offender to play in the direction he does not like to normally, increases defensive pressure, increases offenders ability to go in weaker direction
- e) All the pressure is on the defender, helps with quickness and positioning

Wall Ball

Kick a ball against a wall using left foot and right foot. Place hard shots against the wall, hard enough to challenge yourself. Get close to the wall to improve foot quickness and move further away to increase lateral quickness. Try doing this with three touches, then with two touches, and then finally, with one touch. Helps with trapping, positioning, striking of a ball with both feet, foot speed, concentration. Also will improve your passing accuracy because of the high number of touches you will get on the ball and the high number of balls you play against the ball. Vary your shots — high, low, left, right, inside foot, outside foot, instep etc.

Shielding

You versus one other person with one ball, the goal is to maintain possession. If you lose possession do whatever you have to in order to get the ball back as quickly as possible.

2 v 2 and 2 v 1

These types of games will be extremely useful. The entire game can be broken down into 2 v 2 or 2 v 1 situations. The more skilled you are at these, the more success you will have in the larger game. Playing wall passes is key!

Hope you find some of these useful. Keep working hard!