

# **The Practice Protocol**

**Making Your Soccer Practices More  
Efficient, Fun and Challenging**

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# **The Practice Protocol**

## **Making Your Soccer Practices More Efficient, Fun and Challenging**

This Practice Protocol is for use by coaches in the Tosa Kickers program as a guide to improve player development. It will also:

- Make practices simpler for the coaches,
- Make practice more fun for the players, and
- Allow you and your team to achieve more success on game day.

### **SIMPLE + FUN = IMPROVED PLAY and MORE SUCCESS**

By following these guidelines, coaches – independent of a playing or coaching background – will create a better learning environment.

The design of this protocol is specifically for Tosa Soccer, our coaches' needs and player needs. It includes four parts:

- Part 1     Equipment
- Part 2     Organizing Space, Time, Equipment and the Players
- Part 3     Parts of an Economic Practice
- Part 4     How to Structure an Economic Practice

The Practice Protocol starts by identifying the necessary *Equipment* in Part 1. Part 2 describes the foundation for a quality practice, which is *Organizing Space, Time, Equipment and the Players*. Part 2 provides the “mechanics” for running an organized practice and is required if you hope to teach players the game. Parts 3 and 4, *Components of an Economic Practice* and *How to Structure and Economic Practice*, address more advanced coaching concepts and provide structure to the actual concepts you must teach.

Following the Protocol creates a logical teaching progression to practice and the season. More importantly, it makes the players solve soccer problems consistently (compete) and makes them perform technique repetitively in realistic positions and situations. If every Tosa Kickers coach utilizes the following protocol, we will develop better coaches and consequently better players and teams.

## **Part 1 – Equipment**

You must have proper equipment to run an effective and efficient soccer practice.

### **Absolutely Necessary Equipment**

- Balls with air (preferably 1 per player), properly sized for the age level
- Cones or discs - to create fields, dimensions, goals etc...
- Jersey vests – To create teams (preferably at least three colored vests)
- Stopwatch – You must be able to keep time down to the second.

### **Preferred Equipment**

- A field with lines
- Goals (moveable if possible)
- Corner flags (make more realistic goalposts if you do not have access to a real goal with nets)

## Part 2

### Organizing Space, Time, Equipment and the Players

Many coaches, even experienced coaches, struggle to organize the space, equipment, time, and the players efficiently. It is hard to do and takes time to learn how to do right, but it is absolutely necessary because you cannot teach effectively without controlling your environment. The following are simple tools to make your practices run smoother.

#### I. Organizing Space – First, whenever possible, set up your fields prior to practice:

- A. Give all your activities **direction** by utilizing cones to show where players go or by creating actual boundaries.
  - This keeps players in a manageable area
  - It shows you are in control
- B. Have **boundaries** for all your games
  - This is easier to manage and necessary for player development
- C. When setting up multiple games keep the **fields close** together
  - This allows you to watch all the players easier
- D. **Plan ahead** and use the same boundaries to set up small fields inside larger fields you intend to use later

#### II. Organizing Time – Utilize stopwatch throughout practice

- A. Make all exercises **timed** and hold yourself to it
  - This keeps you on task
- B. The younger the age the **shorter** the exercises
  - To keep attention it is good to do short intense exercises
- C. Time the water breaks
  - Again it keeps you on task and gets the kids back to playing

#### III. Organizing Equipment

- A. Prior to practice try to set up as much of your field or fields as possible
  - Try to use the same cones and field dimensions for as much of practice possible
- B. For all games or drills balls should start in the following locations:
  - Where the drill begins
  - Surrounding the field

- Behind or on the side of the goals
  - With the coach who puts the ball in play
- C. When most of the balls are gone in a drill stop the exercise and have players get the balls
- D. Before all water breaks all players should retrieve balls and place them where the next activity starts
- E. For youngest kids create a place (with cones possibly) for the balls when they go get a drink

#### IV. Organizing Players

- A. Call players in with a countdown 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 – last one in does a single push up.
- B. When you call players in, tell them to put one foot on the ball, hold ball in hand etc...
- It gets them focused and not socializing
- C. Every exercise should have **extremely short lines**
- Lines should be short enough that players should wait no longer than about 30 seconds before they play or are involved in the game
  - Short lines means more reps which is player development
- D. The coach should **partner up players** or teams
- You can control players based on behavior, skill level, area(s) of the field, positions or simply mixing things up
- E. When sending players to a drink have them do a coordination drill (cross-over steps, run backwards) or soccer skill (dribbling, juggling)
- This keeps the crazy socialization to a minimum
  - It allows you to organize balls as well
  - It allows you to teach athleticism, skill which is player development
- F. When returning players from a drink have them do a coordination drill or soccer skill
- G. **When coaching, coach all the players.** Spend less time coaching players individually
- Watch an exercise and look for most common errors stop the game and coach it. Everyone can learn from your instruction.
  - Coaching each individual during a drill often creates a drill that takes too long and while you are coaching a player, chaos is ensuing elsewhere
  - If you have multiple coaches you can assign coaches to coach individually while the one coach handles the entire flow of practice
  - **Bark info to individual players that all players can hear to remind them of proper technique: Lock ankle! Toe down! Open up body!** This replaces coaching each player individually.

## Part 3

### Components of an Economic Practice

You can only achieve an Economic Practice if you have the right *Equipment* and you *Organize Space, Time, Equipment and the Players* efficiently.

An Economic Practice is the procedure of working on multiple parts of the game in one training or exercise. Coaching manuals, videos etc... provide drills, exercises and games. Many of these drills are good, but they are not designed to provide a planned progression of skills over the course of a week, month, or season. Even if you do not have a soccer background, watch soccer, have time to study the game, have a coaching background, or have a teaching background, you can still run an Economic Practice and succeed as a coach.

An Economic Practice addresses the following:

- **Skill – Technique performed under pressure, including:**
  1. Passing
  2. Controlling/receiving
  3. Dribbling
  4. Ball striking (shooting and or serving)
  5. Controlling or striking aerial balls and heading
- **Problem Solving** – *The player impacting the outcome of a game or drill with their decisions. I separate this from tactics because it is more elemental and crucial for player development; it is imperative that we teach players how to think not what to think.*
- **Athleticism** - Anaerobic fitness, Agility, Balance, Strength/Power, Speed
- **Tactics** – Where a player belongs on the field in a given situation:
  1. Attacking – Going to a destination, destinations, goals or goal or, in some cases, trying to achieve an amount of passes
  2. Defending- Defending a destination, goal or, in some cases, against an amount of connected passes
  3. Transition – the moment of winning the ball and becoming the attacker and or the moment of losing the ball and becoming a defender
  4. Set Plays – organizing free kicks, throw ins, goal kicks etc...
- **Psychological** – Dealing with pressure

## I. Mechanics of an Economic Practice

### A. All activities need direction

- The real game has direction so should your small- and large-sided practice games. Use goals, gates, end zones – anything that provides something to attack and something to defend. This makes games tactical and creates real game problem solving. It's also competitive and fun for the kids.

### B. All games have boundaries (in a rectangle preferably)

- A real soccer field has boundaries and is in the shape of a rectangle so should your games. This makes games tactical and creates real game problem solving.

### C. Make 98% of exercises and games competitive

- To compete means to problem solve and you cannot teach or implement problem solving exercises enough
- Competing increases focus

### D. Do everything for time

- The real game is timed
- Time creates pressure
- Time creates problem solving scenarios

## II. The Technical Parts of an Economic Practice

**Technique is the physical skill of soccer:** dribbling, passing, controlling, and striking the ball or shooting. Coaches of youth teams under age 15 should focus every practice on **technique, technique, technique.**

### A. Dribbling

1. Do Dribbling exercises **in a direction** – The game has direction so should your dribbling games
2. Teach Dribbling with **change of speed** and **change of direction** always – This is the essence of beating a player so it must be emphasized every time. Ask your players at every practice: "How do you beat a player 1 v 1?" They should answer: "Change speed and change direction!"
3. Teach dribbling in association with **faking out a defender** – Moves are supposed to trick a defender, teach them that way
4. Teach the following moves:

- The Matthews – the standard dribbling approach that every player in the game employs whether tight to a defender or running at a defender
- Inside of the foot cut – The standard cut every player must be proficient at
- Outside of the foot cut – The standard cut every player must be proficient at
- Fake Pass – Fake passing is elemental to deceptive dribbling and problem solving. The earlier a player learns to use teammates to create deception the better they will get at problem solving.
- Fake shot – Fake shooting or serving into a dribble is elemental to deceptive dribbling and problem solving

*Tosa Kickers has coaching sessions each fall and spring that will show you how these moves work and how to design an activity that allow you to coach these moves efficiently.*

## **B. Passing and Controlling**

1. Do passing and controlling exercises in shuttles or patterns – These provide natural direction
2. Teach the following passes
  - Inside of the foot (this should be the emphasis)
  - Outside of the foot
  - Cut passes or passes with laces or inside of foot in direction you are not facing – A standard deceptive pass all players must be able to do
3. Teach the following control touches
  - INSIDE OF THE FOOT – 90% of control touches at the highest level are with inside of the foot. It is easier and more deceptive.
    - Inside of the far foot – Inside of the foot farthest from the teammate passing the ball allows the player receiving the ball to open up and face the field
  - Inside of the foot out of the air
    - The standard control of a ball out of the air
  - Outside of the foot control
    - Needs to be learned but is used about 10% of the time or less – should not be taught in straight shuttles unless player receiving the ball receives it sideways
  - Inside of the foot out of the air to the ground – we call this putting ‘a roof’ over the ball

## **C. Ball Striking/Shooting**

1. Teach Ball striking with 2 players across from each other
  - This will create a lot of repetitions
2. Teach ball striking in shuttles
  - This will create repetitions and movement
3. Teach ball striking with shooting games



- Why not shoot on a goal like the real game
4. Teach ball striking within large passing patterns
    - Serving is a long-flighted pass so you place it in a passing pattern
  5. Teach the following ball strikes
    - Shooting
    - Serving

#### **D. Controlling or Striking Aerial Balls and Heading**

1. Teach controlling aerial balls in pairs close together
  - Increases repetition
2. Teach controlling aerial balls with partners far apart
  - Increases repetition and gives realistic distance
3. Teach controlling aerial balls with straight shuttles
  - One side plays the ball in the air and the other side controls the ball and plays it back on the ground
4. Teach heading (minimal, especially based on age)
  - Proper technique will decrease head related injuries

As players' skills advance, coaches can use many variations of these activities to challenge players.

### **III. Small Sided Games in an Economic Practice**

Small sided games provide players with the opportunity to be directly involved in all parts of the game (technical such as dribbling, passing, controlling, shooting) and tactical (attacking 1 v 1 or 2 v. 1, defending individually or as a team and transition) while playing under realistic game conditions. Players cannot hide in small-sided games. Properly designed small sided games allow the coach to see and instruct immediately to correct poor technique or to encourage game awareness. Every practice should include small sided games. Small-sided games include any combination of up to four players on a side. This can be equal numbers such as 1 v. 1, or 2 v. 2, or can be "numbers up" such as 3 v. 1 or 4 v. 2.

#### **A Play games with direction, destinations or goals**

- The game has a destination so should your small sided games

#### **B. Play games with transition**

- In the game you go from defense to attack and attack to defense so do it in every activity – This transition is the most complicated and important part of the game to master. Do this in all of your small sided games!

**C. Play games for time**

- The game has time so should your small sided games

## **IV. Large-Sided Games in an Economic Practice**

Large sided games allow for a more realistic game situation, but still allow you as coach to focus on particular parts of the game and to maintain close scrutiny of players' technical and tactical skills. Large-sided games include 5 v. 5, 6 v. 4, 7 v. 5, etc... They are, typically, played in a larger space than the small-sided games.

**A. Play large-sided games with positions**

Once you get to 5 field players you should be playing with positions. Positions have responsibilities and players need to learn to be responsible for a role.

**B. Play games with direction, destination or goals**

Again the game has a direction and goals you need to play that way

**C. Play games for time**

The game has time so should your large sided games

**D. Play large-sided games with offside**

This is the most complex and influential rule in soccer; and even if you aren't going to coach the why(s) and how(s) of the offside rule, you should call offside so the kids learn to problem-solve this rule.

**E. Play large-sided games with restrictions**

The large sided game is the game and includes every aspect of the game. In the large sided game you implement restrictions, rules and or field dimensions to emphasize certain aspects of the game.

## Part 4

### How To Structure an Economic Practice (U10 – U18 Applicable)

To structure an Economic Practice, you must have the right *Equipment*, you must *Organize Space, Time, Equipment and the Players*, and you must include each of the *Parts of an Economic Practice* because this is what creates the flow of practice. ***Coaches should attend the Tosa Kickers Coaches Sessions offered each spring and fall for demonstrations of how these activities work, how to set them up, and what to look for when watching the players.***

### Putting the Parts Together

The coach should ensure that every practice includes an active warm up, technical repetition, small-sided games, and large-sided games. You can mix and match your games. For example, if you set aside 25 minutes for small-sided games, do 10 minutes of 1 v. 1 or 2 v. 1 and then switch to 4 v. 2. For large sided games, use two smaller wide goals for each team for 10 minutes, then switch to one larger goal in the center. Maybe make the goal regulation size and put in a keeper. Keep the activities consistent so the players understand the game while mixing up restrictions to make it fresh and challenge their problem solving ability.

**The Following is an example of an Economic Practice that can be adapted for ages U11-U18.**

#### I. The Active Warm-up

Many Tosa coaches already use the FIFA warm-up before starting individual or small-group work with the ball, and that is fine. An alternative is the following active warm up that includes the soccer ball from the start. It lubricates the joints, warms up the muscles to prepare them for full speed training while working on skill. It covers athleticism and skill and deals for a short time with the psychological.

**A. Juggle 2 minutes** – If the ball hits the ground try to keep juggling it off the bounce

**Works on:** Balance, Agility, Control, Warms up body for higher speed, Psychological (the player keeps track of best score so they are competing, the timed exercise makes them focus as you call out the time)

**B. 5 Minutes, 2 to a ball (improvise and do a few of these for 3 minutes each, depending on what you want to emphasize)**

**Exercise 1** - Player A moving forward with the ball passes to player B who is running backwards. When Player A plays Ball Player B stops and controls the ball with the inside of the foot. Repeat process for 30 yards and switch roles on way back to original line.

**Exercise 2** – Player A moving forward with the ball passes to player B who shuffling sideways. When Player A plays Ball Player B stops and controls the ball with the inside of the far foot. Repeat process for 30 yards and switch roles.

**Exercise 3** – Player A moving forward with the ball passes to player B who shuffling sideways. When Player A plays Ball Player B stops and controls the ball with the outside of the close foot. Repeat process for 30 yards and switch roles.

**Exercise 4** – Player A moving forward with the ball passes to player B who is doing a crossover step. When Player A plays Ball Player B stops and controls the ball with the inside of the far foot. Repeat process for 30 yards and switch roles.

**Exercise 5** – Player A moving forward with the ball passes to player B who is doing a crossover step. When Player A plays Ball Player B stops and controls the ball with the outside of the close foot. Repeat process for 30 yards and switch roles.

**Works on:** Balance, Agility, Control, Passing, Warms up body for higher speed.

### **C. 3 Minutes, 2 to a ball**

**Exercise 1** – Player A stands with legs open wide facing Player B. Player B plays the ball through player A's legs about 5 yards in distance. Player A turns catches up to ball and makes an inside of the foot 180 degree cut and plays the ball back to player B. On the way back player A does high knees.

**Exercise 2** – Same as exercise 1 except do an outside of the foot cut and run back doing butt kicks.

**Exercise 3** – Same as exercise 1 and 2 except do a Cruyff turn and return doing high jump skips with head ball motion.

**Exercise 4** – Repeat process with longer pass 15 yards and make the player sprint to the ball.

**Works On:** Balance, Agility, Speed/Power, Control, Passing, Dribbling, Gets body at high speed for training

**This Drill** is a warm up but includes skill.

## **II. Technical Portion of Practice**

### **A. Dribbling (5 Minutes)**

Mirror game with partners – 45 second turns with score kept. (Attend a Coaches Session to watch this game – Player A and Player B face each other between cones 5 yards apart. Player A with the ball tries to beat Player B to either cone with the ball. Player B cannot cross the line but rather tries to step on the cone first, before A gets there with the ball. A should use fakes and change of speed and direction).

**Works on:** Dribbling, Balance, Agility, Speed/Power, Problem Solving

**The Drill** has direction and is against a defender

### **B. Triangle shuttle (15 Minutes)**

1 Minute timed competition(s) with cones in a triangle 10-15 yards apart. Most amount of passes completed in adherence with rules wins. You can also compete with your own first score.

**Competition 1** – Going Clockwise – Control with left foot play with left foot

**Competition 2** – Going Counter-Clockwise – Control with right foot play with right foot

**Competition 3** – Going Clockwise – Control with left foot play with right foot

**Competition 4** – Going Counter-Clockwise – Control with right foot play with left foot

**Works On:** Passing (both feet), Controlling (Both feet), Dribbling (Each foot), Balance, Agility, Speed, Problem Solving.

**The Drill** has realistic and different passing angles. Adjust this drill 100 ways to create different passes and controls.

*There are many different technical drills and activities you can do to. Dribbling and passing/controlling should always be part of the technical focus. Find activities that work for your team and repeat them so the kids get comfortable doing an activity that challenges every technical part of the game. Attend the Tosa Kickers coaching sessions to pick up good activities for your team.*

## **III Small Sided Portion of Practice**

### **4 vs 2 (25 Minutes)**

Play 4 minute games in a 20 x 25' field and switch the 2 each time

4 try to dribble through one of three sets of gates while the 2 defend the gates

2 Try to pass (shoot) through a center gate

You can and should vary a game like this with countless restrictions. Two games should be going at once to get all players involved.

#### **Possible Restrictions for the 4**

- The ball through the gate has to be a through ball to a teammate who does not run through that gate
- You have to connect 4 passes before you score
- 3 touch maximum
- 2 touch minimum

#### **Possible Restrictions for the 2**

- Have to shoot within 2 passes
- Have to shoot within 1 pass

#### **You can and should vary a game like this with countless scoring changes**

- If the 4 dribble through the gate they get 1

- If they connect a through ball through the gate they get 2
- If the 2 win the ball from the 4 before they connect 4 passes they get a point
- If they score within 1 pass they get a point

#### **Other Variations**

- Play with offside or have the gates be the offside line if you play with through balls
- Play with a large goal with a goalkeeper on the team of 4
- When the ball goes out of bounds the coach knocks a high ball to the 4

**Works On:** Passing, Controlling, Dribbling, Shooting, Defending, Attacking, Transition, Tactics, Problem Solving, and Psychological (because it's timed)

**The Drill** includes and or can include almost every aspect of the game. It is small sided so touches increase. It has almost unlimited restrictions, rules and field configurations.

## **IV. Large Sided Portion of Practice**

### **5 v. 5 (or 7 vs 7 for U-13 and up) + Goalkeepers (20-25 Minutes)**

Large sided games are the game and include every component of the game. In the large sided game your talent in practice is to emphasize what you want to technically, tactically, athletically, problem solving and psychologically in the game.

#### **Field Configuration – depends on what you want to emphasize**

- Play a field that is wider than it is long – You may do this to work on serving
- Play a field that is long and narrow – You may do this to work on combination play
- Create offset offside lines – You may do this to create a larger space for the attack before they worry about an offside line

#### **When the Ball goes Out you can restart play the following ways:**

- With a Goal Kick – Work on this particular set play
- With the Ball out the Keepers Feet – Keeper has to play with their feet
- With the Ball in the keepers hands – Keeper must distribute
- With the Coach playing in a new ball to battle for or to a set team – Either to emphasize ball winning or always start with a team that you are emphasizing the attack
- With a Corner Kick – Work on this particular set play
- With a Free Kick – Work, again, on a particular set play
- With a throw-in – Work to be able to throw it to your teammates feet

## **E. Ideas To Highlight Areas of Emphasis**

**1. Create Restrictions to Highlight Parts of the Game for example to create passing, ball movement and rhythm in attack. For example,**

- 3 touch maximum 2 Touch Minimum 4 touch maximum – A mandatory first touch makes players work on control
- 4 passes before you go to goal – To emphasize possession
- You must switch fields before you go to goal – To emphasize effective possession and changing the point of attack
- 1 touch goals from a pass (not directly from a turnover) – To emphasize the ability to pass the ball.
- All defenders are 2 touch, midfielders 3 touch, fws unlimited – To create logical positional choices and rhythm
- All shots must be taken inside the box – Encourages passing

## **2. To Create Better Serving and Aerial Competence**

- Goals only scored from a wide serve – Players must challenge for aerial balls and serves must be hit
- Goals only be scored out of the air – Self explanatory

## **3. To Improve Control**

- 2 Touch Minimum – If you have to take 2 touches you have to control the ball
- 5 passes before you go to goal – The more players that have to control the ball the more it is worked on
- 2 touch minimum 3 touch maximum defenders can't tackle – only can intercept passes

## **4. To Improve Long Range Shooting**

- All shots struck from outside the box – Obviously that is long range shooting

## **5. To Improve Problem Solving (Every game has problem solving but these are examples of specific rules and restrictions you can provide to take care of important problem solving issues)**

- One Team Starts with a One Goal Lead – How do you change the game when you are winning or losing
- If a Certain Player Score for the Other Team it's worth 2 points – Stopping the most dangerous player
- One team plays with more players (8 vs 7, 8 vs 6) – Playing a man down and playing a man up

## **6. To Improve 1 vs 1 Defending**

- Forced Marking (every player is responsible for an opposing player) – Do not let your player beat you
- Jockey without tackling to teach players how to move to stay goal side of the attacker – in this scenario a defender can win the ball when the players tries to go past them or simply runs into them with the ball

### **7. To Improve Team Defending**

- All balls won from opponent in wide spaces are a point – Pressing in the wide space is logical because space is limited out wide
- All balls won from opponent before they connect 3 passes is a point – Simply teaches the team how to press
- Shots are worth 1 point, shots on goal 2 points, goals 3 points (losers do fitness) – You are not just penalized for goals but simply allowing shots
- All balls won in opponents defensive third are worth a point – High pressure defending creates goals

**Works On:** Everything, because it's the game

**The Drill** changes with rules, restrictions, and differing field configurations. Utilize these to create an emphasis that is important to the development of your team and players within the context of age and level appropriate player development.



## Prologue

By following the Practice Protocol you will run a more organized and efficient practice and challenge the kids to become better problem solvers and more competitive. But this is just the beginning. With an organized, competitive structure in place you will become a better teacher of the game. Good Luck and as always contact me with any questions.

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