# ENOT <br> BDABINTG SOCEER, FEALIY 

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This is really important. Read the whole book. It's about 20 or so pages of insight that may help you look forward to soccer practice with your daughter or son. I couldn't have imagined this to be possible before my first practice as the "head coach".

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## PROLOGUE

One of the greatest rewards as a parent is having your daughter or son want you involved in their fun. Coaching their team is a privilege. Yes, when you experience your child insisting that you HAVE to be their coach, you'l understand.

How is this true for someone who is not a "coach"? Fair question. I was not a coach when I replied to that inevitable email, "we can't have a team without a coach". I was scared to face these 9 year olds. I knew next to nothing about the sport and less about how to teach the game. I relied on what I did have, confidence in leading groups. I wasn't the master but I was comfortable to try and wing it. Find some skill you have and it'll be useful. Math wiz? Explain how shapes make the game go boom! Teacher? You already know how to do this. This booklet will give you some tools to not only survive the first practice, but thrive in the eyes of your child as the season progresses.

If you're reading this just to get a practice plan, skip to sections one, two, and fifteen. I encourage you to read the more to see the big picture if you can. This e-book doesn't have all the answers. It will give you tools and insight from my experiences. Enjoy!

"You can do it!" - Rob Schneider

## 1. YOU'RE THE COACH-BOSS AND EXPERT

Never let the kids know you're confused or nervous. They feed off your mood and energy. Demonstrating your confidence comes from preparation when you don't have experience. This approach to coaching soccer has a few core activities for all ages and a few progressions to explore when your team needs some variety, a new challenge, or they've worn out their patience mastering one area.

The key is repetition with purpose. Stick to these fundamentals and you will see growth in the quality of the games. Kids can learn much faster than adults. They need you to guide them through the reps. Just droning through an activity is almost worthless - unless you're just killing time. Players need to understand that completing an activity is not useful. Learning from an activity is how you find value.

## "GREETNESSISABUNCHOF SMALL THNGS OONE WELL,ADDEDUPOVER TIME, THAT MOST PEOPLL THMN ARE TOOSMALL TOMATTER" -ANSON DORRANCE, UNC WOMEN'S SOCCER HEAD COACH AND 21X NATIONAL CHAMPION

To play the game you need to have a few technical skills: passing, dribbling, and trapping make up a majority of a game. As a result of these three actions; shots get taken, saves made, and games are won/lost/tied. Let's focus on how to prepare players to be effective in these three areas.

Passing - moving the ball away from a dangerous position or into an opportunity to score a goal. There are diagonal passes - the preferred angle, forward - usually a positive development unless it is pushed over the end or sideline in haste, backwards- risky yet strategic if used wisely, and sideways (square) - potentially useful to deceive an approaching (pressuring) opponent at times.

Dribbling/Ball Mastery - you do not need to be a circus juggler. Juggling is a GREAT training tool and will come in handy on the occasional trap out of the air as an example. If you can learn to juggle, do it. There is one method - put in the minutes a day over time. The ball mastery you will gain by working through the mechanics of juggling will last a lifetime of soccer games. Dribbling otherwise is underrated. The quality of a player can be judged by simply setting up some cones and asking them to run through a few zig-zagging patterns. The light touch equates itself to control of the ball and hence possession for your team is prolonged.

Trapping - Every pass has a target. If it isn't a shot, someone needs to be able to receive it with their foot or other part of their body to maintain possession and sustain their opportunity to score more goals than their opponent. It's frustrating to see a player execute a slick pass and then it bounces off the wrong foot, backwards to create a counterattacking opportunity for your opponent.

Section three (Check the Technique) is packed with videos to coach these techniques. Before you skip that page to get to the activities, give it a shot to try and teach these to your players. You may be surprised how easily they learn it with simple instructions. You don't need to be the master at it. It's also okay to ask your players to work on this at home. Send their parents these video links with some context of why you're asking. Make them a partner in their child's game.

## 2.

## CREATEANENIIRONMENT

Do you remember the first day on a new job, moving into a college dorm with a floor of flatmates you've never met, the swim lessons, the blind date, and any other social interaction where you are not in control? That is how many children feel when they break the clutches of mom or dad at the edge of the playing/practice area. Bottom line, you're scary until you show them otherwise.

As players arrive, say hello and ask how they are doing. Most of the answers will be generic and that's okay. You've opened a dialogue that can continue for the whole session/ game together.

Names, names, names. Nothing makes a person feel less important than forgetting or messing up their name. Study the roster beforehand even if you don't have pictures. You are a hero if you know their names when you first meet them. Parents appreciate the lower bar to release them "into the wild".

You are succeeding if you hear from the parents that their daughter or son wouldn't stop talking about all the fun stuff they "got to do" vs. "had to do". Got vs. Had is an indicator.

Be a good person and someone they trust. Teaching them how to enjoy the game more can build this relationship. Find a good line to maintain your authority though. Kids will find the line to where they can take control and make it all about "SCRIMMAGE!". You're teaching the game so they can enjoy it more. Playing is part of practices - no exceptions in my view.

When in doubt, be vulnerable. Ask they their favorite food, movie, color, etc. Share your's and don't be afraid to be honest. Do you love Hanah Montana's "The Climb"? I do.

## 3. "CHECK THE TECHNIQUE,SEEIF YOU CANFOLLOW"-BIDDADDYKANE

These are individual or partner activities you can share with your team to build individual skills. Every club soccer program and most high school, college, and professional soccer team warm up in these areas to keep their skills sharp and challenge each other. Five minutes of juggling is common to start a session. Let them work through the mechanics of it. On the next page, l'll share some practice activities that reinforce these techniques (or technical) skills in group formats. $97 \%$ of the game involves passing and dribbling.

## Passing

Improving accuracy - fundamentals
Wall Ball - highly recommended every day
101 Partner Training Ideas - more suited to U12+

## Dribbling/Ball Mastery

Ball Mastery - great place to start
5 Essential Dribbling Skills - fundamentals Juggling - fundamentals
Turns (away from defenders) - some suited to U12+

## Trapping

On the ground - fundamentals
In the Air - fundamentals and more advanced
Chest Trap - fundamentals

## 4. THEY'RE HERE, WARM UP!

You'll read more about "rondo" in section 7. For now, it is the most effective and simple warm-up approach. The reason kids play soccer is to $\qquad$ ? Have fun playing the game. Rondo is a small-sided game of keep away. It's essentially a micro-game that engages their minds, body, and some may say, even their soccer soul. Set up multiple groups as players arrive to practice/game and get everyone engaged as you take attendance. See section 14 for a sample practice.

The coaching points are using a triangle to play away from the defensive pressure. If a Red player gains possession or deflects out of bounds, they become a green player.

See section 14 for a sample practice.


3 v 2 Rondo in a small space. Set up multiple groups.

PASSIIIG"BOXX"

Most players feel like they can pass accurately from all types of distances, until you put a target out." $X$ " marks the spot receiving target. Hit it and you've succeeded. Miss it, and your partner chases - "Sorry!".

Set up partners, each with a four cone box 4'x'4'. The minimum distance is $5-10$ yards for younger players. Older players (u13+) should be able to passes 15-20 yards with more than $75 \%$ accuracy. As a team gets a rhythm going, ask them to increase the pace on the ball to simulate "game speed".


Passing "BoXX" - Maintain accuracy and pace

Several reasons ("excuses"?) come up for why their pass didn't connect with their partner. The field is lumpy or their shoe wasn't tied correctly, etc. The bottom line is that the technique wasn't likely on point. In section three, the fundamentals of passing for all ages are highlighted. A good coach can evaluate an unskilled player in a few passes at a basic level when the technique hasn't been learned.

These are passing terms that don't apply to this activity but are common to many others in this ebook.

- Diagonal pass - a pass that travels at an angle to avoid the pressure of an opponent assumed to be in front of you. This is the foundation of rondo and triangles.
- Positive pass - receiving a pass and pushing it away from you to create some space for your next move and to allow you to step into the pass
- Negative pass- passing to a teammate directly or diagonally behind you - playing away from pressure to create a new opportunity.
- Square pass- a horizontal pass to an approaching player. This allows the approaching player to use their momentum to push the ball forward (assuming you have an opponent blocking your path forward).
- Seam pass - a pass between two players that "splits" the defense". This may happen as an attacking team plays plays a "through-ball" towards the net.


## 6. DUTCH SQUARE

Taking the passing/receiving accuracy and pace developments from "BoXX", you can now add dribbling and turns in this activity. The Red players in the interior box receive and return passes from the green players. After each pass, they check back into the interior box and look for an open green player to receive a new pass. Vary the receiving options: one touch, two touch, receive inside/outside of foot, receive from one player and pass to another, etc...
Communication from green and red expedites the actions.


Dutch BoXX - Pass and Receive from All

## RONDO

You will win more games in recreational soccer with a team that utilizes the principles of rondo (keep away) effectively to move the ball in a purposeful manner.

Rondo - it's the foundation of the modern game, regardless of what US Soccer may believe. Rondo activities can be in large or small groups, larger or smaller spaces. The rondo warm-up is effective in quickly engaging small groups of players as they arrive for a practice or game to get moving physically, tactically, and mentally. Rondo has it all: high pace, decisions, lots of touches on the ball.

Beyond the warm-up and skill development, a rondo style of play creates a more difficult style of play to defend as players and the ball move at a faster pace than playing a direct "kick and run" style of soccer (which looks like school recess kick ball).

A mistake some coaches make with training in the rondo style is moving the ball without purpose. What is our purpose with the quick switching of the ball? If we are trying to move the ball into scoring opportunities then we have the right idea. It can also be used to move the ball away from your own goal - although the faster you get this done the better in this area of the field.

The first time players use rondo they will likely have two experiences. Enjoying keeping the ball away from their friend who is chasing the passes and irritated that their friends are passing around them. These are two of the lessons they learn.

- Ball movement is a foundation in the game
- Exclusively running after the ball is a bad strategy

As players get comfortable with the triangle ball movement as those in possession of the ball, the defender seeks a new strategy - getting in a passing lane and anticipating where the next pass may go. As passes get deflected more and more, attackers have to get creative - ah, the holy grail of soccer IQ development. This is where movement off the ball happens. In the diagram, $\mathrm{A}, \mathrm{B}$, and C "switch" positions to create a more complex attack pattern to defend.

You can set up different shapes and add players as attackers and defenders to any size you have. Three attackers to two defenders is a good ratio to keep the ball moving and the defenders working in a compact shape/ formation.

A nice way to to teach the movement is to make a square with three players. They move the ball back and forth and change directions to increase the challenge for the defenders. This simulates the game movement to player "away from pressure" - another holy grail moment for coaches to see.

Check this video out for a rondo variations.

"3-Square"

8.DOLLLAR-"FOUR QUARTER BREAK"

Movement with and "off" the ball is a fundamental progression in the game. Static positions are boring to play and watch. This activity uses four zones (quarters) for two teams compete to move to each of the four quarters. Each team must complete 3-4 passes (rondo) in a zone before they can break through the border (green cone line) with a "through-ball" type pass. First team to occupy all four quarters/zones, scores a dollar (in theory). Run this several times to see who has the most "Money in the Bank" at season's end - let the winning team choose the ice cream.


Four "Quarters" Make a Dollar

## 9. THROUGH THE NEVER

The easiest way to teach the art of defending is to make it fun. Pressure, Cover, Balance are covered in section 12 and are the role of the red players here.

Through the Never features three learning objectives: ball movement (rondo), creating scoring chances ("Dollar"), and Pressure, Cover, Balance. It can be used with young and older players to build a balanced playing style. Set up three zones with a red team in the middle working to prevent through balls between green players on each end.


Through the Never - Hustle!

## 10. DOWN BY LAW

This is a brain bender and giggle machine. "Down by Law" - 80's slang for a close connection that would protect you. This builds team coordination and forces communication.

Assign up to 10 players a number in a sequence. Played in the pink square, player 1 passes to 2 , and so on until player 8 returns it to one. After each pass, the player has to cut around a green cone before receiving the next pass. Players should be communicating to their passer two steps ahead of the ball, "Sarah, you got me left", so Sarah knows where to pass before she receives it.


Communicate two steps ahead of receiving the pass

Once the team has a good rhythm, the coach can introduce a second, third, fourth ball. The third ball destroys the green cone requirement. See how long they go without loosing a ball.

The outcome of mastering this activity is your team will have built some chemistry, know each other's names, and be able to adapt to changes around them. This is one of the most prevalent reasons the most well-executed soccer training sessions look messy in a real game. Kids need to learn to be able adapt faster than anything they may have experienced beforehand. Soccer trains brains!

The coaching points include encouraging incessant and noisy communication. This doesn't work otherwise. Fastpaced soccer doesn't work without constant communication. You will also be focused on execution of passes. An errant pass outside the activity area cost time in the sequence - like the precious time on a scoring chance (as an attacker or defender). Mistakes cost you points. This activity prepares kids to execute and communicate well.

When you have a well oiled machine in this activity, you can play some loud music to require the players to amplify their voices. It also creates a more chaotic environment. If you can make it more chaotic than a game, your team will be able to handle game pressure more easily, or they will have experienced an equivalent chaos already.

## 11. DEFENDING VS. ATTACKING

In this section, I will not be sharing the holy grail to teaching attacking and defending. It is too broad for this little ebook. I will share a few tips though. Read on.

If I could require one lesson to all coaches, it would be to learn how to coach defending. If they can't score, they can't win. It also a style of play that is frustrating to face. Players who are fixated on scoring (for the glory) have their patience tested when a team locks down their opportunities for a full game.

The challenges is that kids generally are focused on one thing, scoring. You will not have much success with a Grade 2/3/4 player trying to convince them that a "defensive block" is how we win a tight game. Attacking is fun at all ages, but it is the primary fun at younger ages.

Attacking is the glory for these reasons. It is what shows up in the stats, the action shot for the media, and the reason grandparents can slip their grandchildren some cash - an awful incentive! Embrace this fact and balance out your practices. The path of least resistance as a coach is to have some "shooting time". I've never seen a team say, "no, we want to tighten up our back four now instead of shooting". Read the room and "let them eat cake" every so often.

Defending well wins games in my opinion. It also prepares players from a young age to understand the game at each level (defense, midfield, forwards). A player who only "plays striker" has just limited their chances of playing in high school unless they are clearly the most skilled player at that tryout or no that team. Be versatile to make the team as a strategy to earn your way to into the position you prefer. I digress...

Attacking fails when you are selfish. It also fails if you are laser focused on charging the goalie like a hungry rhino. Attack like a pack of wolves and you'll eat like a pack of wolves. How do you coach it then? The core technical skills of passing, dribbling, and receiving all lead you to be capable to build up an attack on a defense.

So give me something practical Scott! You got it. Here are the two most important areas you can focus on to develop your attacking and defending skills:

Attacking - $1 \mathrm{v} 1,2 \mathrm{v} 2,3 \mathrm{v} 3,4 \mathrm{v} 4$. These are the progressions you can make to larger small-sided games ( $7 \mathrm{~V} 7+$ ) from your technical focus (passing, dribbling, receiving).

Skill development (Section 3) becomes more evident as a players technical proficiency is leveraged to create scoring chances around defenders. Here are a few videos that can build attacking proficiency. To win games, you need player that can overtake other players $1 \mathrm{v1}$. As your team competes at a higher level, you'll need $2 \mathrm{v} 2,3 \mathrm{v} 3$, 4 v 4 skills for more sophisticated attacks. That's the beauty of growth in the game - it always provides chances to grow regardless of whether you are a new or professional player.

This 1 v 1 to 3 v 3 progression is a standard approach and requires a few nets of any size. You can substitute nets with cones and use player bags to stop the shots - if you require them to play the ball on the ground.

Penalty Box Shootout from Holden Youth Soccer. I love this activity because it has everyone engaged and it teaches players to act fast or lose their scoring chance.

Defending - The most fundamental defending concept is providing three layers of protection from the ball advancing. Can 3 players shut down 5 ? Yes, for a short period of time.

- Pressure player - closest to the ball
- Cover player - second closest (looks to intercept a bad pass or step in front of the intended passing target)


Pressure Cover Balance on a Wing Attack

- Balance - the furthest from the ball of the three players who focuses on delaying or stopping the attack if it has penetrated the first two layers of pressure.

Through the Never has become a Sterling favorite with the girls teams in recent years. It's a well-rounded activity that challenges the attackers to build-up and find an effective penetrating passes that break lines while teaching defenders the basics of pressure, cover, balance, and pressing. This is a high-pressure, high work rate activity that kids love and can continue to grow with it regardless of their age. The defense can typically begin the game by winning as the attackers think the 10 v 5 (or whatever size number of players you have) seems like a mismatch. This is the beauty of this activity. It removes the game-time misunderstanding that the attacker can easily penetrate zones with weaker passes. It also teaches the value of an organized defense through a compact shape, hustle, and communication.

## 12. THEFORMULA

We coach for different reasons. I do it because I love seeing kids grow beyond what they may have thought they could do. I was a professional cyclist until my early twenties and this taught me how to dissect a new task into workable segments and master each until the whole task (trick on a bike) could be done 8 out of 10 times. This could take weeks and months in some cases. This is where I learned to persevere to reach my goal. Then there was the fear factor.


1991 First Night Boston

Flying through the air on BMX bike is a huge thrill, but it can be scary - just like a child showing up for a soccer practice or a game. Take it step by step. There are lots of unknowns and that makes us anxious. Most of us want to flee the scene and get back into our bubble. A good coach can show a child how to break through the fear barrier little by little until they see the soccer field as a safe place where they can have fun.

On my bike, I was always experimenting. Even in shows and competitions, I was always testing my limits or my ability to deliver on what was asked of me from my team. Soccer is also a massive experiment with constantly moving pieces. This is chess at 100 miles per hour while skidding on an icy road - to the player that isn't comfortable yet. To the player who is in their comfort zone, it's still 100 miles per hour, but they can see the road ahead clearly and have confidence in your ability to navigate it. That's the magical place we all hope to see our players arrive at.

The formula isn't complicated:

- Love what you're doing
- Commit to grow
- Use goals

If you are having fun, and that happens in many forms for us all, you'll put your energy into it. If you have a dream, you'll work for it. If you have goals, you can hold yourself accountable to them.

Share these goals with people you implicitly trust. These are personal and a young player or teenager can quickly be convinced that what they are doing is dumb - end of the dream.

Track your goals and assess how they are helping you. Are they all focused on technical skills when mixing in some physical and tactical elements could be the way your reach the next level in our dream?

It's your dream. Approach it however works best for you. Nobody should be telling you that something is impossible. I don't believe that is a healthy attitude for a coach or player to accept.

## 13.

## PRACTICESESSIONS

Can you get each player 400-600 touches on the ball in every practice? If it's done well, you can get 400 in five minutes. Choose your activities to maximize touches on the ball. Repetition and the experience of playing the game cannot be substituted.

The key to a successful practice is to keep the kids engaged. This equates to fun and wanting to come back and keep playing and learning. US soccer has a great methodology called Play Practice Play. You can take a free online course in a few hours that will be invaluable, like this little book hopefully, for the entirety of your daughter or son's soccer life. You can also take the Holden Youth Soccer course online as well. l've heard, "how does Holden have teams that are so much stronger?". This is the answer.

A few final tips on running an effective and enjoyable practice before you explore the format. The four "Don'ts" of coaching apply to all sports. Malcolm Brown nails it in this video. Watch it in addition to reading the list below.

No laps
No yelling or use of negative language
No lines
No lectures
We don't enjoy any of these actions as adults. Whey would we expect kids to engage with us if we do this to them. The era of the screaming coach are declining. Make the most of your time with the kids as a mentor and a coach. Use respect as your foundation and it will show up as unity on your team.

Think of your practice in four phases (US Soccer Play, Practice Play):

1. Play - as kids arrive, welcome every player by name. Ask them to drop their bag and come and see you when they are ready. You can set up a small-side game as your attendance list is filling up. US Soccer does not use rondo, but I highly recommend it for simplicity and mental development.
2. Practice - emphasize your core concept to learn that day. Choose one aspect of the game and apply it in an activity. An example may be 5. Passing Boxxes that progresses into 10. Dollar - Quarter Break activities.
3. Play - take the rondo warm-up and the learning activity and put it into a game scenario. Evaluate if they have learned your core objective for today. Interrupt them sparingly and quick (less than 30 seconds).
4. End - Assemble your team and ask them what they focused on today. Let them struggle a little and lead them to the answers. If you tell them the full answer, you've set up an expectation that they can be silent at every practice. This is the uncomfortable zone they need to learn to break out of now.

What do you do if they nailed the practice phase, but can't execute in the second play phase? You can stop the smallside game a few times. Be very brief (under 30 seconds) to reinforce the key point. Let them play for a few more minutes and decide if you see improvement. Kids tune out after that. You will not see them master it in one session. Try it again at a few more practices and you will see improvement.

Random alert! Please do me a favor though. Two activities that are a waste of good time together are "thunder" and "world cup". This is for school recess and your backyards. Both have players standing around, not playing or touching the ball. They are fun. I don't deny that. They just don't teach the principles of the game well. Have you watched a 12 vs 2 match? No nutritional value in World Cup or Thunder.

## 14. NONE OF THIS WORKED

Do you have a group of kids that make you feel like you need a safe/mercy word to have a parent rescue you? Not every player wants to be with you or has the same enthusiasm for learning. You WILL NOT reach every player and not every parent will show their appreciation for the time and effort you've invested.

Reach out to your fellow coaches and Board members for guidance and even an in-person demo with your team. Coaches are generally coaches because they enjoy or love teaching. We'll share what we know because that's what we do.

What do you do with the 10-16 year old player that knows it all, is expecting a call up to the USWNT/USMNT? Play this Video Have they done all this for their entire career (into high school):? Get them back to work then.

I'm the Sterling Youth Soccer Association Director of Coaching Development. I can help you.
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## 15.

## 2020 SISA PRACTICE PLAN

Thank you for volunteering to coach. Our goal this year for the Grade $2,3,4,5$, and 6 girls and boys is to prioritize playing the game with a basic warm-up based on two areas; rondo and touches on the ball. I highly recommend reading section 4 for details on rondo and section three that includes ball mastery. The practice plan is detailed here though.

Practice Night Schedule:
10 minutes - Rondo warm up (Section 4 in ebook)
10 minutes - Technical development (Section 3)
40 minutes - Scrimmage

## Preparing the Field:

If your team has 10 players, make two groups of 5 for rondo sessions. With a different number, you can adapt to 4 player passing to start and progress to 3 v 1 rondo. Each square uses four cones in a $15 \times 15$ yard square ( $10 \times 10$ for younger teams if you like).

Set up cones for each player on the sideline with six feet of spacing. This is home base for them when they are not on the field.

## Player arrival:

Welcome each player by name and ask them to place their bag on the sideline cone and bring their ball to the playing area. The coach can start passing with the first player or two and then eventually you'll have the 4-5 player passing square in action. As more players arrive, repeat this until you have


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5 Player Passing Box - Move to Corners with X Shape
both running. If your player total is not $8,10,12$, you can pass with the few extra players and then swap them into the rondo. All the touches are good progress. Run this for the first 5-10 minutes.

The five players begin by passing to each other and moving to different corners with each pass. The ideal "shape" is an " X " to stretch the defenders as far as possible and form passing triangles. After a few minutes of successful passing, switch to a 3 attacker and 2 defender. This is essentially "keep-away" with three players moving inside the square to prevent the remaining two players from gaining control of the ball or deflecting it

In section three of the ebook, technical skill development is covered. The first "ball skills" | recommend are toe taps and shuffles to build their comfort with the ball and to learn how they can manipulate it. These are featured in the Ball Mastery section. There are also dribbling, juggling, and turns covered.

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5 Player Rondo

These are all essential technical skills to play the game efficiently and effectively.

Scrimmage:
If you have two teams of the same age practicing, you can arrange for team scrimmages. If you prefer, you can set up a small-sided scrimmage (5v5) with just your team. To save time, establish this with the other coach before your players arrive if possible.

During the scrimmage, reinforce the principles of rondo and the technical development. You shouldn't expect mastery in the first few sessions. Kids are amazing in their ability to learn with repetition and patience in their coaches. Stay true to your plan and they'll benefit from it.

In these activities, you can coach the following ideas:

Rondo:<br>Move to open space<br>Pass away from pressure<br>Communicate with your teammates

Technical:
Pass with a purpose - not kickball
Maintain control of the ball if you have no pressure on you
Find a good shot within your shooting range
You'll be the hero when they are playing and they see the lessons applied. It makes the game more fun.

When in doubt, reach out.
We'll help you figure it out.


## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## Scott Moroney

USSF D \& Grassroots (4v4, 7v7, 9v9, 11v11) licenses
NFHS AIC (accredited interscholastic coach) National License
FC Stars Coach - U9-14 girls (2019- Present)
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District Select Program (DSP) coach -U14 girls (2019 - present)
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