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Soccer is a game of choices, full of freedom with an abundance of opportunity for individual creativity. And even though many coaches think their influence during a game is far-reaching the choices are solely made by the players on the field. Those choices have to be within the restrictions of the Laws of the Game and the boundaries of the field. They have to be the right choice or the opponent will steal the ball and possibly score. Another very important reason why soccer is such a difficult game is the fact that the ball is always "free". There is no protected ball possession. This leads to many moments of transition and the players having to make correct choices over and over again. Other factors that make soccer a complicated game is the duration and the continuous play with few substitutions.

In order to play soccer the players have to recognize each particular soccer situation and respond with the correct technical and tactical action. Each player needs a degree of Technique (the skills to play the game), Insight (the skill to take the appropriate action in a given situation) and Communication (the interaction between the player and all the elements involved such as teammates, opponents, the weather, the weight and size of the ball, the field, the referees, spectators). It's the responsibility of the coach to develop these three skills step by step, always beginning with Technique.

It is difficult to formulate a step-by-step approach to learning how to play soccer, because the learning depends largely on practice. The development of players depends on how much time they spend playing. It's that simple. But lack of time is nowadays enemy number one as far as learning to play soccer, -and sports in general-, is concerned. Increased competition of other sports, computer games, television and so forth has had an adverse effect in this context. All over the world children used to spend hours playing soccer on the streets. They devised all sorts of soccer games, from scaled down matches to games which they depended on the presence of walls, sidewalks and trees. This was how children mastered the skills of the game. The constantly changing circumstances stimulated their creativity. Progress went hand in hand with growing insight, sometimes referred to as "soccer intelligence". Nowadays soccer activities have to be squeezed into 1 or 2 hours of training each week at the club where games and drills or activities are devised, started and stopped by a coach. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the couple of hours on the playing and practice field are used in the best possible way; in a so-called accelerated learning process.

In order to accelerate the learning process the 11v11 game needs to be simplified, while at the same time as many typical features and characteristics of the game must be retained. Small sided games are the ideal way to learn playing soccer quicker. However, given the minimal amount of playing time available for soccer practice, more is required to speed up the soccer development process. The quality of coaching in the basic games is also a crucial factor. By making proper use of the simplified soccer games, a youth coach can accelerate the learning process of his young players. A coach can help their development by passing on his expertise and skills. By the way, also the players of Manchester United, Inter Milan, FC Barcelona and all other top teams in the world play small sided games on a daily basis.

It is impossible to formulate exact written instructions on how to improve and develop players. But it's a fact that kids learn to play soccer by playing soccer. Not by running around the park or doing wind sprints. You as a coach have to make sure they are always playing the game during your practice sessions. And you have to make sure that your parents stimulate their kids to play around the house as often as possible too!