



10-Week Season Plan for Special Olympics Football (Soccer) Program

The following football (soccer) 10-week season plan should be used as a *guideline* as you meet your athletes where they are regarding their individual skills and game development.

Preseason

Four weeks before season:

1. Begin final preparations for the season—confirm practice location, dates, and times; begin scheduling competition; create agendas for coaches' meeting and orientation and parents', guardians', and caregivers' meeting and orientation.
2. Send out promotional flier or brochure to the athletes and coaches.

Two weeks before season:

1. Conduct orientation and first meeting with coaches.
2. Conduct social get-together for orientation and first meeting with parents, guardians, caregivers, and athletes; involve assistant coaches.
 - a. Provide practice schedule and competition schedule for major events.
 - b. Go through home training program of overall fitness that parents, guardians, and caregivers can also do.
 - c. End with food and beverages.

Week 1

Warm-Up

Light jogging or brisk walking for 4 to 5 minutes to increase overall body temperature and prepare the body for more vigorous activity.

Stretching

Upper body: Start in a standing position, interlace fingers above head with palms facing upward. Pull arms back behind head and up. Be careful not to drop the head forward or arch the back. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds.

Quadriceps: Stand and hold on to a wall with one hand. Hold the top of the right foot with the left hand. Gently pull the heel toward the buttocks. Be sure that the bent knee points straight down, near the support leg. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds and repeat to the opposite side.

Groin: Sit on the floor with knees bent and soles of feet together. Pull heels as close to body as comfortably possible. Grasp ankles or shins and place elbows in insides of knees. Gently press knees open with elbows and stretch upper body forward until an easy stretch is felt. Be sure that

the bend is initiated from the hips with a flat lower back and that the eyes look forward. Do not round upper back. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds.

Hamstring: Sit on floor with left leg extended and sole of right foot placed against the knee or thigh of the left leg. Look straight ahead and slowly bend forward from the hips toward the foot to the extended leg until an easy stretch is felt. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds and repeat with the other leg.

Calf: Stand in a front lunge position with both feet pointing forward. Hold on to solid support (wall). Position the bent front knee over the ankle; slowly move the hips forward keeping the lower back flat. Be sure to keep both heels on the ground and toes pointing forward. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds and repeat to the opposite side.

Skill Instruction: Dribbling

Assessment:

The *beginner* player typically kicks the ball some yards away and runs after it rather than keeping it close and under control. Dribbling under control tends to be difficult because the player dribbles with the toe. These players can change direction slowly, but often lose the ball when pressured by an opponent.

The *intermediate* player can move the ball forward with the toe pointed down and keeping the ball close and under control. He can change direction using the inside or outside of the foot to beat opponents, but may have difficulty executing fakes to beat opponents.

Teaching the skill:

1. Have player dribble forward using the top of the foot along the outside of the laces, pointing the toe down toward the ground. Keep the ball close—within 1 yard from the body. **Key words:** "inside of the foot," "light touches," "toe down."
2. Encourage player to use the inside of the foot to quickly change direction and beat an opponent. **Key words:** "inside of the foot," "change direction," "chop across the ball."
3. Encourage player to use outside of the foot to shield the ball from opponents and evade their tackles. **Key words:** "keep it on the outside," "spin away."
4. Teach players to use the sole of the foot to change direction with the ball. **Key word:** "reverse."

Competition Drills

Dribble in the Square: Designate a 15-yard by 15-yard square. Every player has a soccer ball. Players dribble around inside the square, avoiding collisions with other players. This drill can be used to introduce different dribbling techniques. Coach can play as a chaser. Players must try to avoid being kicked out of the square. Play for 30 seconds. Award 1 point for keeping the ball safe.

Immediate Attack: Play on a mini-field, as in Dribble in the Square, with goals 4 yards wide. Form two teams of three players, one of whom is the goalkeeper. Play a regular game except that when a player gets possession of the ball, she must immediately dribble against an opponent and try to get past the opponent. The player cannot pass the ball before doing this. Award 1 point for successfully dribbling past an opponent and 3 points for each goal scored.

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up). Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework." Make team announcements at this time.

Week 2

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review last week's skill.

Skill Instruction: Shooting

Assessment:

The *beginner* player is able to kick in the general direction of the goal but without any consistency or power. This player usually kicks the ball with the toe or awkwardly with the inside of the foot. He may slow down or stop before attempting to shoot and finds it very difficult to shoot a ball that is rolling across the body.

The *intermediate* player has a positive attitude toward taking shots and is able to shoot with a reasonable degree of accuracy. This player is able to shoot with the top of the foot (instep) to generate power. She occasionally connects successfully with a rolling ball but has learned to increase success by controlling the ball before shooting. The player is still likely to lose composure and effectiveness under pressure and has not mastered the advanced skill of volleying the ball out of the air.

Teaching the skill:

1. When shooting, approach the ball slightly from the side, not straight on. This allows the foot to make a more natural and effective strike on the ball. **Key words:** "from the side," "sweep around."
2. For good accuracy and power, keep the head down and strike the ball with the instep and with the ankle firmly locked. **Key words:** "head down," "toe down," "watch the foot strike."
3. Make a strong impact on the ball and follow through with the foot. **Key word:** "strike."

Competition Drills

Shoot-Out: Use a regular goal or marker cones. Place a starting cone 15 to 20 yards from the goal. Three players on the "shooting team," three players on the "goalkeeping team." Shooter has 3 seconds to dribble and shoot. Coach counts down "3, 2, 1, shoot." Goalkeepers rotate after each shot. Five shots each, then change teams.

1 vs. 1 to Goal!: Designate a 2-yard by 20-yard square with goals at opposite ends. Form two teams of three players. Number equally matched players 1, 2, and 3. Play #1 from each team on the field with #2 in goal and #3 behind the goal as a chaser. Play 1 vs. 1 for 1 minute. Coach rolls in spare balls when needed. One point for each shot on target and 3 points per goal. Rotate players. Keep the team score.

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up). Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework." Make team announcements at this time.

Week 3

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review dribbling and shooting.

Skill Instruction: Control (receiving)

Assessment:

The *beginner* player usually reacts to a ball by kicking it rather than trying to control it. If the player does attempt to control the ball, it tends to bounce off the foot or leg and is usually recovered by another player.

The *intermediate* player has the ability to get behind the flight of most balls that come within playing distance. He successfully brings a rolling ball under control using the inside of the foot and makes a good attempt at controlling air balls using the chest. While basic control is good, the player often loses composure and the ball when pressured by opponents.

Teaching the skill:

1. Use the inside of the foot to bring a ground ball under control. All the body weight should be on the supporting leg, with the receiving foot raised slightly off the ground. **Key words:** "open out the foot," "raise the foot."
2. Relax and cushion the ball rather than offering resistance against the ball. **Key words:** "soft foot," "cushion."
3. For air balls, relax the body as the ball hits the chest or thigh, depending on the height of the ball. "Give" with the ball rather than offering resistance. **Key words:** "relax," "cushion."

Competition Drills

Control and Shoot: One coach per four players—set up a 4-yard by 2-yard goal. Place a starting cone 12 yards out and a shooting cone 6 to 8 yards out. Coach rolls the ball out slowly to player, who must control it and then dribble and shoot within 3 seconds. Score 1 point per successful control and shot. Same player repeats three times and then goes to back of line. With more mobile players, roll the ball slightly to one side and make the player move to get behind the ball, control it, and shoot.

Control and Shoot With Chasers: Divide players into three teams: shooting team, defending team, and goalkeeping team. Set up a 4-yard by 2-yard goal, a shooting cone at 15 yards, and a defender's cone at 20 yards. Coach stands to the side of the goal and rolls out a ball to the shooter. Shooter controls the ball, then dribbles and shoots. As the shooter receives the ball, the defender is released and tries to chase and tackle the shooter. Shooter can shoot at any time. Goalkeepers must remain within 1 yard of the goal line. Players return to their group after the shot. Rotate groups after 5 minutes.

Understanding the Game

Teach players about the basic aim and organization of the game through mini-soccer games. Progress from the simplest 1 vs. 1 situations up to full games as players become more familiar with the basic principles and rules of play. Mini-soccer games can become a part of every practice.

Attack and Defend (1 vs. 1): Designate a 15-yard by 10-yard area with goals at each end. Form two teams of three wearing different-colored scrimmage vests, and number the players 1, 2, and 3 (no goalkeepers). Coach stands at the halfway line with several soccer balls. When a player's number is called, that player comes out and plays for 30 to 45 seconds against opponent with the same number. Other players wait behind the goal and help collect balls and return them to the coach. If the ball goes out, the coach immediately rolls in another ball.

Key questions to ask your players:

- Which goal are you scoring in?
- Which goal are you defending?
- What color shirt is your team wearing?
- What color shirt is the other team wearing?
- What do you do when you have the ball? (ATTACK!)
- What do you do when the opponent has the ball? (DEFEND!)

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up). Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework." Make team announcements at this time.

Week 4

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review dribbling, shooting, and control (receiving).

Skill Instruction: Passing and understanding the game

Assessment:

The *beginner* tends to play with her head down, looking at the ball, and so is rarely able to look for a teammate before passing. She usually uses the toe or awkwardly tries to pass with the inside of the foot. A player at this level can kick successfully in the correct general direction, but rarely to a teammate.

The *intermediate* player is able to locate and make eye contact with the intended receiver before passing. He uses the inside of the foot for short passes and the instep for longer passes. A player at this level still finds some passes difficult to master (outside of the foot, chipped, and one-touch passes). In addition, he is deliberate and predictable when passing in a game and does not disguise or fake passes.

Teaching the skill:

1. Make eye contact with the intended receiver. This is the starting point for successful passing. **Key words:** "head up," "look at your teammate."

2. The inside of the foot can be used for short "push" passes. The ball should be struck firmly, with the foot following through in the direction of the intended receiver. **Key words:** "push the ball firmly," "follow through with your foot."
3. The instep can be used to send longer passes. **Key words:** "toe down," "firm strike."

Competition Drills

Soccer Bowling: Designate a 10-yard by 10-yard square. Place 5 to 10 cones up the middle. Form teams of three or four players. Players pass and try to knock down cones. Coach retrieves and returns balls from the middle. Keep time to see how long it takes to knock down all the cones, or play one group against another.

3 vs. 1 Keep-Away: Designate a 15-yard by 15-yard square. Position one player in the middle (start with the coach). Three players stand on the outside of the square with the ball. See how many passes the three players can make before being intercepted. Rotate middle players every 2 minutes. Show players how to move to the open corner to get open for a pass. See which group can get the most passes.

Understanding the Game

Teammates (2 vs. 2): Designate a 20-yard by 10-yard field with 4-yard by 2-yard goals at each end. Form four teams of two. Two teams stand behind each goal. Coach stands at the halfway line with several soccer balls. Teams come out to play 2 vs. 2. If the ball goes out of play, leave it and receive another from the coach. If the defending player gains possession of the ball, she must pass the ball to a teammate before trying to score. For lower-ability players, allow each team to dribble and pass from one goal to the other without any opposition. Introduce opponents later.

Key questions to ask your players:

Who is your teammate? Who do you pass to? Do you tackle your teammate? (NO!)

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up). Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework." Make team announcements at this time.

Week 5

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review dribbling, shooting, control (receiving), and passing and understanding the game.

Skill Instruction: Heading the ball

Assessment:

The *beginner* is sometimes fearful of the ball and avoids contact. Players who do try to head the ball do so without looking at the ball, heading it with the top of the head rather than with the forehead. The result is inconsistent power and little accuracy.

The *intermediate* player shows no fear of attacking the ball with the head and is able to use good technique: keeps eyes on the ball and plays the ball with the forehead. He is able to get some power behind the ball by using the upper body and neck. The player directs the ball in the correct general direction but without fine accuracy. Most intermediate players still find it difficult to jump and head a ball successfully.

Teaching the skill:

1. Look at the ball as it comes toward the head and keep the eyes open as contact is made. **Key words:** "eyes open," "watch the ball."
2. To get more power, rock onto the back foot before the ball arrives and get some leverage when heading. **Key words:** "rock back."
3. Make contact with the forehead, not with the top of the head, and attack through the ball for power. **Key words:** "forehead," "power through."

Competition Drills

Head to the Coach: Designate a 15-yard by 15-yard square. Assign one coach per three players. Each coach has a soccer ball. Players jog around the coaches. Coach calls a player's name, then gently tosses a ball to be headed back. One point for a successful header. To keep players thinking, introduce surprise commands like "Freeze," "Sit," and "All to the center," upon which players must react quickly or else lose a point.

Head on Goal: Divide players into two teams of three players each: attacking team and goalkeeping team. Set up a 4-yard by 2-yard goal and a marker cone at 12 yards in front of the goal. Coach stands to the side of the goal and throws a ball underhand to an oncoming attacker. Attacker attempts to head the ball and score. Goalkeepers must remain within 1 yard of the goal line. Goalkeepers rotate after each shot. Repeat. Each player gets three attempts; then switch teams.

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up). Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework." Make team announcements at this time.

Week 6

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review dribbling, shooting, control (receiving), passing and understanding the game, and heading.

Skill Instruction: Tackling and understanding the game

Assessment:

The *beginner* usually chases the ball or an approaching opponent and makes some kind of effort to kick the ball away. She is either tentative and may fear making tackles, or is somewhat "out of control" and makes contact with just about everything except the ball.

The *intermediate* player can successfully focus on, track, and close down opponents dribbling with the ball. He has the coordination to make good, strong contact on the ball using the inside of the foot. However, this player often falls for fakes from the attacking player.

Teaching the skill:

1. When an opponent has the ball, move quickly to close the distance to that player. As you near the player, slow down and concentrate. Focus attention on the ball, not on the opponent's body. **Key words:** "go to the ball," "don't let them dribble."
2. When you see an opportunity to get the ball, make a firm strike with the inside of the foot. Get your weight behind the tackle—do not reach in. **Key words:** "see your foot strike the ball."
3. Be alert after you make contact. The ball will often run loose. Be ready to pursue it and gain possession. Counterattack quickly. **Key words:** "make contact, then make it yours."

Understanding the Game

Field Positions and Team Play (3 vs. 3): Designate a 25-yard by 15-yard field with 4-yard by 2-yard goals. Form two teams of three without goalkeepers (you can also play this as 4 vs. 4 with a goalkeeper). Designate positions: right wing, left wing, center. Play a regular 3 vs. 3 game (use kick-ins for a ball over the sidelines). Coach how to play in each part of the field. Focus on the wing players. Occasionally call "Freeze!" Players must stop and check their positions. Award points for good positional play.

Key questions to ask your players:

What position are you playing? Where are the wings? We don't crowd, we ____ (SPREAD OUT!)

Great soccer players play as a ____ (TEAM!)

Week 7

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review last week's skill, heading, and passing and understanding the game.

Skill Instruction: Goalkeeping

Assessment:

The *beginner* goalkeeper is effective only if the ball is played directly at her. This player often reacts to ground balls by kicking them away rather than using the hands. The player has limited ability to time an effective dive for shots going into the corners of the goal. Throws of the ball out to teammates may be inaccurate.

The *intermediate* goalkeeper has a good awareness of the goal and of basic goalkeeping techniques and responsibilities. The player shows good lateral motion to get in a good position to take a shot and usually attempts to get his hands to the ball. The player attempts to dive for ground shots, although these dives may be slow. A goalkeeper at this level is generally not able to dive for shots in the air or attack crosses in the air. He should be able to distribute the ball accurately to teammates.

Teaching the skill (handling balls coming straight at the goalkeeper):

1. Goalkeeping consists of occasional flurries of action and a lot of standing and waiting. Maintaining concentration when the ball is away from the goal is critical. **Key words:** "on your toes," "watch the play."
2. As the ball approaches, the goalkeeper should be in the ready position, with hands up at about waist height. **Key words:** "ready position, "hands up."
3. If the ball is rolling along the ground, the goalkeeper must get behind the line of the ball and either (a) scoop the ball up with the legs straight and together or (b) go down on one knee and scoop the ball up. **Key words:** "get behind the ball," "feet together, scoop," "one knee down, scoop."
4. For a ball coming in the air, a goalkeeper should secure the ball with both hands. The two hands need to work together as one unit. **Key words:** "two hands," "catch it—hug it."

Competition Drills

Fundamentals: Set up a triangle, 4 yards per side, using large cones or flags. Position a goalkeeper on each side of the triangle. Coach stands in the middle with several balls. Go around the group, working on goalkeeping fundamentals. Goalkeepers throw the ball back to the coach. Repeat, but this time throw the balls randomly to keep goalkeepers thinking and mentally alert.

Goalie in the Middle: Mark out a central goal 4 yards by 2 yards (or a full-size goal for 11-a-side players) with flags or cones. Goalkeeper stands in the middle. Goalkeeper receives different kinds of shots (easy at first, then building up to hard shots). Goalkeeper takes a ball from one side, then quickly turns around and takes a shot from the other side. Count number of saves made before a goal is scored.

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up). Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework." Make team announcements at this time.

Week 8

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review heading and goalkeeping.

Skill Instruction: Team play (understanding the game)

Scrimmage or practice game in preparation for upcoming tournaments

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up). Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework." Make team announcements at this time.

Week 9

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review skills and elements of game needing work based on previous competition.

Skill Instruction: Team play (understanding the game)

Scrimmage or practice game in preparation for final competition

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up). Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework." Make team announcements at this time.

Week 10

Warm-Up

As in Week 1

Review skills and elements of game needing work based on previous competition.

Skill Instruction: Team play (understanding the game)

Scrimmage or practice game in preparation for final competition

Cool-Down and Team Talk

Brisk walking and light stretching (as in warm-up).

1. Give encouragement for jobs well done and make suggestions regarding "homework."
 2. Make team announcements at this time.
 3. Collect uniforms following final competition.
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Postseason

1. Meet with coaches to evaluate the season and each athlete in preparation for next year.
2. Conduct end-of-season celebration to include all constituents: parents, guardians, caregivers; athletes; coaches; and any other school or support personnel who have helped your program.
 - a. Provide certificates and acknowledgement of improvements to all athletes and volunteers.
 - b. Show video highlights or PowerPoint with pictures highlighting season.
 - c. Finish with food and beverages and music.
 - d. Provide postseason fitness program to athletes.
3. Review uniform and equipment inventory; make notes as to what needs to be replaced for next year; store.
4. For those athletes not participating in the next sport season, communicate and monitor fitness program.