

Lesson 1: High-Intensity Game Simulation

Sample lesson. This is a real lesson from the U16 curriculum, printed the way a parent prints it from the lesson page. Every lesson in the programme has the same parts.

Duration: 60 min

Unit: Elite Performance & Season Review

Equipment: Cones, balls, goals, pinnies, stopwatch

Age group: U16 (9th – 10th grade)

Objective

Maintain decision-making quality above 75% accuracy during fatigued conditions and demonstrate tactical adaptability across 3 different game-state scenarios.

Activities

1. Match-Intensity Intervals: 30-second all-out sprints with 30-second active recovery (jogging) (9 minutes)

Setup: Mark out a 20-30 yard (18-27 meter) sprint lane using two cones. Each player needs a soccer ball and starts at one cone.

Steps

1. SET UP: Place two cones 20-30 yards apart. Each player stands at one cone with a soccer ball, ready to sprint.
2. SPRINT PHASE: On 'GO!', players perform an ALL-OUT sprint from one cone to the other for 30 seconds. Focus on maximum speed and effort.
3. RECOVERY PHASE: Immediately after the 30-second sprint, players begin a 30-second ACTIVE RECOVERY, jogging slowly back to the starting cone while dribbling their soccer ball at their feet.
4. REPETITIONS: Complete 8 full repetitions of this 30-second sprint followed by 30-second active recovery. Maintain consistent timing for each interval.
5. PERCEIVED EFFORT (RPE): Players should aim for a high RPE (7-9 out of 10) during sprints and a moderate RPE (3-5 out of 10) during recovery. Listen to your body.

Coaching points

- This drill directly mimics the stop-and-go, high-intensity demands of a competitive soccer match, improving anaerobic fitness.
- Emphasize 'ALL-OUT' effort during the sprint phase to truly challenge the anaerobic system and build match-specific speed endurance.
- The active recovery with the ball maintains light cardiovascular work and ball familiarity, crucial for maintaining touch under fatigue.
- Encourage players to monitor their RPE to understand their body's response, ensuring they push hard but also recover effectively.

Parent teaching guide

Why this activity? This activity is all about building the 'stop-and-go' fitness that's crucial in a real soccer game. It trains your child's body to sprint hard for a short time and then recover quickly, mimicking

situations like chasing a loose ball, making a tackle, and then getting ready for the next play. This builds stamina and ensures they can perform at their best throughout a match.

Safety

- Ensure the sprint lane is completely clear of any tripping hazards like toys, rocks, or uneven ground.
- Remind your child to listen to their body and take extra breaks if they feel dizzy, lightheaded, or overly fatigued.
- Have water readily available and encourage sips between repetitions to stay hydrated.
- Ensure your child has warmed up properly with some light jogging and dynamic stretches before starting and cools down with static stretches afterward.

What to say

- "GO! All-out sprint! Push it!"
- "Now, active recovery! Gentle dribble back, catch your breath."
- "Fantastic effort on that sprint! Now focus on soft touches."
- "Keep that ball close during your recovery, like it's glued to your foot."
- "You've got this! Dig deep for that sprint!"
- "Remember, fast feet for the sprint, soft feet for the dribble."

It's working when

- Child is giving maximum effort during the sprint phase, showing quick leg turnover and speed.
- They transition immediately into a slow, controlled dribble during the recovery phase.
- The ball stays close to their feet and under control during the recovery jog, even when tired.
- They maintain a consistent pace and effort level across multiple repetitions.
- Child is breathing heavily but not completely exhausted after the recovery, showing good work-rest balance.

2. Game-State Pressure Drill (30 minutes)

Setup: Set up a 40x30m playing field using cones or markers, with a goal at each end. Divide players into two teams of 7 (7v7).

Steps

1. SCENARIO 1 START: Designate one team as TEAM A (starting 2-0 down) and the other as TEAM B (starting 2-0 up). Set a timer for 10 minutes.
2. PLAY THE GAME: Both teams play a regular 7v7 match. TEAM A must try to score at least two goals to tie or win within the 10 minutes.
3. DEFEND THE LEAD: TEAM B's objective is to protect their 2-0 lead for the entire 10 minutes, preventing TEAM A from scoring.
4. SWITCH ROLES: After the 10 minutes conclude, stop play. Teams switch roles: the team that was previously leading is now down 2-0, and vice-versa. Reset the 10-minute timer and play again.
5. DISCUSSION: After both 10-minute segments, gather players. Discuss the psychological and tactical adjustments each team made when chasing a game and when protecting a lead.

Coaching points

- Observe how players' decision-making changes under pressure when needing to score quickly versus needing to defend a lead.
- Encourage tactical adjustments: higher defensive lines and more direct play when chasing, compact defense and counter-attacks when leading.
- Focus on communication: How do leaders emerge and organize the team when the game state demands specific actions?

- Highlight the psychological aspect: Discuss how frustration or complacency can impact performance in high-stakes situations.

Parent teaching guide

Why this activity? This activity helps your child understand how the score and time remaining in a game influence decision-making and strategy. It teaches them to adapt their play, whether they need to urgently score a goal or protect a lead, skills crucial for success in real soccer matches.

Safety

- Ensure the playing area is clear of any obstacles or hazards that players could trip over.
- Remind players to be aware of their surroundings and avoid reckless challenges to prevent collisions.
- Encourage regular water breaks, especially during longer sessions or on warm days, to stay hydrated.
- Always supervise the activity closely to ensure fair play and address any potential issues immediately.

What to say

- "Team A, you're down 2-0! How can we get a shot on goal quickly?"
- "Team B, protect that lead! Can we keep our defensive shape?"
- "Great effort! Think about what you need to do right now – score or defend?"
- "We need to push forward! Can we make a quick pass into space?"
- "Excellent communication! That's what we need when the pressure is on."
- "What changes in your mind when you're trying to score versus trying to defend a lead?"

It's working when

- The 'chasing' team demonstrates urgency, taking more shots and making more direct passes towards the goal.
- The 'leading' team organizes defensively, trying to keep a compact shape and clear the ball effectively.
- Players on both teams communicate more frequently, calling for the ball or directing teammates.
- Players make different tactical decisions based on whether they are trying to score or prevent a goal.
- The 'chasing' team shows resilience and doesn't give up, even when time is running out.

3. Fatigue Decision-Making: After completing a high-intensity running circuit (4 minutes) (27 minutes)

Setup: Set up a 25x20m playing area with small goals at each end for the 4v4 game. Designate a separate area for a 4-minute high-intensity running circuit. Players are divided into two teams of 4.

Steps

1. BEGIN with a 4-minute HIGH-INTENSITY RUNNING CIRCUIT. This circuit should include sprints, agility drills, and quick changes of direction to elevate heart rates.
2. IMMEDIATELY after the 4-minute circuit, players transition onto the 25x20m field. There is NO rest period between the circuit and the game.
3. PLAY a 4v4 game for 3 minutes. Players should focus on scoring goals, maintaining possession, and making quick decisions under game conditions.
4. AFTER the 3-minute game, take a 2-minute RECOVERY period. Players can walk, stretch lightly, and rehydrate during this time.
5. REPEAT the entire sequence (running circuit, 4v4 game, recovery) for a total of 3 SETS. The coach will observe decision-making throughout.

Coaching points

- Observe how players' DECISION QUALITY changes as fatigue sets in. Are they still making smart passes, or are they forcing plays and losing possession?
- Encourage players to COMMUNICATE effectively even when tired. Good communication can help overcome physical fatigue and improve collective decision-making.
- This drill directly simulates late-game scenarios where players must perform under significant physical and mental pressure, making it highly relevant for U16s.
- Focus on the 'WHY' behind decisions. Ask players after each set about their choices to help them reflect on their performance under fatigue.

Parent teaching guide

Why this activity? This activity helps your child develop the crucial ability to make smart decisions on the soccer field even when they are physically tired. In real games, especially towards the end, players often face fatigue, and this drill simulates those late-game scenarios, training their minds and bodies to perform under pressure. It teaches them to maintain focus and make effective passes, shots, and defensive plays when it matters most.

Safety

- Ensure adequate hydration by having water breaks readily available, especially with high-intensity exercise.
- Check the playing surface for any hazards (rocks, uneven ground, holes) before starting to prevent trips or falls.
- Remind children to listen to their bodies and communicate immediately if they feel dizzy, lightheaded, or unwell.
- Ensure a proper warm-up before the first circuit to prevent muscle strains and prepare the body for intense activity.

What to say

- "Push through it, you've got this! Keep those feet moving!"
- "Right into the game! No rest, let's go! What's your first smart decision?"
- "Are you making a smart pass to a teammate, or just kicking it away? Look up!"
- "Communicate! Talk to your teammates, even when you're tired! Let them know you're open!"
- "Great job making that smart decision even when you were exhausted! That's excellent!"
- "Take a deep breath, recover, and get ready for the next round! You're doing great!"

It's working when

- Child continues to look up and scan the field for options, rather than just looking at the ball.
- Child makes accurate passes to teammates in good positions, even when breathing heavily.
- Child maintains good body shape for receiving and protecting the ball, even if movements are slower.
- Child communicates with teammates (calling for the ball, warning of defenders) despite fatigue.
- Child makes an effort to track back defensively or press the opponent, even when tired.

4. Full Match Simulation (25 minutes)

Setup: Set up a full-sized soccer field with two goals (or a smaller pitch suitable for 9v9). Divide players into two teams (11v11 or 9v9) using pinnies for identification. Have multiple balls ready for quick restarts.

Steps

1. INITIALIZE GAME: Organize players into two teams (11v11 or 9v9). Explain standard soccer rules apply. The objective is to score goals.

2. **START CONTINUOUS PLAY:** Begin a full match, emphasizing maximum competitive intensity. Play will be continuous for 25 MINUTES.
3. **COACH INTERVENTION (GAME STATE):** At various points, the coach will blow a whistle and **ANNOUNCE A NEW GAME STATE** (e.g., 'Score is 1-0, you are winning!', 'Score is 0-2, you are losing with 10 minutes left!').
4. **TACTICAL ADAPTATION:** Players must immediately **ADAPT THEIR TACTICS AND EFFORT** based on the announced game state. Teams winning might focus on possession, while losing teams push for attack.
5. **CONTINUE AND CONCLUDE:** Play resumes immediately after the announcement. The match continues for the full 25 minutes, with the coach introducing new scenarios as desired.

Coaching points

- Emphasize the importance of **COMMUNICATION** and collective decision-making as game states change.
- Observe how quickly and effectively teams **ADAPT** their formation, pressing, and attacking strategies to new scenarios.
- Challenge players to think beyond just scoring; consider game management, time, and opponent's strengths/weaknesses.
- Vary the game states to expose players to different pressures: playing with a lead, chasing a deficit, playing with a man advantage/disadvantage.

Parent teaching guide

Why this activity? This activity helps your child understand how to adapt their play based on the score, time, and other game situations, just like in a real soccer match. It teaches them to think strategically, make quick decisions, and communicate with teammates under changing pressure, which is crucial for success on the field.

Safety

- Ensure the playing area is free of hazards like rocks, holes, or sharp objects.
- Remind players to be aware of their surroundings and other players to avoid collisions.
- Encourage regular water breaks, especially during continuous play and on warm days.
- Ensure players are wearing appropriate footwear (soccer cleats or athletic shoes) and shin guards if desired.

What to say

- "Whistle! The score is now 1-0, and your team is **WINNING!** How does that change your plan?"
- "Great effort! Remember to communicate with your teammates about the new game state."
- "Whistle! The score is 0-2, and your team is **LOSING** with 10 minutes left! What do you need to do now?"
- "Think about the time and the score! What's the smartest decision for your team right now?"
- "Are you playing to protect your lead, or are you pushing for an equalizer? Show me!"
- "Excellent adaptation! I saw you change your strategy right away."

It's working when

- Players visibly change their tactical approach (e.g., passing more to keep possession when winning, shooting more when losing).
- Teams start communicating more about the new game state and what they should do next.
- Players show an understanding of game management (e.g., not taking unnecessary risks when ahead, taking more risks when behind).
- Effort levels remain high, but the *type* of effort shifts based on the scenario.

- Players actively try to influence the game in line with the announced game state.

On their own

Solo-friendly version of 'High-Intensity Game Simulation' — no partner or sibling needed!

- Replace opponents with cones as 'defenders' — dribble around them using the same movement patterns.
- Use a wall for passing: pass to wall, control rebound, then pass to a different angle. Move between passes to simulate rondo movement.
- Set up targets (cones, water bottles) in the goal. Track your score across sessions to see improvement.
- Use a phone timer to record your times. Compete against your previous best — personal records are the ultimate solo motivation.