

# 1. "Dribble Across A Square" \* \* \* \* (U-8 & up)

Comment: This is the best way to teach dribbling and how to use the bottom of the foot & the inside & outside of the foot to stop the ball and turn. Easy set-up & everyone has a ball. This is a great warm-up. It is 10 times better than dribbling through cones & is a good way to evaluate dribbling skill. This game helps children's brains to learn to process a lot of activity, to use peripheral vision, and to make correct, instinctive decisions and maintain composure when under pressure and in heavy traffic.

Teaches:

- Control dribbling, to look up while dribbling & how to do a "Pullback" (aka "Drag Back"), "Stop/Turn", "Cutback" & "Hook Turn". Players learn to use peripheral vision, to shield the ball when in traffic, and that they can speed up if they get in the clear. It is a "self-teaching" game and playing the game really teaches these skills and self-confidence & composure in heavy traffic & under pressure.

Set-up:

- Use 4 disk cones to make a square about 10 or 12 steps wide (smaller or larger depending on age & number of players)
- Every player has a ball
- Spread players around the square, all facing inward (like below):



The Game:

- All players start on "Go" & **each player dribbles across the square & back.** (Tell them to dribble to the imaginary line on the opposite side of the

square, make a turn & dribble back to where they started. Point out at the first of the game that the cones create an imaginary "Starting Line" and "Turning Line" for each player).

- " Must do a "Pullback", a "Stop/Turn", a "Cutback" or a "Hook Turn" to turn. (Do a Pullback, aka a "Drag Back", by putting the bottom of the foot on top of ball to stop it & pull it back in the direction you came from. Do a Hook Turn by pulling the toes up & turning the foot so the outside of the foot can "hook" the ball, stop it & pull it back. A Cutback uses the inside of the foot to hook the ball). See photos of a Pullback (called a "Drag Back"), Hook, Cutback & Stop/Turn at [www.fa-soccerstar.com](http://www.fa-soccerstar.com) (click "Turning" on the left side and then "How To Master" on the right side above the photo).
- Tell players to look up while they dribble so they don't run into each other (don't worry, there won't be many collisions).
- Each player keeps count of his or her trips across the square. The first to 12 is the winner (each time he turns is "one"). Tell players to yell "Done" when finished and ask each player his score after each game.
- Play 3 games; 1st to 12, then to 10, then to 8. Play at the start of practice as a warm-up and at the end of practice until dribbling skills improve or your team gets tired of this game. For beginners, let them decide how to turn using the method they are most comfortable with. For advanced or select players, require a Pullback one game, then a Hook, then a Cutback. Let a "Stop/Turn" count for a Pullback.
- After your team has played this game in a few practices, make the square larger so it is less crowded. This will let players speed up when they get in open space. Tell them that they can go faster if they kick the ball in front of them, but they **MUST** still keep control of the ball. If they kick it too far, they won't be able to make their turn. In most games, a player will lose the game if he or she loses control of the ball even once. The game is self-teaching, but it is helpful for the coach to be encouraging and to point out how players can improve their performance.

Teaching  
Points:

- "Control Dribbling" - When in traffic, keep the ball close to your feet so you can protect it ("shield" it) and learn how to look up while dribbling by keeping the ball close to your feet so you know where it is.
- "Speed Dribbling" - When you get "open" (out of traffic), you can kick the ball using the inside of foot or the "laces" & run to it so you can go faster, but you must still keep it under control so you can turn.
- How to do a "Pullback", "Stop/Turn", "Hook Turn", and a "Cutback".

### Benefits Of The "Dribble Across A Square Game":

1. It is the best way to teach dribbling.
2. It is 50 times better than dribbling through cones.
3. It is a good warm-up.
4. It is quick and easy for one coach to set up and manage the game.
5. It is a great way to evaluate dribbling skill.
6. Based on the results we have had, we believe playing this game helps children's brains learn to process a lot of activity, that it teaches them to use peripheral vision, and that it teaches them to make correct, instinctive decisions and maintain composure when under pressure and in heavy traffic. In addition to improved dribbling skill, we have noticed significant improvement in "field vision" and "field awareness".
7. You can monitor each player's progress by asking each player his or her score at the end of each game.
8. Playing the game teaches "Control Dribbling", "Speed Dribbling" ("Running With the Ball"), shielding the ball, to look up while dribbling and the Premium Version teaches 4 types of turns (how to do a "Pullback", aka a "Drag Back", a "Stop/Turn", a "Cutback" and a "Hook Turn"). It is a "self-teaching" game and playing the game teaches these skills.

**Monitoring Progress.** Each player keeps count of his or her trips across the square. A player gets one point each time he or she turns. Have the first player to reach the target score (e.g., 12 or 10) yell "Done". As soon as a player yells "Done", blow your whistle and have all the other players stop as soon as they get back to the closest side of the square. Then, ask each player his or her score so you can monitor each player's progress. What I would do is start with one player and ask: "John, what was your score?" and then quickly ask each of the others. It is also an opportunity to praise anyone who has improved or to give tips such as "It is very important to keep control of the ball on your turns. If you lose the ball it will cost you several points". This only takes 2 or 3 minutes.