

soccer tennis

how to teach ball juggling

This is a GREAT game for developing juggling skills and "first-touch". The best thing is that the kids LOVE IT! We all know how important it is to be able to quickly control bouncing balls during a game. Soccer tennis will create hundreds of quality touches while the players are having fun. Without even trying, they will learn to receive chest balls, thigh controls, instep volleys and head touches. Soon they will be sliding sideways to get in front of the pass instead of poking out with their legs.

Basically it is a tennis game with some sort of improvised "net" (or real net), that is played with the soccer ball and controlled volleys and juggles. You can keep score like tennis games with "love-15-30-deuce" etc... or just play up to any number. (Non-tennis playing kids don't get the tennis scoring concept.)

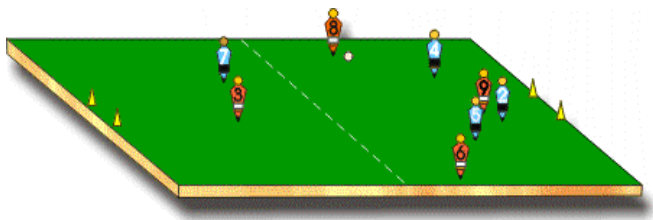
When the kids are just learning allow them lots of bounces (on the ground), between shots over the net. (I let my beginning kids have 3 bounces.) It is more important to keep the point going allowing for more touches, than it is to adhere to any strict rules. Later, when they are pretty good, limit the number of bounces to only 1 or 2. If players have different skill levels, allow more bounces to the beginning player and they can still participate.

At first we even play that if a player totally "flubs" it into the net and the ball dies on their side, that player can get one chance to "rescue" the point by executing a "toe ball-lift" or "heel rainbow-lift" to keep things going. **Make up your own version. Have fun!** The key is keeping points going with lots of quality touches!

You can make a "net" out of several cones, or maybe 2 cones with a string hung between them. I use a stepladder that I have turned on it's side, and added a couple of cones at each end and it's really fun to use one of the little soccer-tennis nets that you can get from the soccer stores.

This game is easiest to learn on a hard surface, where the bounces will be "true" and higher. Later, you can play this game on the field which will require a little more juggling ability.

What to do: Set up a makeshift "net" out of cones, a ladder or even a row of soccer bags stacked up, or use one of the very cool soccer tennis nets. Then cone off a small sized "court" to fit the number of players and the net. If you are playing on the driveway use some chalk or just the lines in the pavement. Needless to say, if you have a real tennis court at your disposal, try it..... (as long as you don't get yelled at by the tennis coach.)



Divide up teams. You can play 1v1, 2v2, 3v3, or even 4v4 on a large court. You can play odd numbers like 2v3, etc.

One player serves from deep in their court across the net to the other team. At first the idea is not to win the point on the serve, but just get the point started.

We usually bounce the ball and then half-volley it across for the serve, but some variations we use are - serving the ball off the ground after a "toe-lift", or just directly "flipping" it over with one's toe. Sometimes we toss it up in the air and "head" it over to get things started.

Then the defending player controls the serve, sometimes after a bounce but occasionally out of the air. They will learn quickly to get their bodies in front of the ball and use their thighs, chest or head to make contact. Then you start counting bounces on the ground. Of course in real tennis, the players are only allowed 1 bounce. You will eventually get **this** good with soccer tennis, but start with more bounces to allow for learning. **I let my little kids take 3 or 4 bounces but the older kids are allowed only 1 or 2. (And of course, the coaches are only allowed 1.)**

Juggling (without the ball bouncing) is encouraged. It doesn't "count" against the player and they can manoeuvre the ball close to the net for a better shot.

Players can and should pass to each other. They will learn to chip a deep shot up to their team mate who then can try to put it away. It can be lots of fun while they refine a soft touch with their juggle touches, volleys and half-volleys.

****If you have time to play only one little fun game, play this one!**