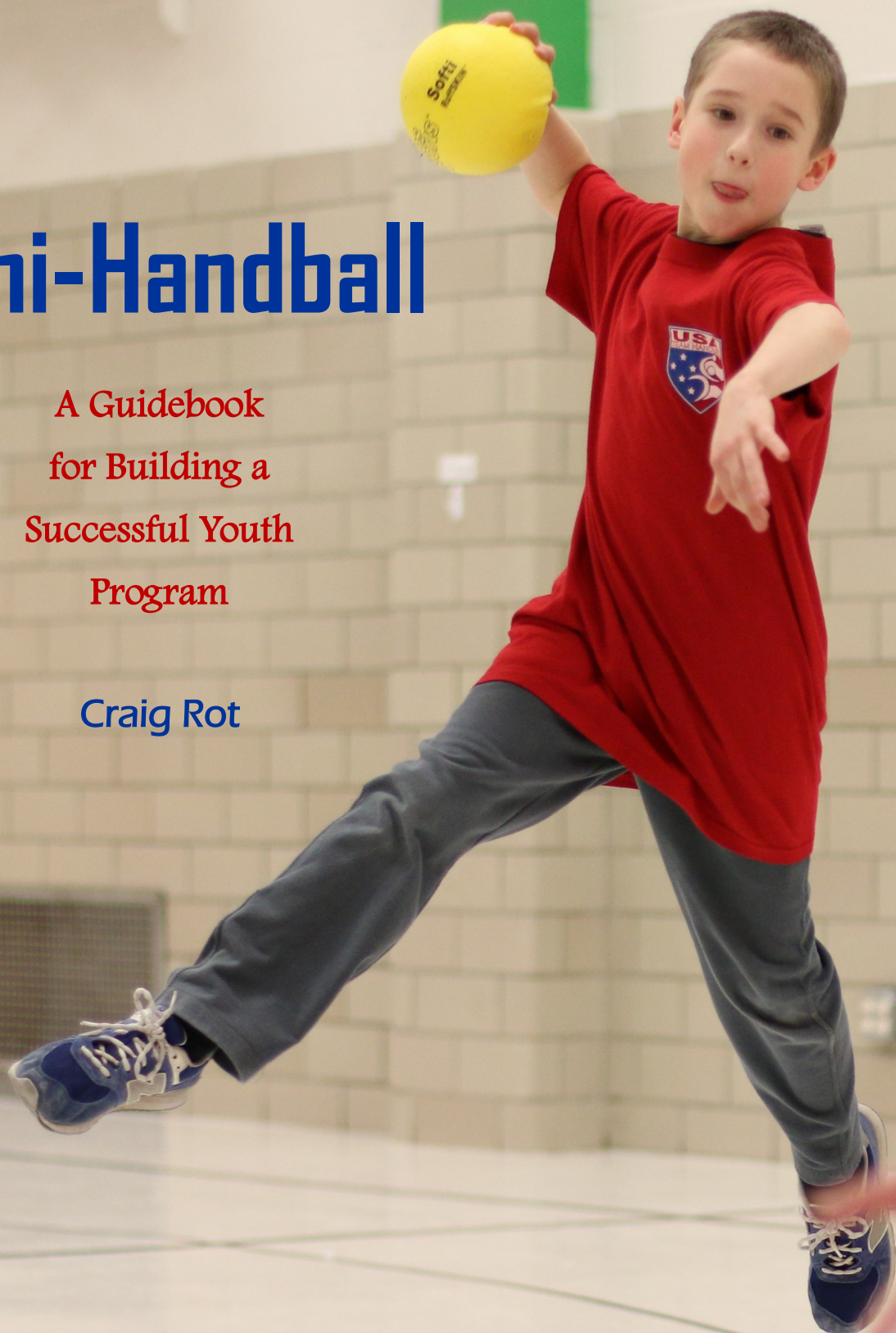
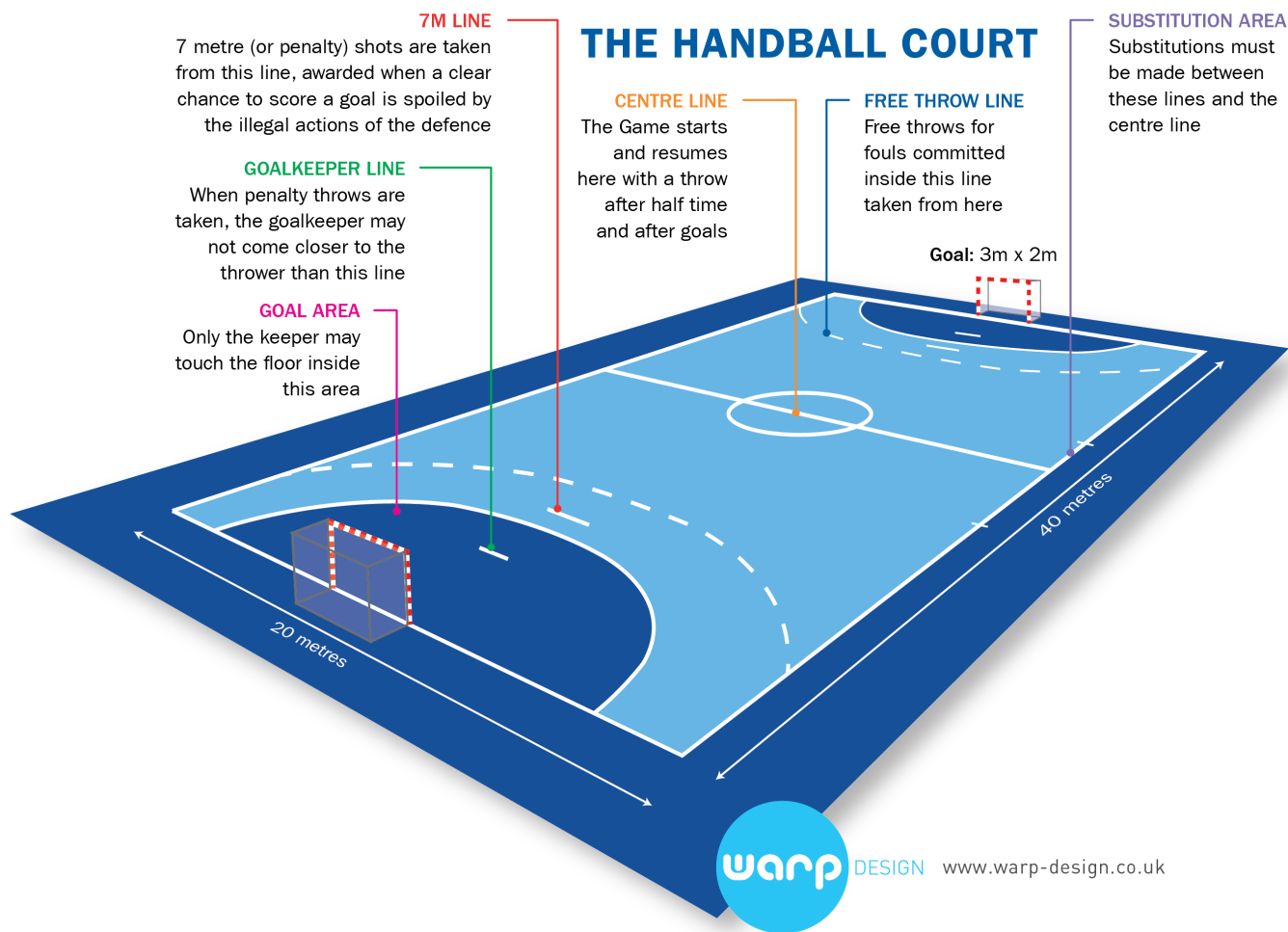


Mini-Handball

A Guidebook
for Building a
Successful Youth
Program

Craig Rot





The Positions

Wings (2)

Wings tend to be fast, dynamic players, who work well in transition and have great ball-handling skills. They are accurate shooters, and can hit a shot from even the hardest angles. Wings play in the corners and along the sides of the court, and need to have good hands for the fast break.

Backs (2)

Backs are tall and have cannons for arms. They score the most goals on the court, and do not have a problem with this fact. Backs employ a myriad of shots, jumping, running, hip and sidarm, and score from inside and out. Backs are physical players who are equally strong on defense.

Center Back

The center back is the playmaker. Playmakers have great coordination, vision and presence, sensing the flow and pace of the game. They are remarkable passers, but can shoot if the opportunity presents itself. On defense, they disrupt passing lanes and lead transitions.

Circle Runner

The circle runner works amongst the defenders on the 6m line, opening holes for the backs, creating space for scoring opportunities. Circle runners have great hands and strength. On defense, the circle is the anchor, coordinating alignments and assignments.

Goalkeeper

Goalkeepers come in all shapes and sizes, but all have one unifying characteristic: they love what they do. Goalkeepers are flexible, nimble, and crafty, and have exceptional hand-eye coordination. They have strong arms for transition, and are able to coordinate their defense from the goal area.

Inside the Game

Offense

While in offense, the team moves forward in waves, first wings and a circle runner, looking to take advantage of openings in transition, followed by the backs, who are led by the center, looking to find a quick gap to exploit. If there are no gaps, the team gets into an offensive mindset, working the ball around the perimeter from wing to wing, taking time to lull the defense into a stupor, prodding the defense, meeting the defenders at the free-throw line, passing to the next cutting player, looking for space enough to shoot or make a pass into the circle runner, who creates gaps, and space of his or her own to shoot. If this does not work, the backs will cross and the wings will shift, or the wings will hold to the corners, and take advantage of distracted defenders.

Defense

While in defense, the team transitions back as fast as they can, being mindful of the offensive first wave that will be cutting in and out of them, setting up their formation, which might be flat, with everyone backed up against the goal area, or focused, with one or more defenders operating out in space beyond the goal area, looking to take away passing lanes. The biggest, tallest and strongest of the defenders occupy the middle, where scoring angles and opportunities are plenty, looking to direct the offensive flow to the sides, where it can be contained, or shots can be more easily defended by the goalkeeper. Defenders must remain focused, wrapping-up or redirecting anything that stands before them, especially if it is holding a ball.

Goalkeeping

In the goal area, the goalkeeper has a lot of space to operate, but without some coordination with his defenders, the large goal is almost impossible to defend. Of all the positions and elements of the game, goalkeeping is the most vulnerable, which likely makes it the most individualistic, too. Every goalkeeper is unique. Some are great with their hands, while others are great with their feet. Some dominate the front of the net, while others control the posts. Whatever an individual's style, the importance of the goalkeeper cannot be understated. The goalkeeper is vital to winning, and plays more than just a defensive role in the game, setting the offensive pace by striking sprinting wings, or just restarting the game quickly after giving up a goal, by hurrying the ball forward, looking to take advantage of celebrating opponents.

TEAM HANDBALL

MINI-HANDBALL

Program Overview

Mini-Handball

Mini-Handball is played around the world and combines the most essential aspects of Team Handball, running, jumping, catching and throwing, while minimizing the contact and aggressive play of the sport. Mini-Handball is perfectly designed for children, as it incorporates a child's inclination for play with their capacity for movement, with the added benefit that boys and girls play together. As your players grow and develop, so too does this program, which offers three developmentally appropriate lesson plans:

Beginner

This level of handball is best for kids ages 5-7, and is designed to create a fun and playful experience, while limiting adult interaction or coaching.

Intermediate

This level of handball is designed for kids ages 8-9, and tries to balance skills training and fun, while providing a greater understanding of the rules.

Advanced

This level of handball is designed for kids ages 10-12, and prepares players for Team Handball, while allowing them to still have fun and be creative.



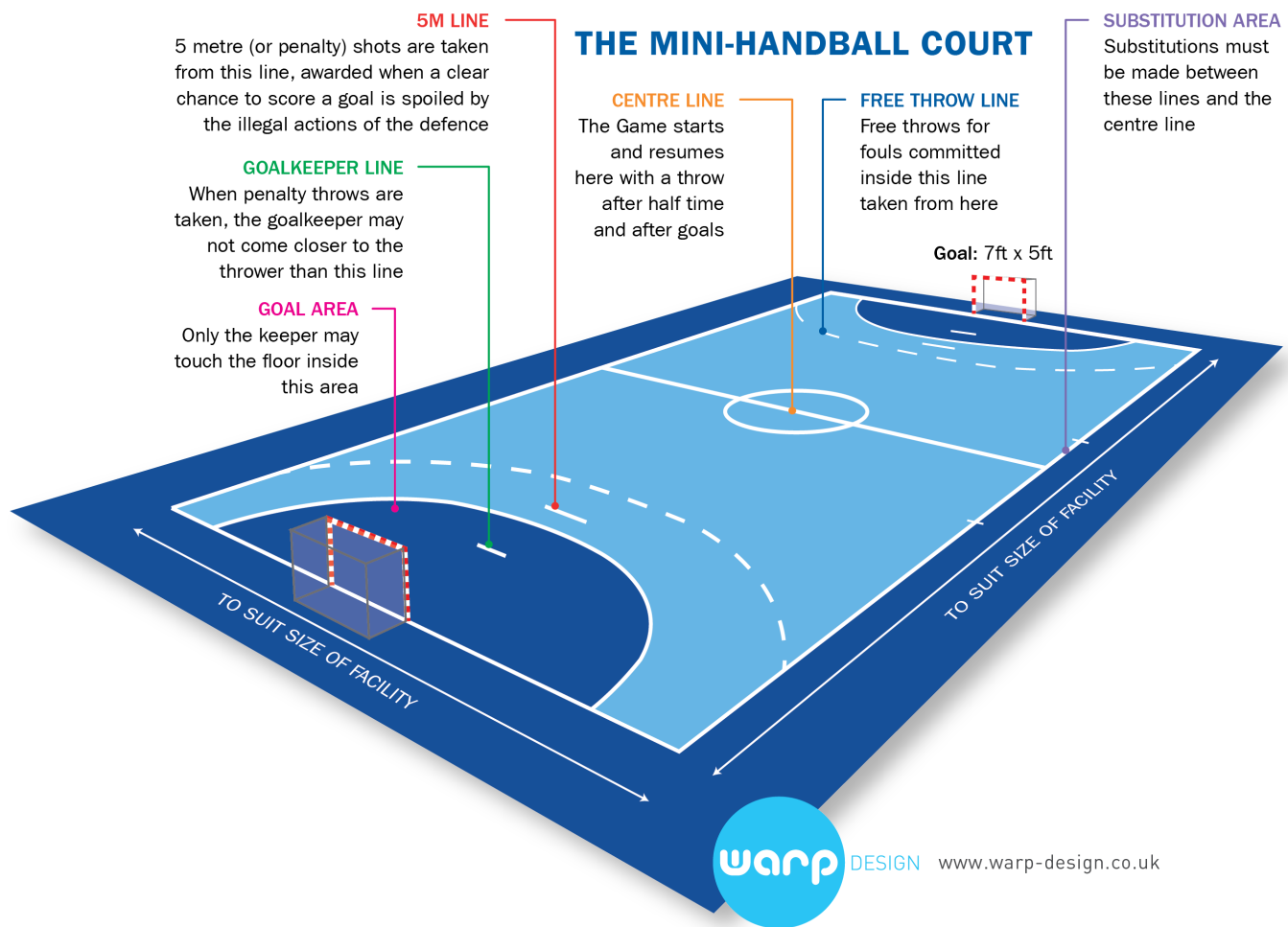
Key To Success

The key to success is you. Because Mini-Handball is developmentally appropriate, and the games, techniques and lesson plans contained within this guidebook have been laid out in a concise and simple manner, the only obstacle to success is an unwillingness to try. Everything you will need to make your program effective can be found within this book, and if it cannot be found here, relevant and appropriate links will be provided for you. The benefits outweigh the uncertainty, as Mini-Handball is about as much fun as kids can have, and is not overly technical to coach, even for someone who has never played the sport.



What You Will Need To Start

In reality, all you need to play Mini-Handball is space, a ball, and players. It can be played indoors and outdoors, and the space required can be modified to accommodate most circumstances. For goals, you can use cones and broomsticks, but as you build your program, you will want to acquire 5 x 7 goals, regulation balls, and several sets of pennies (colored jerseys) for the players. Soft-skinned handballs, also called Softees, will help the younger players learn the game, and will help everyone safely practice goalkeeping techniques. But this Mini-Handball is adaptable, and can be modified to suit most space needs and resource limitations. Be creative until you have the proper equipment.



The Positions

Offense

In Mini-Handball, players play both offense and defense, but while in offense, they will work together to get free and make space on the line for open shots. They must pass, dribble, fake and shoot, and by limiting the number of players in the offensive zone in the early weeks of the program, players have more space to get free, and therefore will have more scoring and skill-learning opportunities.

Defense

While in defense, the players use footwork and hand techniques to keep the offensive players from scoring. It takes perseverance and dedication to keep defending in a strictly man-to-man defensive setting. The important skills developed here carry over from one level to the next. Players should be encouraged to keep at it from the beginning, which may be difficult for some of them.

Goalkeeper

In Mini-Handball, everyone plays goalkeeper, although some players will naturally gravitate toward the position's high risk/high reward nature. It is very important that everyone has an opportunity to play goalkeeper, because the game cannot be fully understood without it. Knowledge of this position will translate into success at other positions.

Inside the Game

Offense

The first four weeks of Mini-Handball are focused exclusively on offensive skills and tactics, and players will begin to assert themselves, use creativity, and develop a style that is uniquely their own. This is the beauty of Team Handball, and it remains true in Mini-Handball. As players develop and hone skills like dribbling, faking, passing and shooting, they will gain a distinct advantage over the defenders, who will be ill-equipped in these early weeks to counter the superior advantage of the offensive players. Restricting younger players to offensive and defensive zones opens up space for players to learn level-appropriate skills. Opening up the entire court for older players creates a realistic game situation, while improving cardiovascular endurance.

Defense

In the second half of the program, the coin will flip, as defenders learn footwork skills, positioning, and blocking techniques to counter the fakes and shot-types of the offensive players. In Mini-Handball, contact is minimal, and aggressive play is discouraged. Defenders must keep an arm's length of distance between themselves and the offensive player, and are prohibited from playing zone or coordinated defenses. They must select an offensive opponent and shadow that player until a goal is scored or the ball is turned over. This focuses attention where it matters most, on the 1 vs. 1 situation, and teaches players how to make better decisions in real time. Dividing the court into lanes, players begin to understand the interplay between offensive players and defensive players.

Goalkeeping

Through free-play, guidance, and constant rotation, players will become familiar with playing this position, even without really focusing constructively on techniques during the first weeks of the program. The importance of goalkeeping cannot be understated, and players should be encouraged to experiment with tactics and techniques while in the goal area, even if it means giving up goals. With the introduction of defensive schemes comes the first lessons in goalkeeping, as players are shown positioning, stance, basic hand and foot skills that will assist them in becoming better goalkeepers.

MINI-HANDBALL

Beginner Mini-Handball

Program Overview

This program is designed for kids ages 5-7. The emphasis here is on fun and movement, not on skills and drills, and most certainly not on winning. They will still run, jump, throw and catch like the other programs, but they will do so in a way that is more appropriate for their physical and emotional needs, all the while embracing their natural tendency toward play. The goal of this program is for the kids to learn Mini-Handball without being taught in the traditional sense.



Philosophy: Me & My Ball

The basic philosophy of Beginner Mini-Handball is Me & My Ball. The kids in this program should become familiar with their ball, and in doing so, they will come to understand the game. In the beginning, the kids will do everything with a ball, and any ball will do.

As they learn to dribble, pass & catch, and shoot, they will begin to understand the basic rules of the game, most of which are focused on offensive skills, defensive skills, and goalkeeping. This level is about encouragement, experimentation, and limited oversight.

The players in this group need to be reminded of infractions without consequence, which keeps the game moving and the players learning. The focus here is on fun and movement, and by allowing the players to be free, providing gentle reminders, the child's natural enthusiasm for play can be encouraged and developed.

Three Goals for Beginners

Fun, Fun, Fun

At the Beginner level, Mini-Handball needs to be fun, and it is important for coaches at this level to come to practice each week ready to enjoy the chaos that is to be expected of this age group.

Get Moving

The kids in this age group are neither emotionally nor cognitively ready for long winded speeches about the philosophy of sport or the tactics of Team Handball. They learn best by doing, and in this spirit, give them balls and get them moving. Make suggestions and not corrections, as kids in this age group are wonderful modelers of behaviors, but not the best listeners.

Emphasize Learning, Not Winning

At the Beginner level, Mini-Handball is not about winning, and emphasizing this straightaway will go a long way toward creating an enthusiastic environment for all players. It goes without saying that there will be some kids who are hyper-competitive or hyper-sensitive, and it will take a soft voice to remind them the goal of this program is learning and not winning.



Dribbling

In Mini-Handball, dribbling is different than in basketball. Only the top of the ball can be touched. At this level, kids need to be able to dribble while walking.



Throwing

The basic throw in Mini-Handball is overhead, with the elbow at or near ear height. There are variations in throwing, but those will come later.



Catching

The ball is caught with two hands, away from the body, with index fingers and thumbs together.



Session 1: Beginner

Practice Plan

The first session is all about getting the kids moving and throwing. Let them come into gym and find the balls left out for them. Encourage them to throw at a goal or targets you tape to the wall. Kids love unstructured play, and the goal of this program is to keep them in this mindset as long as possible. Today is about learning the court, which includes sidelines, end-lines, and goal areas.

Free Play—Warm-up (5-10 minutes)

- [Beginner Warm-Up](#)

Station & Lead-up Games (20-30 minutes)

- [Dribble Fun](#)
- [Partner Passing](#)
- [Target Practice](#)

Mini-Handball Games (20-30 minutes)

- Divide the court in half with cones, and divide your kids into teams of 5 or six players (1 goalkeeper, 2-3 offensive players, 2-3 defensive players).
- Play short games, rotating the players through each position, using a soft-skinned handball.
- Remind them of rules infractions like too many steps or making contact with the offensive players without stopping play.
- If a player throws the ball over a sideline, the other team puts it back in play by stepping on the line and throwing the ball to a teammate.

Call of the Day: Goalkeeper Throw

The first signal the kids learn is Goalkeeper Throw, which is an extended arm, with the hand bent down at the wrist. Every time the ball crosses the end line and was last touched by the attacking team or goalkeeper, make this signal, and reinforce the call by saying it aloud.



INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate Mini-Handball

Program Overview

This program is designed for kids ages 8-9, but this range is not set in stone, because children develop across a wide spectrum, especially within this group. The emphasis here is on developing individual skills and improving team understanding of the game. Dribbling, passing, movement with and without the ball, fakes, and shot selection, all of these will become important at the Intermediate level. The goal for this level is to get them working together, while developing individual skills they will need at the next stage.



Philosophy: Me & My Friends

At the Intermediate level, players make the transition from an individual skills focus to a cooperative group focus. Here they will learn to work together, passing, defending, moving up and down the court.

A greater emphasis is placed on thinking than reacting, and in doing so, the individual learns the flow and pace of the game, which is dynamic and ever changing, molded in the unique style of each team.

The Intermediate level has greater consequence than Beginner, while allowing some leeway on the rules, as players learn to accept their mistakes and the resulting consequences, moving immediately onto the next task.

Three Goals for Intermediate

Work, Work, Work

At the Intermediate level, Mini-Handball is about cooperation and collaboration, and kids learn quickly in this program that they cannot achieve group goals alone. If they want to get better, they will have to learn to work together, and this is an essential aspect of both Mini-Handball and Team Handball.

Get Running

The kids in this age group are primed and ready to run, and this natural inclination and enthusiasm for physical play should be expressed in everything they do. At the end of every practice, they should be red-cheeked and exhausted. But they won't quit, and after practice, they will likely want to enjoy more unstructured free-play to experiment with everything they are learning.

Emphasize Improving, Not Mastering

At the Intermediate level, Mini-Handball is not about mastering many new skills, but about improving the skills they already know. These slight adjustments in form, position and timing will open up more shooting opportunities, allowing for better passing and improved defensive presence.



Defensive Skills

See the Beginner's Guide for a review of basic **Defensive Skills**. Below are several additional techniques.

Marking

This technique consists of shadowing in the vicinity of an opposing player when in the defensive half of the court.



Shading

Defensive players can use footwork and body position to keep offensive players from gaining favorable shot situations, directing the shooter away from advantages gained by handedness or court position.



Session 5: Intermediate

Practice Plan

This practice is all about defense. Reinforce the shooting skills and In The Goal Area rule from last practice. The goal of this practice is to transition to a defensive mindset, learning the footwork and hand-skills they will need to become better defenders and goalkeepers. At this level, kids will have a better understanding of the commitment and effort required of solid defensive play, and should be encouraged to “keep at it.”

Free Play—Warm-up (5-10 minutes)

- [Intermediate Warm-Up](#)

Station & Lead-up Games (20-30 minutes)

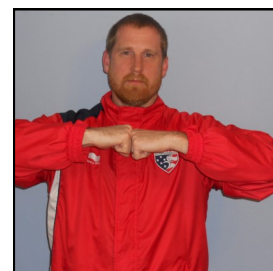
- [Defensive Fun](#) & [Goalkeeping Fun](#)
- [Six Passes](#)
- [Jailbreak](#)
- [Protect Royals](#)

Mini-Handball Games (20-30 minutes)

- Divide the court into four lengthwise alleys, and divide your kids into teams of 5 (1 goalkeeper, 4 court players, playing 1 per alley).
- Play short games, rotating the players through each position, playing 1 vs. 1 within alleys, using a soft-skinned handball or a real handball.
- If a defensive player makes a foul, stop play with a free-throw (no shots on goal) from the spot of the foul.
- Stress the importance of communication between defenders.

Call of the Day: Defensive Foul

The Defensive Foul call includes restraining, holding and pushing, and at this level, any contact will fall into this category. The signal for this suite of fouls is two fists pressed into each other. Reinforce this call by saying the rule aloud, but allow inadvertent and mild contact to go without a call. If excessive contact is used, stop the game and talk with the player about the problem.



Intermediate Wrap-Up



Program Review

At the end of the Intermediate program, kids should be able to perform on offense:

- Dribble while running.
- Pass while running to a moving teammate.
- Shoot at the corners of the goal.
- Employ basic fakes to get past defenders.

And on defense:

- Play full-court 1 vs.1 defense.
- Close mark an opponent.
- Use body to keep self between opponent and goal.

And in goal:

- Hold strategic positioning, using both hands and feet.
- Take away easy angles from shooters.
- Lead the fast break down the court.



The Next Level

Advanced

The next level of Mini-Handball will focus on:

- Mastering offensive skills like dribbling, passing & catching, and shooting
- Improving defensive skills like marking, sliding, and better footwork.
- Transitioning from defense to offense, fast breaks
- Improving goalkeeping techniques
- Using arm movement, faking and crossing to create space to shoot.
- Introducing team concepts, including coordinated defenses and verbal communication.



INTERMEDIATE

Advanced Mini-Handball

Program Overview

This program is designed for kids ages 10-12. At these ages, players have the necessary physical and cognitive abilities to understand the game at its most complex. They can think about personal, team, and opponent objectives, all the while executing with more precision and greater skill. At this level, players will work to collaborate and coordinate, working against other groups of similarly arranged teams. This is the final stage before contact is introduced, and it is important that they master moving with and without the ball, positioning the body, and exploiting gaps in the defense.



Philosophy: Us & Them

At the Advanced level, players make the transition from a cooperative group focus to a competitive team focus, not only learning to work together as a team but also learning to work against others.

They will learn a greater nuance of skills, and use these defined skills to analyze, anticipate, and problem solve in game-like situations. A greater emphasis is placed on determining than reacting, and in doing so, the players learn to work together in a common purpose.

The advanced level has the strictest guidelines of all the levels, and players should expect to be called for their rules infractions. The idea of learning through failing is the foundation of this program. Over time, players will become better decision makers, and learn important life-skills like being accountable to others and coping with mistakes.

Three Goals for Advanced

Move, Move, Move

At the Advanced level, Mini-Handball is about movement, and this means players, handballs, and even goalkeepers. Team Handball is a dynamic sport, and everything and everyone is in a constant state of flux. There is always something to do, and there is always somewhere to be. Move. Move. Move.

Get Thinking

Because of this constant state of flux, the kids at this level are expected to problem solve on a second-by-second basis. In the previous levels, coaches are encouraged to remind the kids of the answer to a problem. At this level, encouragement needs to remind them that they already possess the answer, and that only through trial and error will they get better at problem solving and decision making.

Emphasize Accountability, Not Individuality

At the Advanced level, Mini-Handball is about accountability, which means the players are accountable to themselves, to their coaches, and to their teammates. Selfish play needs to be discouraged, as teams can only improve as long as all of its members are improving.



Session 8: Advanced

Practice Plan

This practice brings together everything the kids have learned about the boundaries of the court and goal areas, passing & catching, shooting, footwork, defending and goalkeeping, and gives them a game-like situation in which to show off their skills. Warm the players up and then set a clock, letting them play a real game that can be dividing into halves or mini-games, whichever way you see fit.

Free Play—Warm-up (5-10 minutes)

- [Advanced Warm-Up](#)

Mini-Handball Games (40-60 minutes)

- Play full-court games, and divide your players into teams of 5 players (1 goalkeeper and 4 or 5 court players).
- Divide the teams as evenly as possible, and play with strict accordance to the rules.
- If the balls go out of bounds, make sure the team that did not last touch the ball before doing so restarts the game with a free-throw with a foot on the sideline (opposing team must give 3 meters of space to do so).
- If a goal is scored, raise your hand over your head and blow the whistle twice. Have them restart the game at center court, signaling with a whistle blow that the game has been restarted.



Game Rules

See the Intermediate Guide for more information on **Various Rules and Issues** that come up during the game.

Warm-Up Plans

Overview

Good habits bring about success, and it is important that kids learn from a young age that athletic activity is about being healthy and being mindful. Properly warming-up the body not only prepares kids' bodies for the exertions of practice, but it puts them in the right mindset, too.

Beginner Warm-up Plan

- Done with a ball.
- Basic cardiovascular warm-up, including some running.
- Basic stretching, mainly legs and arms.
- Stress the importance of preparing the body to do activity.

Intermediate Warm-up Plan

- Done with a ball.
- More cardiovascular effort than previous, with increasing levels of intensity.
- Basic stretching, mainly legs and arms, with some stretching of torso.
- Stress the importance of fitness for activity.

Advanced Warm-up Plan

- Done with a ball.
- Intensive cardiovascular warm-up, raising heart rate for the demands of proper practice.
- Comprehensive stretching of entire body, working from the head down to the feet.
- Stress the importance of proper technique and commitment for preventing injury and increasing stamina.

WARM-UP PLANS

STATION GAMES

Station Games

Overview

These are simple skill-specific games that focus on individual skills, like dribbling, passing & catching, footwork, shooting, defending and goalkeeping. They are best for small groups, with a more individualized focus. The goal of these games is to give kids the ability to try new and more complex techniques in a casual, risk-free environment.

Dribble Fun

- Dribble while standing, walking, and running.
- Stress the fact that they can only touch the top of the ball.
- Do so going forward, backward and sideways.
- Do it with the dominant hand, weak hand and alternating.
- Set up a cone course and make them do it at different speeds and with different techniques.
- Feel free to invent new ways to learn.

Passing Fun

- Kids should work in pairs.
- Throw, bounce, roll and even kick the ball back and forth.
- Emphasize proper catching technique, which is with two hands out away from the body.
- Do so standing, walking and running.
- Feel free to invent new ways to learn.

Target Practice

- Tape targets to a wall, hang targets from the goal, or use the mat that comes with most goals.
- Emphasize proper technique, with the elbow at ear level.
- Change the distance from which they are shooting.
- Do so standing, running, and jumping.
- Feel free to invent new ways to learn.

More Station Games

Footwork Fun

- Done without a ball.
- Set up a cone course, and have the kids run it forward and backward.
- Make sure they do so with their hands out in front of them.
- Pass to them intermittently, making sure they are ready for a ball.

Three Steps Fun

- Done with a ball.
- Have them take three steps, make one dribble, and then take three more steps.
- Increase the number of dribbles between three-step segments.
- Have them shoot the ball at the end of the sequence.

Defensive Fun

- Best done in groups of five.
- Four defenders will link together in a line like a caterpillar.
- One offensive player will hold a ball and face the head of the caterpillar.
- Head of the caterpillar will direct the body away from the ball carrier, who will try to touch the last in line.
- Rotate through each position.

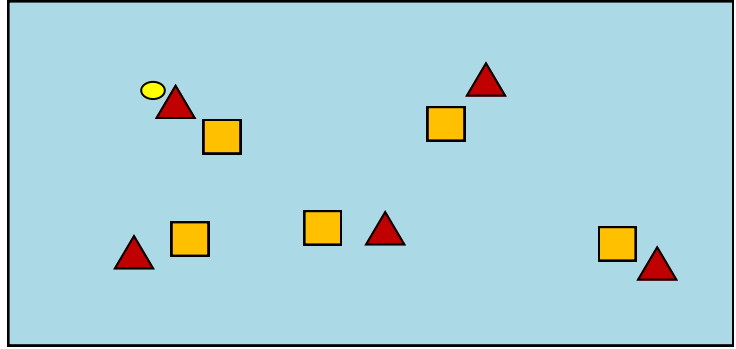
Goalkeeper Fun

- Break into groups of two, using soft-skinned handballs.
- Rotate back and forth between goalkeeper and shooter.
- Object is to throw the ball past the goalkeeper.
- Work on lower and upper body shots, as well as left and right shots.
- Stress staying on the toes when goalkeeper.



SIX PASSES

Field Set-Up



Focus

- Passing/catching & throwing
- Individual offensive & defensive skills
- Improve spatial orientation

Equipment

- 1 handball, 6-12 cones/bowling pins, color pennies

Court Size

- Adapt to needs & availability

Object of the Game

- Two teams compete to score as many points as they can within set time by attempting to make 6 consecutive passes among their teammates. Players must count out-loud number of passes being made.
- The game starts with a jump ball & is played according to no body contact rule.
- Players are allowed to dribble, pass/catch, hold the ball for 3 seconds & make 3 steps with the ball.
- A free-throw is a simple pass from one player to another to restart the game.
- A point is scored when the team competes 6 passes in a row without the ball being intercepted or lost due to technical error.
- After each point scored, the game is restarted by a captain or another designated player from the other team.
- If the ball goes out of bounds, the game is restarted from sideline with a throw-in. All passes made prior to a ball leaving the court are considered null and the team in possession of the ball needs to start their count from 0.
- Each pass must be made between two different players.



Variations

With time, increase difficulty by:

- Letting the players hold the ball for only 1 second and/or
- Prohibiting dribbling and/or
- Allowing only bounce and/or overhead

Teaching Suggestions

- Full court individual defense (“man to man”) without switching.
- Rules should be simple to make fair and uncomplicated calls and can be modified according to participants’ preparedness and coach’s preferences.
- Encourage constant movement, short passes as well as simple “break-free from your guard” and “pass-and-go” offensive strategies.
- Emphasize holding the elbow high (above the shoulder) and ball high above the head prior to passing and/or throwing.
- Remind players often that passing is always faster than dribbling.
- Challenge players to pass the ball to all teammates positioned in unguarded areas to receive the ball and not to just a few “friends.”
- While in defense, stress the importance of keeping their bodies between the attacker and their own goal.

The Amazing Students of *L'Etoile du Nord French Immersion School*

Grades 1-3 Pilot Program



Grades 4-6 Pilot Program



Special Thanks

I'd like to thank many people for helping make this guidebook possible:

First, I need to thank Lisa Kihl, PhD, of the University of Minnesota, for providing support, oversight and guidance to this project. I came to her with an unrealized dream, and she helped me flesh it out and bring it to life.

I need to thank Mariusz Wartalowicz, the tireless Technical Director of USA Team Handball, for always pointing me in the right direction.

From St. Paul's *L'Etoile du Nord French Immersion*, I need to thank Dr. Fatima Lawson, who felt strongly enough about this program to offer me her school and her students, Kristine Blomgren, without whom none of this could have actually materialized, and the wonderful students of LNFI, who brought with them each week focus, enthusiasm, and that certain *joie de vie* that makes coaching kids so enjoyable. Never stop playing; never stop laughing.

In the technical department, I need to thank Al Nowatzki, whose photographs, including the amazing cover, feature prominently throughout this guidebook, and Jonathan Goodwin, who let me use his handball court graphics from last summer's London Olympics.

Last, I need to thank my assistant coaches, Khaled Alsharji and Josh Heterick, who came each week and offered their humor, patience, and knowledge to these kids free of charge. I hope we will be competing against one another next fall in a citywide Mini-Handball tournament.

Dedication

I dedicate this guidebook to my boys, Lucas, T.J., and Cameron; the future of this sport is bright with each of you carrying the torch.