



Participant Manual

A program of the

National
ALLIANCE
For Youth Sports

This Participant Manual was created as a guide for parents. Enclosed you will find information about the Start Smart Soccer program including:

- Activities with performance cues to continue practicing at home with your child after the completion of the program.
- The Readiness Test with ways to interpret your child's score.

While teaching your child all of these skills, please remember that the #1 goal is FUN!!!

Contents of this Manual

Start Smart Soccer and the contents in this manual are the property of the National Alliance For Youth Sports. For additional information, please call 1-800-729-2057.

Introduction

- What is Start Smart Soccer?.....page 1
- Why Start Smart?.....page 1
- Program Guidelines.....page 2

Activities and Performance Cues

- Kicking.....page 3
- Dribbling.....page 5
- Trapping.....page 7
- Throw Ins / Agility.....page 9

Readiness Test Introduction.....page 10

- Kicking Test.....page 11
- Dribbling Test.....page 13
- Trapping Test.....page 14
- Throw Ins / Agility Test.....page 15

Interpreting the Test Scores.....page 17

What is Start Smart Soccer?

Start Smart Soccer teaches children (ages 3-5) the basic skills necessary to play organized soccer, while they work one-on-one and spend quality time with their parents. The program focuses on teaching children and their parents kicking, dribbling, trapping, and throw in/agility skills without the threat of competition or the fear of getting hurt. Start Smart Soccer sessions are held one time per week for 6 weeks, and each week the exercises become more difficult as the class progresses and the children show improvement.

Why Start Smart?

Before entering organized youth sports programs, children need to master the fundamental motor skills that serve as a basis for more complex sports skills. Children do not effectively learn these skills by playing games, but rather by learning and practicing *developmentally appropriate activities*.

Developmentally appropriate activities are tasks that are designed for the current level of performance ability of the child with equipment that enables the child to be successful. Success is extremely important in early motor skill learning experiences, as it builds self-esteem and the motivation and confidence needed to try and improve.

Children who enter youth sports programs with fundamental motor skills and confidence in their ability to perform are much more likely to learn new, more complex sport-specific skills, achieve success in competition, and enjoy a positive sports experience. These children are also more likely to participate in sports fitness activities as adults.

All children should be provided with effective, developmentally appropriate activities and equipment to prepare them for future organized sports competitions. Start Smart accomplishes this by offering programs that encourage children and parents to spend quality time together, without the threat of competition or the fear of getting hurt.

Program Guidelines

These guidelines should be emphasized to ensure that your child obtains high levels of success and achievement during the Start Smart Soccer program.

- ***Positive Learning Environment:*** Children must be provided with a positive non-threatening learning environment where they receive a great deal of encouragement and success.
- ***Children are Unique:*** All children are unique and learn at different rates. It takes them much effort and many practice trials to improve.
- ***Maximum Involvement:*** Start Smart activities are organized so that all children are maximally involved and practicing tasks at the same time. To maximize individual practice time, equipment is provided for all of the parent-child groups.
- ***Success is Important:*** The child should experience high success rates on each task or it is probably too difficult and should be modified (i.e. changing the distance that a ball must travel).
- ***Appropriate Equipment:*** The equipment must be developmentally appropriate for the child. Start Smart provides equipment that is the appropriate size and weight for this age group.
- ***Keep it Simple:*** Children are not “little adults” and they learn and comprehend differently than adults. In the early learning stages, keep it simple by demonstrating exactly what you want them to do.
- ***Positive Feedback:*** Clear, concise, positive feedback from parents regarding the child’s performance and effort will enhance learning.
- ***Expect Success:*** Children need a lot of encouragement and a feeling that your only expectations are that they learn and improve. If you expect success, your child will have the confidence to believe that he/she is capable of succeeding in the particular task.
- ***Complete Tasks Before Continuing:*** Start Smart activities are organized from simple to more complex. A child should complete one task successfully before moving on to the next exercise.
- ***Review Tasks:*** Children will benefit from reviewing previously completed tasks. This practice is especially helpful if they are having difficulty with the next task.

Kicking

Activities and Performance Cues

Equipment

- Use an appropriate ball to teach your child the proper form for kicking. We recommend and use a soft soccer ball initially, and as the children improve we encourage them to use a small regulation-style soccer ball.

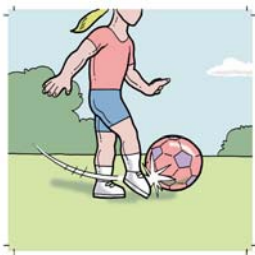
Skills

- To focus on distance, have the child:
 - Kick a stationary soccer ball beyond a marked line.
 - Take 2-3 steps as a running start before kicking the ball beyond the line.
 - Kick the ball to a parent who is standing at increasing distances from the child.
- To focus on accuracy, have the child:
 - Kick to a target.
 - Pass the soccer ball to a parent.
 - Kick the soccer ball between two cones or into a goal.

Kicking



Step behind and to the side of the ball with your non-kicking foot.
Kicking leg should be back, knee bent, and toes pointed.



Swing kicking leg forward, straighten knee at contact.
Contact behind and in center of ball with the top of your shoe for long and low kicks.
Contact behind and to the bottom of ball with the top of your shoe for high kicks.
Point toes.



Arms out to your sides during kick.
Follow through high with leg.

Dribbling

Activities and Performance Cues

Equipment

- Use an appropriate ball to teach your child dribbling skills. We recommend and use a soft soccer ball initially, and as the children improve we encourage them to use a small regulation-style soccer ball.

Skills

- To practice dribbling a soccer ball, have the child:
 - Dribble while standing in one place.
 - Dribble while walking in a straight line.
 - Dribble while going in and out of cones that are placed in a line.

DRIBBLING



Touch the ball on the side of the toe, inside or outside of the foot.

Upper body tilted slightly forward.

Keep the ball close to your feet between dribbles.



Keep arms out to sides and away from body.

Run or jog on the balls of your feet.

Take short strides.

Trapping

Activities and Performance Cues

Equipment

- To begin, use a soccer ball to teach your child how to trap a ball. We recommend and use a soft soccer ball initially, and as the children improve we encourage them to use a small regulation-style soccer ball.

Skills

- To practice trapping, have the child:
 - Stop a rolling ball with the sole of the shoe.
 - Stop a rolling ball with the inside of the foot.
 - Stop a rolling ball and then kick it toward a target.

TRAPPING-INSIDE OF FOOT



Turn toes out with your stopping foot, while keeping your foot flexed.

Face the ball.

Watch ball to side of foot.

Keep your knees bent slightly.

Keep foot flexed and “give”.

TRAPPING-SOLE OF FOOT



Hold foot at an angle with your heel close to the ground.

Face the ball.

Watch ball to foot.

Bend knees slightly.

Throw Ins / Agility

Activities and Performance Cues

Equipment

- Use a soft soccer ball initially and then a small regulation-style soccer ball to practice throw ins. No equipment is needed for running exercises.

Skills

- To focus on throw ins, have the child:
 - Practice throwing in a ball from behind a marked line.
 - Throw in a ball to his/her parent.
 - Throw in a ball to a target.
- To focus on agility, have the child:
 - Run and change directions on a parent's call.
 - Practice sliding back and forth.
 - Combine many skills: the child will change activities between skipping, sliding, walking, running, and the grapevine.

THROW INS



Use both hands equally.
Keep your feet on the ground.



Look at your target.
Follow through with throw.

RUNNING



Keep your head up.

“Lean into” run slightly.

Lift your knees.

Bend your elbows and swing your arms freely.

Run on the balls of your feet.

Run lightly.

Readiness Test Introduction

When are the children tested?

Children should be tested **prior** to beginning the Start Smart Soccer program and then **after** completing the program to gauge progress.

Why are the children tested?

The Readiness Test is qualitative, meaning it focuses on performing the skill movement correctly by following the performance cues. After the test is complete, read the “Interpreting Test Scores” section of this manual as it will determine the child’s level of sport readiness.

How should the test be administered?

Read the directions and set-up for each skill area in this manual. Understand that **the test is NOT used to rank or score any of the children, and the scores are only for you to see, as they will not be collected by the Start Smart Soccer Coordinator.**

****IMPORTANT** Do not give the child any additional instructions other than what is provided to ensure the accuracy of the test results.**

How should the children be scored during the test?

Use the score sheets provided in your manual for the qualitative skill assessment. Give a “√” for each component that is observed, and an “X” if the component is not observed. The child should take as many trials as necessary for you to assess each component individually.

Kicking Test

Kicking Test Set Up and Equipment Requirements

Make a target (10 feet wide using cones or corner flags) or use an actual goal. Mark off 10 feet from the target or goal using cones or marking tape. Use either soccer ball for this test.

Instructions

The child will kick a stationary ball on the ground from the line to the target (or goal). The child may step over the line as they kick the ball.

Verbal Instructions to the Child

“Stand behind the ball and line before you kick. Kick the ball as hard as you can at the middle of the target. You may cross over the line as you kick the ball.”

Kicking Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child's non-kicking foot is slightly behind and to the side of the ball.		
Child's kicking leg is brought back behind the supporting leg with knee bent.		
Child's body is leaning slightly backwards away from the target area.		
Child's kicking leg swings forward and straightens during contact.		
Child's foot contacts the ball in the center of ball with top of foot - not the toes.		
Child's arms are extended at sides for balance during the kick.		

Dribbling Test

Catching Test Set Up and Equipment Requirements

Mark off 2 lines on the floor (15 feet apart). Put a marking cone in the middle of each line. Children can use either soccer ball for this test.

Instructions

The child stands next to the cone set up in the middle of the line. When signaled, the child dribbles to the cone set up on the other line. The child stops at the second cone. If the child loses the soccer ball while dribbling, the trial should be taken over.

Verbal Instructions to the Child

“Dribble from one cone to the other. Stop when you get to the second cone. You can go as slow or as fast as you like.”

Dribbling Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child touches the ball on the side of the toe, inside or outside of the foot.		
Child's upper body is tilted forward.		
Child takes short strides (steps) while dribbling.		
Child keeps the ball close to his/her feet between dribbles.		
Child keeps arms out to sides and away from his/her body.		
Child runs or jogs on the balls of his/her feet.		

Trapping Test

Trapping Test Set Up and Equipment Requirements

In an open area, mark off 2 lines (10 feet apart). The child can use either soccer ball for this test.

Instructions

The child stands with both feet on the line. The parent stands on the other line. The parent will alternate rolling the ball straight to the child and to the child's sides. The child will try to stop it with a foot using either the side or sole of the foot. The child may step over the line to stop the ball.

Verbal Instructions to the Child

"Stand on the line and stop the ball when I roll it to you. Try and stop it with the side (or bottom) of your foot and keep it by your feet."

Trapping Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child holds foot at an angle with the heel close to the ground (sole trap).		
Child turns toes out with his/her foot flexed (side of foot trap).		
Child faces the ball.		
Child watches the ball to his/her foot.		
Child bends knees slightly.		
Child keeps foot flexed and "gives" (withdraws foot slightly at contact).		

Throw Ins / Agility Test

Throw Ins / Agility Test Set Up and Equipment Requirements

Throw Ins – In a large open area, mark off a sideline using cones or tape. The child can use either soccer ball for this test.

Agility - In a large open area, mark off a starting and stopping point 30 feet apart. No equipment is needed.

Instructions

Throw Ins – The child will stand behind the line. When signaled, the child will take the soccer ball and throw it toward the parent who stands 10 feet away.

Agility - The child will begin at the starting point. At the parent's call, the child will run to the stopping point by either zig zagging, running straight, or curved.

Verbal Instructions to the Child

Throw Ins – “Stand behind the line with the soccer ball in your hands. Throw the ball to me when I tell you to do a throw in. Throw it as hard as you can.”

Agility - “Stand at the starting point. First I will tell you how you will run (zig zagged, straight, or curved) and then I'll say, ‘Go.’ Run as fast as you can to the finish line.”

Throw Ins Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child uses both hands equally.		
Child keeps feet on the ground.		
Child follows through with throw.		

Agility Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child keeps his/her head up.		
Child "leans into" run slightly.		
Child lifts his/her knees.		
Child bends elbows and swings arms freely.		
Child runs on the balls of his/her feet.		
Child runs lightly.		

Interpreting the Test Scores

Children Learn at Different Rates

These tests were developed to give professionals and parents an educated *estimate* of when children are ready to begin participation in organized sports programs. Motor skill specialists agree, in all aspects of children's development, that all children go through basically the same skill sequence of motor skill development, but not necessarily at the same rate or time. For a variety of reasons, all children do not reach the same level of skill performance at the same time. For example, there may be a wide range of performance scores on the qualitative assessment tests in a group of children who are all the same age. This is to be expected, and should be considered "normal."

Be Patient with your Child's Progress

As your child proceeds through the Start Smart Soccer program, you will constantly be evaluating his/her progress. As the child meets the goals for each task, he/she is then ready to move onto the next task. If not, it simply means that the child needs more practice and encouragement to perform the task. It does NOT mean that the child does not have the ability or will never be able to perform the task.

Be careful not to compare your child to other children in the group. Remember that children develop and learn on different timelines. Be patient, and give your child lots of encouragement and opportunities to practice tasks.

Do not rush your child out of this developmental program into a competitive sports program before he/she is ready. Remember that children must not only be physically ready to play organized sports, but it is important that they are emotionally ready as well. Your child may benefit more during this time by experiencing success and will gain confidence in his/her abilities by continuing in the Start Smart Soccer program.

Interpreting the Qualitative Assessment Test

Each child should reach a "mature level" in each skill by age six, and definitely before entering an organized sports program. A "mature level" is achieved when all of the described task components on the assessment tests are consistently demonstrated when performing the particular skill.

If one or more of the components is not observed when the child performs the skill, then more practice and instruction is needed and the parent and child should focus on these remaining components. After the child has demonstrated a "mature level" on all skills (the child consistently demonstrates that he/she can accomplish all of the tasks in the skill assessment tests), then he/she has met the minimum skills necessary to begin organized soccer.



**2050 Vista Parkway
West Palm Beach, FL 33411
1-800-729-2057
www.nays.org**



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