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### Basic Soccer Position Terms

**Backs** – Refers to defenders.

**Defender** – A player who works mainly in the defensive third of the field. They are primarily focused on stopping the opposition's attackers from scoring.

**Forward** – A player who is responsible for most of a team's scoring. They play in front of the rest of their team (or in the attacking third of the field) where they can take most of the shots.

**Fullback** – a rear defender.

**Goalkeeper** – I bet you know this one. The player positioned directly in front of the goal who tries to prevent shots from crossing the goalline; the only player allowed to use their hands and arms, though only within the 18-yard penalty area.

**Midfielder** – A player generally positioned in the middle third of the field between the forwards and defenders. Their job is to link the defense and the offense through ball control and passing. They play both an attacking role and a defensive role.

**Striker** – Generally the same as a forward, though it sometimes refers to a forward that is his team's primary scoring threat.

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# What do Monkeys and Gorillas Have to do With Soccer?

## Ask Coach Gary Crandall of Soccer Tots Dallas

by Mike Kravik

On another damp, cold February morning I pulled into the parking lot of the Soccer Spectrum amongst nothing but mini-vans and SUVs filled with car seats. The Soccer Spectrum is an indoor soccer arena located in Richardson and is the home to many different year-round soccer leagues. Inside I saw lots of moms and a few dads with their children getting ready to do their weekly stint of Soccer Tots, a class where children as young as 18 months get a chance to work on their soccer skills.

Gary Crandall brought Soccer Tots to the DFW area. The former electrical engineer from upstate New York began his business in February 2004 based on the principles of giving young kids the chance to have fun, expel energy and develop their motor skills. Soccer Tots will typically conduct 65 weekly classes in various places for kids throughout the Dallas area.

The first class I watched was for the 18 months – 3 year olds and was conducted by a twenty-something young man who introduced himself to the kids simply as “Coach Matt”. All the kids and their parents sat down in a circle and introduced themselves by rolling the ball back and forth. Coach Matt told the kids they needed to stretch and the kids and parents followed his lead through a medley of different warm-up drills.

The class was dialed up a notch when all the kids went to one end of the arena and were told to dribble their soccer ball to the other end. The kids gave knowing nods and made their way towards the goal. One little girl, buoyed by the courage of the stuffed dinosaur she clutched in one hand beat everybody else to the other side. During the next drill the kids play “green ball / red ball.” The kids run towards Coach Matt when he shows them the green ball and stop when he shows them the red

ball.

Leading a class with kids as young as 18 months old sounds daunting but most of the kids were focused and did what Coach Matt said. Like any class there are the occasional rebels who march to their own drumbeat. Some of these kids have sudden compulsions to score and will fall out of line and go on random breakaways towards the goal. Halfway through the class, the kids get a break. The appropriate diaper changes are made, sippy cups are brandished and runny noses are wiped. After everybody recharges, the class starts up again and the kids get to play with water noodles and chase rolling Hula-Hoops (“anything we can do to make them run,” says Crandall). At the end of the first session everybody gathers with their hands in a tight circle like the Dallas Mavericks after a timeout and everybody chants, “1-2-3....Soccer Tots!!” Every kid then gets a hand stamp with a smiling soccer ball and I see nothing but smiles of satisfaction on the faces of the children and their parents.

The second class features the four year olds and they are more advanced than the younger kids. The parents go to the stands but what is interesting to note about these parents is that nobody is on their cell phone or has their nose stuck in some magazine waiting for the time to pass. Everybody seems to be enjoying watching their kids experience an hour of the structured freedom that Soccer Tots provides their four year olds. One mother remarked to me, “This is better than getting on some soccer team because the kids get to actually work on their skills and they have a blast.”

Crandall joined Coach Matt in leading this class because there are more kids in this class and he wants no more than a 9:1 ratio of kids to coaches in Soccer Tots. After introductions and warm up, the kids go to one of the goals which are referred to by the coaches as the “Monkey Cage.” The kids are then

told to dribble their soccer balls but not to panic when one of the gorillas (Crandall or Coach Matt) sneaks up on them. In the next drill the kids get to exact revenge on the gorillas by throwing their soccer balls at them. The kids don't know it but when they are going after the gorillas they are working on their overhead throw-ins. This type of coaching is known as guided discovery. The kids are learning skills and they don't even know it. The next drill is “rock and roll” where the kids dribble the ball and then stop it with their foot. Crandall encourages the kids not to touch the soccer balls with their hands because the balls are “hot.”

Halfway through the session the kids are on their break and a little waif of a girl named Larissa sashays up to Crandall, hugs his right leg and pleads with all her heart “Can we please play doggy doo next?” Crandall could not resist Larissa's request and the kids got to play “Doggy Doo.” The kids split into two teams and spent the next five minutes kicking 25 balls back and forth to each other chastising the other team for having the gall to put something in their yard. Little 4 year old Larissa enjoys this drill most of all and after booting a ball into the other team's yard she puts her hand on her hip and in her best Clint Eastwood she says, “Get that out of my yard!”

The beauty and genius of Soccer Tots exists on several levels. Most importantly, the kids are having obvious fun but they are also working on developing soccer and motor skills. Crandall says the recipe to keeping the kids constantly interested is to have several different drills that are all fun and coaches that are passionate about what they are doing. “I love to hear the kids say to me ‘What's next, Coach?’”

Another quick hour goes by and 15 more kids go home with not only more soccer skills than they had at the beginning of the hour, but with stamps on their hands and smiles on their faces.