

U6-U8 Age Appropriate Activities

"The younger they are, the more organized the coach must be."
Dr. Tom Fleck, USSF National Staff Instructor

Topics to Cover – for U6-U8 Coaches

- Age Appropriate Activities / Fun Games lead to Development!
- Dribbling, Turning with Ball, Fakes and Skills
- Passing – Encourage players to pass to partner (at U7-8)
- Finishing – encouraging the mentality to shoot!

KNOW THE PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH COACHING

Decision-making is the key. Soccer is a game in which the players have to think! Let the players make some input into the session, by giving them some opportunities to make decisions within the games that you choose as a coach.

The coach makes the games and the rules simple. One should allow scheming but not cheating. Have a lot of balls around as a coach, so that you can shout 'ball's out' or 'get out of here' to make the play somewhat continuous for plenty of repetition.

Review Principles of Youth Coaching

A COACH OF YOUTH SOCCER MUST ALWAYS BE POSITIVE !
A COACH MUST ALWAYS CHECK THAT THE PLAYING AREA IS SAFE!

1. Activities need to be developmentally appropriate – fun, agility
2. Give clear instructions – Brevity, Clarity, Relevance provide good pictures – little talking
3. Simple to Complex progression
4. Opportunities for decision making – attack/defend scheming
5. Use safe and appropriate spaces (ie. 20x30 yards)
6. Provide plenty of implications for the game – very wide scope with young kids

It's all in a name!

Note: The name of a game is very important. The younger players will concentrate for longer at an activity if it is called something they can relate to and use their imagination to play at. Five years ago, the kids favorite was the Power Rangers, so instead of a 'soccer drill', we played the Power Rangers game! They didn't think they were learning the same old 'soccer skills' so they enjoyed themselves using their own imagination and creativity. Coaches should attempt to get into the psyche of their players and find out what they enjoy. Their concentration will last longer and the coach's job will be easier!

U6-U8 Appropriate Games – Warm-Up & Dribbling

Coaches have to consider players of this age from three perspectives; physiological, psychological and social. Children of any age can differ in their level of development in either of these categories by as much as (plus or minus) 3 years. There can be a world of difference between players starting their first season as opposed to their third! Please review the activities below and from your own personal experience, adjust accordingly to the developmental needs / techniques of the players/coaches you are

working with.

Concentrate on a lot of touches on the ball for each player – each with own size 3 ball. If a game is becoming tedious or the players are restless – declare multiple winners and move on to another activity. It is vital that a coach knows (or works out quickly) what level his/her players are at! If the games are too easy, the kids get bored and if they are too difficult, they get frustrated. Make activities sufficiently challenging to keep the players interested, or challenge the better individuals while a game is ongoing (i.e. using left foot only etc.).

Note: U6 have difficulty seeing imaginary lines between cones – so lay a lot of disks for sidelines

Warm Up Games

U6-U8 Players do not need to do any static stretching, unlike us adults! This is not to say that we cannot do some ball gymnastics for fun and get them into good habits, but use sparingly. I prefer to use a quick warm-up tag game to get kids 'juiced up' (excited) for the game of soccer. This in turn will get the kids to both get out of their parents car and tie their shoelaces quicker – I mean who wants to do laps or stand in a circle listening to the coach at this age!?

Red Rover / Sharks and Minnows

All players start in a line at one end of the grid, while coach is in the middle. Coach calls 'Red rover, red rover, send everybody over' (everybody can be substituted for boys, girls or shirt colors if big numbers). The coach tries to tag players, who in turn try to reach the other side of the grid safely. If they do they turn around and wait for the coach to call again. If they are tagged then they are in the middle with the coach. Can progress to having the kids each with a ball (gets them to attempt to look up while dribbling!)

Red Light Green Light

Start all kids on one side-line of a grid. The object is to be the first to the other side. When you (the coach) calls 'green light' they move as fast as they can towards the other line. When you call 'red light' they must stop keeping their ball under the control. If they still move or their ball is more than 1 yard from their feet they go back to the start line! Make it fun – if they move their face muscles (coach tries to make them laugh) they have to go back also.

Blob / Link Tag

Coach is it, all the players have a ball in a grid. If the coach tags someone or their ball (usually get the best dribbler first to allow the weaker kids to get more touches), that player's ball is knocked out of the grid and then the two link arms and try and get somebody else. Game continues.

Pac-Man

One player starts with a ball in a grid (usually one of the better players). All the others start in the grid without their balls (placed just outside the grid within easy reach). On command the player with the ball has to dribble the ball under control while attempting to tag others. If he does then they also get their ball and attempt the same.

Freeze Tag

Every player starts with a ball in a grid except two taggers (in different color bibs). After 3 seconds, the taggers are free to tag anyone with a ball. If tagged, they have to freeze with their legs apart and ball by

side. They can be released (or unfrozen) by another free player dribbling ball up to them and passing ball through frozen players legs. Swap taggers after 30 seconds or if they freeze everybody!

This can also be played without the ball, just as a tag game. To be unfrozen, free players crawl through the legs of the frozen players.

Hospital Tag

Lay out appropriate sized grid, with a small square in the middle (the hospital). Make 2 players taggers, who have to chase others. If tagged on shoulder for instance, player has to hold shoulder with one hand until they can run into the hospital to free themselves. Game gets amusing if player is tagged 2-3 times in open!

Everybody's it!

Every player starts with a ball in a grid. On command they can hunt each other down and if they can touch their ball against somebody else's then they score a point. This teaches them to be creative, fake to get a view of someone's ball or in turn shield their own ball from attack!

Other Simple Ideas

Can use control ball from air to thigh then dribble away quickly 5 touches. Then use air to foot.

Dribble in area. On command 'switch' leave ball and find another. Continue dribbling.

All players like opportunities to challenge themselves. For instance, once in a while use outside of foot and left foot – Get players used to using all surfaces of their feet.

Minefield

Two teams turn cones upside down or right way up to score in 30 seconds!

Variations of Minefield

Dribble round cone in order to pick up

Croquet – same as above only introduce knocking other persons ball away with your ball

Outside of foot (still w/knocking ball away). Can dribble around 2 at a time (schemer)

Play and Retrieve

Play individually (at U6) and begin to pair players up (at U7-8). Show them a couple of ways to retrieve ball then let them be creative! i.e. Throw ball away and give # of body parts to bring ball back with

of passes to hit server's feet

Coach/Server moves to a different position after he kicks ball away

Remember at these ages we do not want to say the one with the most points chooses a consequence for all the rest! Most players in this age range will lie about their score...especially little boys! A coach

should be aware that if he/she plays a game with points and asks the first boy what did you get and he says 'N' (a number), the next will say 'N+1', the next 'N+2' etc.! Be careful!!

Practical Session Information for Coaches of U6-U8

Please note that most coaches of these age groups are fairly inexperienced in the game. I find the best way for them to learn and to experience the frustrations of their 6-8 year olds is to get a ball and attempt the activities that they are going to ask their players to do, prior to the practice!

Please remember that although U6-8 players do not need static stretching you are working with adults who do, so while you are introducing yourself and explaining the clinic format make them stretch whatever they need!

WARM-UP

I usually pick 2 of the above games to show them 2 examples (one without a ball and one with), for instance Sharks and Minnows (without a ball) to get them enthused and having fun, and then Red Light Green Light to get a ball involved in a simple exercise. Good start for U6 practice.

DRIBBLING

After some fun warm-up activities, ask the coaches to dribble in a defined rectangular area. Ninety percent (85%) of all players in the world, prefer to kick a ball with the right foot. Consequently, 85% of all young players will dribble the ball round in a counter-clockwise direction. Coaches must recognize this problem and attempt to get their players comfortable with both the left and right foot.

Get the chin off the chest!

At the youngest ages, teams usually play 3v3. There is no such thing as 3v3! In reality, the game is 1v5 because all players play with their head down concentrating on the ball! We want them to look up to be aware of what is around them. There is a simple activity to help do this, called Body Part Dribble. Have all players dribble their ball around in the set area and when the coach calls out a certain body-part, for instance 'hand' then the players stop the ball with their hand. Try this a few times then the coach does not call out but simply points to the body part on his/her own body. This will quickly get the players to look up after each gentle touch on the ball.

Find your own space!

Then instead of having to look up for the coach, just let the kids play without bumping into each other. Stop the players when a few are close to each other, then get them to stand with their arms out to the side and twist gently from the waist. If they can touch one another player, they are too close! Then guarantee them that the next time you stop them, they will all find their own space. As a coach, one must stand in an appropriate spot to see the whole field of play. He or she can wait until every player is in their own space before calling stop. This way show the coaches that they can stand in a position to see everybody and recognize certain situations in which to stop the players to make positive points.

Shielding/Turning (for 7-8 year olds)

Introduce the concept of shielding the ball using hands first (younger players will comprehend this infinitely quicker as they are more dexterous with their hands than feet). Each player has a partner with one ball between them. (The Coach should give a good picture to start so they do not go straight down and bang heads). One player tries to keep the ball away from coach. The only rules are that the ball has to remain on the ground and that you can only maneuver it with one hand at a time. If partner (coach)

touches the ball with his/her hand possession changes! When coach wins ball, demonstrate that you don't have to run away, just simply place your body frame between the ball and the opponent.

Secondly, tell players not to travel – can stay in one spot and still retain possession

Third, get shielder to keep hip pointing to partner

Fourth, play shielding game using feet

Fifth, give everyone a ball in the rectangle and if coach (without ball) approaches them they are to turn away to shield. Coach can introduce inside and outside of foot turns this way.

Simple Body Fake or Trick!

All kids/players love to learn new tricks! Instructor can use their favorite trick or any Coerver move as long as they break it into very small steps. I prefer to teach tricks without the ball first!

Get all participants to stand 3 steps back from their ball to learn the foot positioning first before complicating things with the ball! Lift the left foot up, take a small diagonal step forward (to the left), bend the left knee and drop the left shoulder down. Then lift the right foot up and take a quick hop diagonally forward to the right. When the ball is involved, on the hop push the ball forward in the same direction with whichever part of the foot is comfortable, preferably the right hand side of the laces of the right shoe. Let them practice on their own for 30 seconds. Do not spend long on this exercise. Some players will understand the concept and this will begin to rub off on the players around. I have had a 3 year old do this fake at camp and remember it the next day! Only spend 3-4 minutes on this then move onto another high intensity activity.

Windows '98

Place a number of windows around an area (2 cones close together). 2 players have to dribble through the window to score a point. Only rule is not to dribble through same window twice in a row! The Coach must introduce vision at this point. Head for the window that is open (i.e. no-one around it) so you don't have to stop and wait your turn! Let them play once and then can give some suggestions for the technique to use!

PASSING

U6 Players usually are not psychologically ready for passing to their teammates and are still in the mindset of parallel play – each is playing a separate game in their head. Still it is never too early to give them a concept, as some will get it and again it will begin to rub off on the others in their peer group. Most U8's who have played before are ready for the concept of passing to a team mate. The following game is ideal to introduce passing to a partner.

Windows '98

Place a number of windows around an area (2 cones close together). 2 players have to pass through the window to score a point. Only rule is not to pass through same window twice in a row! The Coach must introduce passing and communication at this point. Let them play once and then can give some suggestions for the technique to use!

Do not berate kids for using their toes! They will use whatever part of their foot that is comfortable for them. Simply suggest different areas of the foot and tell them why (more surface area etc.) I like to use the example of when Brazil beat England in 1997 1-0, Romario scored toe-poking the ball in the corner

as it was the only part of his outstretched body that could reach the ball. Ask the coaches if you think the Brazilian coach slammed Romario against the lockers after the game for using his toes?

Advance the game for U8 players by giving double points for left foot or outside of foot passes.

3 teams (3 blue, 3 orange, 3 yellow). Have to pass through window (gate) to score a point. How many can you score in 30 seconds. If balls collide – deduct 1 point.

Death on the Nile!

10x30 grid. 3 teams of 3 players, and 3 balls. Each team gets one minute in the middle (the river). Count # of interceptions. Other 2 teams have to play the balls across the 'river' back and forth.

Introduce calling for the ball, then passing to a teammate on same side to open 'channels'.

Within game can coach recommended technique for passing (with inside of foot and why) & receiving. One can also introduce simple deception at this point (faking the pass & knowing defensively what they are trying to read to anticipate).

FINISHING

U6 Finishing

Simply having the coach stand between 2 flags (the goal) and having kids dribble ball in and try to kick it in the goal is enough to start. Of course the goalkeeper (coach) lets most balls in! Then we can progress to other finishing games...

Crab Soccer

Divide the kids into 2 teams of 3-4 players. Set up a grid with a goal at one end. Have one team (each with a ball) stand on the opposite end line from the goal and get them to dribble around the other team (down on hands and feet like crabs with bottoms off the floor). If player scores, have them pick ball up run back to start line and try again. Switch teams after 1-2 minutes.

Get out of here

Play "Get out of here" (works for 8-12 year olds) - Two teams in a line (no more than 4 in a line!) stand at opposite corner flags. The coach stands on the half way line with all the balls. Facilitate the kids naming their team! Play 1v1 or 2v2 in a 10 x 15 yard grid to 2 yard goals, with the first 1 or 2 from each side coming out as soon as the coach puts a ball on the field. The coach is boss of the balls! Introduce penalty for encroaching! When a goal is scored or the ball goes out of play, the coach shouts 'Get out of here!' and the players have to go to the back of their line. As soon as the coach yells, he can put another ball on the field for the next two players from each team to play. The game is continuous till the coach has no balls left. He can then ask the players what they can do to rectify the situation... They will soon collect all the balls back! Encourage players to shoot as soon as they see a sight of goal!

4 goal open/close game 25 seconds (3 teams of 2-3 players)

Then introduce four small goals, one each on the mid-lines of the grid described above. Have 2 teams of 3-4 players. Four goal game with gates. One team can be assigned to be gatekeepers (at U8) or use 4 parents, with one person standing in each goal and the coach goes in the fourth. They are to act as a gate, designed to close or open the goal (step to the side or in) when directed by the coach pointing or calling

name. The other players (each team with a ball) play to score on any open goal by passing through it. Then try game with only one ball on the field. Then develop to... 'THE GAME!'

Finish with 2 fields of 2v2, with a different method of scoring on each field.

The Coach can use any number of different options! Or go straight to...

"The Game" 3v3/4v4 to goals with one ball!

Every coach has experienced a kid tugging on his/her shirt asking 'when are we going to scrimmage?' A coach should always try to let the kids scrimmage for a third or so of practice in the format that they will play in season.

For the younger kids this will be 3v3. The coach should be the 'boss of the balls' serving balls into play until they are all out of play. Each player must retrieve one ball to the coach to resume game.

Please, Please, Please don't make any kid sit out of a game. Play games of inclusion! If you have an odd number, play 3v4 or 4v5. Don't be too set on even numbers – it doesn't matter. If teams are wildly uneven fix things by having one or two players switch teams.

Excite kids with their own development. You have to be very organized!

Review objectives of soccer activities

1. Get players to solve problems
2. Foster cooperation and teamwork
3. When does the coach control the game as opposed to the players?
4. Use games that bring out an aspect of the real game
5. Excitement – get kids 'juiced up!'
6. Create environments to bring ideas out. Show kids how to survive!