

# U9-U12 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 U9-U12 Coaches

- Age Appropriate Activities / Warm-up Games
- Dribbling, Turning with Ball, Fakes and Skills
- Passing – Encourage players to pass to partner – Look at team shape
- Combination & Transition
- Finishing – encouraging the mentality to shoot!
- Defending (U10+) – the role of the first and second defenders

## 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

See the OYSA Coaching Manual 1996-98 Supplements for other age-appropriate activities!

## U9-12 Appropriate Games

Many of the concepts introduced in the previous module are still going to be applicable to this age group until we build a core of youth coaches that have come through the National Youth License Module system.

Many of the coaches of these age groups have either played a little or been to a coaching clinic before. We must be able to reinforce fundamental skills/techniques to them through both fun games and making them think a little!

Please remember that although U10-U12 players should have had decent habits instilled at the younger group, many never have! I still like to play a fun tag game and use intermittent stretches. Of course the adult participants will need lots, so while you are setting up, introducing yourself and explaining the

clinic format encourage them to have a good stretch.

## **WARM-UP**

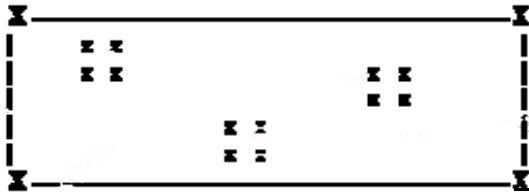
Many of the warm-up activities introduced in the U6-U8 and U8-U10 modules are still applicable or can be made more challenging/appropriate by some minor coaching adjustments.

I still prefer to use a quick warm-up tag game to get U10-14 recreational players '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. Good habits can be formed now though and when changing the taggers after 30-60 second intervals, a coach can introduce some basic stretches (see 1997 Supplement to OYSA Coaching Manual) or utilize some ball gymnastics.

I usually pick 2 games to show them as examples, for instance one without a ball to get them enthused and having fun, and then one to get a ball involved in a simple exercise. At the coaches clinic, I usually play Running the bases, although a coach may use any fun tag game from their childhood!

### **Star Wars or "Running bases" game (for older / more advanced players)**

This activity works for most U8 through U14 players. Set up 2-4 random bases (a base = 4 cones set as a small square, where a player cannot be tagged)



The coach appoints 2 or 3 people as being IT (the taggers then are given a colored training vest to hold in their hand). The objective is for them to get rid of the vest by tagging another player. If a tagger touches another player, he or she drops the vest and the new tagger has to pick it up (no tag-backs). Only 1 allowed on a base at a time. The last one on base is safe (the other player then has to move away).

Then play the game with the taggers without a ball, but everyone else with a ball. Later introduce new rule: tagger has to touch ball, not person! Then make it more challenging by having the taggers only tag by touching a ball with their foot. Stop. Coach can introduce shielding with hands, then play again. Coach players in game – point out good things!

Highlight smart play – ask player why he/she is doing it...

If one player is struggling – the coach can play and bail him out (dribble into him accidentally)

## **DRIBBLING**

Remember to notice and encourage players using both left and right feet!

### **Shielding/Turning**

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.

Then go back to the running bases game again and see if players can now shield and keep ball during game. Coach can introduce another tagger!

Give coaches idea of slanted line concept – interesting to watch different types of players...

Some kids scheme – little dribbling, some kids are chasers, some kids challenge themselves to nutmeg taggers!

Highlight smart play – ask player why he/she is doing it...

If one player is struggling – the coach can play and bail him out (dribble into him accidentally)

### **Ball Wars!**

Everyone has a ball, dribbling in a fairly small grid. Each player can score a point by dribbling around and hitting their ball against somebody else's. This encourages both attacking and defensive play.

It is guaranteed that the coach will be asked 'what happens if he kicked his ball against mine as I was kicking towards his?' Give both a point. Points don't matter. Challenge the individual to beat his/her own personal score each time.

### **Ball Tag!**

Then in a 20x30 yard grid introduce a 2 team competition, blues against orange 8v8. Blues start inside grid without a ball. Orange begin outside grid and then are timed to get a ball (from a pile just outside the grid) pass it amongst themselves and try to hit the blue players with the ball below the knee! If hit this time have to kneel down on one knee, but can knock balls away with other foot. Time it, then change teams.

### **Find your own space!**

All dribble in a reasonable size grid trying not to bump into each other. Again encourage players to use both left and right feet. 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.

## **FAKES & TURNS**

### **Simple Body Fake**

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!

### **Coerver feints/moves**

For the coaches who have not seen or heard of Wiel Coerver, he is an ex-professional player and coach from the Netherlands who introduced a program emphasizing 1 v 1 moves to beat an opponent. His videos and books break down each move and explain it in simple terms. They are available in the OYSA office library and are well worth a look! You will be amazed at what the under 8 player in Holland can do with the ball! Here are a couple of the moves explained:

### **The Scissors**

Standing behind the ball, swing your left foot around the front of the ball from left to right, put toes on ground, bend the left knee, drop the left shoulder, then quickly move the right foot to the left side of the ball and push it forward diagonally to the right with the laces of the right shoe. Remember that the first 3 steps after a move have got to be at pace so the defender does not catch you! Repeat, increasing speed and agility, and practice move with both feet.

### **The Roll-Over**

Standing behind the ball, roll the ball across the body (left to right) with the sole (cleats) of the right foot so ball is moving, then swing the right leg back around the front of the ball from left to right, bending right knee and dropping shoulder, then take ball away with the outside of the left foot. Again, remember that after the move, the player on the ball has got to get away quickly.

The great thing about these moves is that you can practice them inside on a rainy day, because you don't need a ball to quicken foot speed. Try faking the dog or cat out! Try to see the real thing 'live' at one of the OYSA Coaching Clinics.

American Football - Create a playing field of 20 x 30 yards, and make the last 5 yards of each end an end zone. A touch down is scored by keeping possession and creating an opportunity to dribble into the end zone. If this is done with the ball under control, then a touchdown is scored.

## **PASSING**

### **Coaching points (Passing):**

Keep on toes all the time (be ready), look up and take 'snapshot', make decision who to pass to, then head down and keep eye on ball, ankle locked with toe up, swing leg in straight plane, follow through center of ball.

### **Coaching points (Receiving):**

Keep on toes all the time (be ready), get body behind line of ball, look up take 'snapshot', make decision where to turn when ball is controlled (away from pressure), then keep eye on ball, offer largest area of contact to ball, cushion ball by giving slightly on contact, trap towards the ground, push ball out to side ½-1 yard (away from pressure) to enable to take in stride.

**Keep-Away** - This is an excellent exercise for warming up. Instead of having players standing around in a line waiting to shoot at goal before a game, have them gently warm up playing 3 v 1, or 5 v 2 keep-away for 15-30 second intervals. This gives players a lot more touches on the ball and produces a good feel for the particular playing surface, while alternating aerobic and anaerobic exercise. When an opposing coach sees this happen, he knows that the other coach knows what he is doing and begins to worry!

### **Windows '95**

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.

Advance the game by using left foot pass only, outside of foot passes, or play in groups of three to four and introduce the wall pass (see combination below).

2 teams (5 blue, 5 orange). Have to pass through window (gate) to score a point. How many can you score in 30 seconds. If balls collide – deduct 1 point.

Keep ball moving. If ball stops deduct 1 point.

Same game only partners cannot talk (verbally communicate)

Then play Blue v Orange with 3 balls.

Other restrictions include limiting touches, ball never stops, left foot passes, etc.

### **Death on the Nile!**

10x30 grid. 3 teams of 4 players, and 3 balls. Each get one minute in the middle. 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'.

Techniques being used include; passing & receiving, chipping, defending etc. We have to challenge our players cognitively.

Other changes can include; points for passes, keep ball moving, time limit to play ball.

### **3v3, 4v4 Passing & Moving**

Play in a grid 20x30 yards. Two teams of three/four playing with a ball each. All they are to do is to keep possession in the area without bumping into the other team. Coach should stress team shape (triangle/diamond) always to be in a position where you can see the ball i.e. be passed to! Introduce communication and the importance of looking around before receiving and passing! Receiver's first touch should be in the direction where they want to go next.

### **3v3 or 4v4 'American Football!'**

Play 4v4 but instead of making goals for the teams to score in, create an end-zone at either end of the small field. A team can score a 'touch-down' (6 points) if they pass the ball to a team-mate standing in the end-zone. Think up any number of variations for an extra point!

Advance the game by not allowing any player to stand still in the end-zone, or then limit access to the zone to 3 seconds at a time for any player.

### **Chip Pass to Target**

Create three 10 x 10 yard adjacent grids, and three teams of 4 players. Place one team in each square. The team in the middle (team B) have to sit down in their grid, but can move about. The object is for team A to chip the ball to team C over the heads of team B. For team C to score a point, the ball has to be brought down under control (remaining in the grid or at the coach's discretion). Team C then has 3 touches, one to control, one to lay off a short pass and one to chip the ball back to team A. Whichever team is the first to play the ball out of the playing area, or allows team B to make a contact, switches position into the middle.

### **COMBINATION/TRANSITION**

Possession/Transition Game (4 v 2) - Set up 2 adjacent squares of 15 x 15 yards and pick two teams of four players. Start with 4 v 2 in one of the squares, with the other 2 staying in the adjacent square. The 4 try to keep possession in their area. If one of the 2 wins the ball they play the ball into the adjacent square to their teammates and then join them in the square to keep possession. When the transition takes place, the nearest two opposing players also move across the center line to become the 2 trying to win the ball back from the 4. Play continues.

Wall Pass (2 v 1) - In a 20 x 15 yard grid play 2 v 0 to get the feel of a one-touch wall pass as shown in the 1996 supplement. Then add one defender into the grid, and make the offensive pair play 2 v 1 and produce a wall pass to beat the defender and score by stopping the ball on the end line under control. The players with the ball turn round and repeat the exercise, trying to score as many times as possible by utilizing the wall pass. Get player A with the ball to dribble at the defender to start the move. Player B then must read the visual cue and create an appropriate angle to either side of the defender in order to allow the opportunity for the wall pass. As the players get better technically, and more used to the players around them, the coach should point out further visual cues. For Example, if Player A wants to play a wall pass to the left, then he may want to run to the right of the defender (as he faces him). This will not only open up space on that side by drawing the defender away, but it can also be read as a cue for a teammate to create an angle for a wall pass on that side. Add deception by having the initial pass made with the outside of the foot.

Overlaps (2 v 1) - In a similar vein, overlaps can be created down the flanks. In an open space, practice Player A dribbling towards the middle of the grid, with player B making an overlap outside (into the space created) from behind the player with the ball. He must communicate that he has read the visual cue and is overlapping the player with the ball who cannot see him. In a game situation, communication that

the player with the ball has a player open on the flank is vitally important.

American Football - Create a playing field of 15 x 30 yards, but make the last 5 yards of each end an end zone. A touch down is scored by keeping possession and creating an opportunity to pass to a teammate in the end zone. If this is done with the ball under control, then a touch down is scored. Once the players have the hang of the game, introduce a 3-second rule, i.e. a player running into the end zone can stay in there a maximum of three seconds and then has to get out.

## **FINISHING**

### **Get out of here**

Play "Get out of here" (works for 8-14 year olds) - Two teams in a line stand either side of the coach (standing on the half way line with all the balls). Name them team France and team Brazil! Play 2v2 in a 15 x 20 area (or 3v3 in 20x30) grid to 2 yard goals, with the first 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!

### **4 goal open/close game 25 seconds (3 teams of 3)**

Then introduce four small goals, one each on the mid-lines of the grid described above. Have 3 teams of 3 players. Four goal game with gates. One team is assigned to be gatekeepers, one player 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) when directed by the coach pointing. 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...

Finish with 2 fields of 4v4, with a different method of scoring on each field.

Field 1: Chip ball off ground through goal to score.

Field 2: All team members have to be in opponents half of field for their goal to count!

Option 3: Have to go around the back of goal and dribble/pass through cones the opposite way.

**The Coach can use any number of different options!**

### **Jurassic Park**

30x20 or 30x30 yard grid, with 6 mini goals around border. Start with 5 Orange inside grid with balls, Blues are outside. On command they have to come in and steal the balls to score. When scored the ball is dead. Time how long it takes to kill all 5 balls. Swap roles.

### **Numbers Up**

Going to one goal. Add pressure - (i.e. 2v1, 3v2). Provide target for defender if they win the ball. Looking to shoot as quickly as possible, by having body in correct position, showing good 1st touch when receiving ball. 1st touch should be away from pressure. Disguise your shots.

### **Quick Fire!**

Pull one goal all the way up the field to the outer edge of the 18 yard box. Play 5v2 in an area 18x36 yards with two full size goals 18 yards apart. Play for 1 minute at a time, with the 5 having to make 5 passes before shooting. If the defenders steal the ball they go for goal also. You can add goalkeepers at any time.

### **Cooler Ball!**

Can play 4v4v4. Put large cooler / trash can (or similar) in middle of field and have 1 ball and the three teams play against each other! To score a team simply has to hit the target. Kids will play this game forever!

### **Triangular Goals**

Create Triangular goals (3 flags 2 yards apart in a triangle shape) in the middle of the penalty area. Play 4v4 in penalty box. One team has 4 attackers, the other 3 keepers and 1 defender. If ball goes out of box, or keepers / defender makes a save, switch. Let each team captain keep scores.

Then go to larger area – 6v6 or 8v8 in between half-way line and edge of 18 yard box. Open goals up to 6 yards wide.

Advance the activity appropriately by asking players to play 3 passes before shooting or chip over goals to teammate! Have to score with a volley or half volley, etc.

"The Game" 8v8, 9v9 to goals with one ball!

A coach should always try to let the players scrimmage for a third or so of practice in the format that they will play in season. For the U10-12 age group this will be any number from 8v8 to 11v11.

**Excite kids with own development. 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!