

# Age Level Philosophies

## U6 and below

The primary concern with these age groups is to instill a love of the game and to develop fundamental understanding and skills.

The Coach must be enthusiastic and able to give positive encouragement. Praise the players for doing the task correctly. They must be understanding and fair. They must be able to give equal playing time to every player. They cannot be concerned with wins and losses. They must secure a safe environment and most importantly be willing to play games with players and have fun.

- Every player should have a ball in all training drills and games.
- No games where players are eliminated should be played.
- Fundamental motor skills like running, jumping and rolling need to be established.
- Skill development should focus heavily on kicking the ball, stopping the ball, dribbling the ball and stealing the ball.
- You should not teach heading at all and you should always encourage individual success.
- Do not try to teach tactics.
- Get players to move in the correct direction to score or defend on the pitch.
- In the game, everybody moves up and down the field as a unit.
- Do not leave defenders standing at the top of the penalty box or in front of the goal. They can not learn to play the game by standing and watching.
- Do not have players run laps or do conditioning drills that do not develop soccer skills.

Remember these players have short attention spans and will give 100% until fatigued so they must be given frequent but short rest periods.

Most importantly these practices must be **FUN!** There are many games that can be played that teach soccer skills without the players knowing that you are teaching them at all. This is where you establish the Love of the Game. Players should ALWAYS want to go to practice.

## U8

The primary concern for this age group is to continue to develop a love of the game while increasing their individual skills and understanding.

The coach must know basic rules of corner kick, goal kick, indirect kick, kick-off, drop ball and minor fouls. The coach must be enthusiastic and sensitive and must encourage good sportsmanship. Wins and losses still do not matter at this age and should not be emphasized.

- Dribbling skills using all foot surfaces should be enhanced.
- How to receive (not trap) and control the ball should be introduced.
- Passing should be taught (Don't encourage players to just kick the ball down field).
- Encourage controlling the ball and trying to keep possession.
- Shooting and Finishing should start to be taught.
- Every player must have their own ball.
- 75% of practice should be on technique.
- Both left and right feet should be utilized with every activity.
- All activities are to be done with a ball.
- Introduce space, width and spreading out on the field.
- Move up and down the field as a unit (there still should not be a defender standing in front of the goal at this age level)
- Establish an understanding of restarts.
- You should still place heavy emphasis on individual technique rather than group tactics (Lots of 1v1. 2v1 and 2v2 towards goal).
- Do not have players run laps or do conditioning drills that do not develop soccer skills. All activities, including conditioning should have balls involved.

Remember that these players are just starting to develop good social skills. They will be able to focus on themselves and a friend and this should be promoted in the soccer environment. They are also at an age where their feelings are easily hurt so positive feedback, vice criticism, positive or negative, is vital. Praise them when they do things correctly and don't single out a player when pointing out incorrect techniques. Again, practices should be fun and help develop a deep Love of the Game. **PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT!** If they learn it wrong here they will always do it wrong.

## U10

The primary concern for this age continues to be individual skill development but a stronger emphasis now starts to be placed on small group tactics.

The coach must have the ability to demonstrate the progressive technical skills that are being introduced at this level. The coach must seek additional soccer education and coaching licensing where appropriate (licensing for advanced and select). The coach must instill in their players respect for the game and all who are involved in it. This especially means the officiating crews for matches. Player development is still the primary focus at this age so don't over emphasize wins and losses.

- Ball juggling should be utilized to enhance coordination, touch, and feel.
- Receiving and ball control should be heavily emphasized.
- Passing skills including the pace and accuracy of passes should be heavily emphasized.
- Shooting and finishing should continue to be developed.
- All activities should be reinforced with lots of repetitions.
- Goal Keeping skills should be introduced and taught to everyone.
- Introduce positional responsibilities but don't over emphasize them.
- Emphasize spatial awareness (depth and width).
- Introduce 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> attackers and defenders concepts and responsibilities.
- Introduce small group tactics (combination play, overlaps etc).
- Introduce restart tactics (throw ins, indirects, etc)
- Introduce basic set pieces
- 75% of practice should still be on technique

Remember that these players are starting to grow into their bodies. Their coordination and awareness are improving. They understand the team concept better and are more willing to work together for a common goal. They will also blame others and point out mistakes which can hurt teammate's feelings. This is the age where they start becoming serious about playing soccer so it is vital to maintain their love of the game. Practices should still be fun but should also be more focused. PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT! If they learn it wrong here they will always do it wrong.

## U12

The primary concern for this age continues to be individual skill development but a much greater emphasis is placed on small to medium group tactics.

The coach must have the ability to demonstrate technical skills and poses soccer awareness. The coach must seek additional soccer education and coaching licensing where appropriate (licensing for advanced and select). The coach must instill in their players respect for the game and all who are involved in it. This especially means the officiating crews for matches. Player development is still the primary focus but these players fully understand the wins and loss records so as a coach you must be encouraging even after a loss and make them aware of their successes not their failures.

- Increase technical speed and decision making.
- Develop under pressure play.
- Establish 1<sup>st</sup> touch control on all surfaces and on the move
- Establish passing with all surfaces and on the move
- Establish dribbling and taking players on.
- Establish striking techniques and service from all angles.
- Establish shielding, keeping possession, support, and combination plays.
- Establish 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> defender/attacker roles and responsibilities.
- Establish proper defensive pressure and how and when to tackle.
- Introduce man marking
- Establish set pieces
- Continue building Goal Keeper skills
- Continue to develop small group tactics (2V1, 2V2, 3V1, 3V2, 3V3)

Remember that these players are entering an area of development where they start to look up to the professional player and mentors. They are also testing their boundaries. It is very important to establish discipline and instill an attitude necessary to compete and succeed. The technical training must far outweigh anything else in this age group. Encourage players to watch professional matches.