

U—6

COACHES HAND BOOK



INTRODUCTION

THE REAL GOAL

(Reproduced from Soccer Jr. Magazine)

As the editor of SOCCER JR. magazine, I hear a lot about coaching youth soccer players. Clinicians emphasize developing players' skills. Top coaches claim that playing at the highest level of competition is the best way for kids to get better. Soccer administrators speak of the need to turn out better players so that today's 14-year-olds can win the World Cup by 2010. Nutritionists, trainers and sports psychologists prescribe what players should eat, lift and think to maximize their performance. What I rarely hear anyone talk about, however, is WHY kids should play soccer in the first place. It's the most important question of all and one that every coach should know the answer to! If you ask the soccer experts, you're told that kids should play for fun. That's a nice, short answer but one that's way overused. And it's an answer that's much too vague for a coach who is trying to improve his or her coaching skills. After all, what is fun? Lots of laughter? Scoring goals? Getting trophies? Rolling in the mud? Soccer can deliver a lot more---especially as a child grows older.

For starters, soccer can be a great teacher. A good coach helps his players set appropriate goals and then works with the players to achieve them. During this process, players learn about themselves, discovering talents as well as shortcomings. They learn how to deal with winning and losing. Ultimately, it's the well-coached player who can tell the difference between victory and achievement.

Soccer also teaches youth players how to work with adults and with each other. A good coach stresses the benefits of teamwork and the liability of not having it. With a coach who knows when to step back, soccer can reveal the kids who are natural leaders. It teaches them how to help those that are less skilled. It can also teach kids how to be good followers.

In the hands of the right coach, soccer is also a value builder. When a coach makes good sportsmanship the goal, his players are less likely to take shortcuts to glory, such as intentional fouls, intimidating trash talk and cheating.

As a youth coach, keep in mind that you're developing people first and players second. It's your responsibility to shift the focus from building winning records to building character. Developing teamwork, leadership skills and sportsmanship are the goals you must score. If you don't, despite your best intentions, you may hurt the kids you're trying to help. Many kids have started out full of the joy and fun of playing soccer but have gradually lost their enthusiasm and quit because of coaches with upside-down priority lists. Don't add to their ranks.

Today's youth soccer players talk about feeling pressure to win, being forced to play positions they don't like and not getting enough playing time. They complain about loud

and abusive coaches and about self-important referees---and even about parents who have lost perspective. Listen to the kids and do something about it.

Parental Support The Key to Peak Performance

Coaches, you can print this out and hand to parents at your first team meeting. The role that parents play in the life of a soccer player has a tremendous impact on their experience. With this in mind, we have taken some time to write down some helpful reminders for all of us as we approach the upcoming season. If you should have any questions about these thoughts, please feel free to discuss it with us, the coaches.

- 1. Let the coaches' coach:** Leave the coaching to the coaches. This includes motivating, psyching your child for practice, after game critiquing, setting goals, requiring additional training, etc. You have entrusted the care of your player to these coaches and they need to be free to do their job. If a player has too many coaches, it is confusing for him and his performance usually declines.
- 2. Support the program:** Get involved. Volunteer. Help out with fundraisers, car-pool; anything to support the program.
- 3. Be you child's best fan:** Support your child unconditionally. Do not withdraw love when your child performs poorly. Your child should *never* have to perform to win your love.
- 4. Support and root for all players on the team:** Foster teamwork. Your child's teammates *are not* the enemy. When they are playing better than your child, your child now has a wonderful opportunity to learn.
- 5. Do not bribe or offer incentives:** Your job is *not* to motivate. Leave this to the coaching staff. Bribes will distract your child from properly concentrating in practice and game situations.
- 6. Encourage your child to talk with the coaches:** If your child is having difficulties in practice or games, or can't make a practice, etc., encourage *them* to speak directly to the coaches. This "responsibility taking" is a big part of becoming a big-time player. By handling the off-field tasks, your child is claiming ownership of all aspects of the game preparation for as well as playing the game.
- 7. Understand and display appropriate game behavior:** Remember, your child's self esteem and game performance is at stake. Be supportive, cheer, and be appropriate. To perform to the best of his abilities, a player needs to focus on the

parts of the game that they can control (his fitness, positioning, decision making, skill, and aggressiveness, what the game is presenting them). If he starts focusing on what he can not control (the condition of the field, the referee, the weather, the opponent, even the outcome of the game at times), he will not play up to his ability. If he hears a lot of people telling him what to do, or yelling at the referee, it diverts his attention away from the task at hand.

8. **Monitor your child's stress level at home:** Keep an eye on the player to make sure that they are handling stress effectively from the various activities in his life.

9. **Monitor eating and sleeping habits:** Be sure your child is eating the proper foods and getting adequate rest.

10. **Help your child keep his priorities straight:** Help your child maintain a focus on schoolwork, relationships and the other things in life beside soccer. Also, if your child has made a commitment to soccer, help him fulfill his obligation to the team.

11. **Reality test:** If your child has come off the field when his team has lost, but he has played his best, help him to see this as a "win". Remind him that he is to focus on "process" and not "results". His fun and satisfaction should be derived from "striving to win". Conversely, he should be as satisfied from success that occurs despite inadequate preparation and performance.

12. **Keep soccer in its proper perspective:** Soccer should not be larger than life for you. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Remember your relationship will continue with your children *long after* their competitive soccer days are over. Keep *your* goals and needs separate from your child's experience.

13. **Have fun:** That is what we will be trying to do! We will try to challenge your child to reach past their "*comfort level*" and improve themselves as a player, and thus, a person. We will attempt to do this in environments that are fun, yet challenging. We look forward to this process. We hope you do to!

New Hampshire Soccer Association

PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS

CHARACTERISTICS OF U -6 PLAYERS

- *Short attention span.
- *Can attend to only one problem at a time.
- *May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- *May or may not understand or remember: what lines mean on the field; what team they are on; what goal they are going for.
- *We need to be patient and laugh with them as they get 'lost' on the field.
- *Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often. Give "hints", don't criticize. [1 Need generous praise and to play without pressure. No extrinsic rewards (trophies, medals, etc.) should be given for winning.
- *Prefer "parallel play" (Will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates. Thus, a 3 against 3 games is, in reality, a 1 against 5 games because they all want the ball at the same time.
- *Very individually oriented (me, mine, my).
- *Constantly in motion, but, with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly.
- *Development for boys and girls are quite similar.
- *Physical coordination limited. Eye hand and eye foot coordination is not developed.
- *Need to explore qualities of a rolling ball.
- *Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc..
- *Prefer large, soft balls.
- *Catching or throwing skills not developed.
- *Can balance on their "good" foot.

THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT

As coaches of these younger players there are things that we know that we can expect during training and games. If we know what to expect, we will be more effective in dealing with the hundreds of situations that come up. This will help us relax, and, in turn, allow us to enjoy the unpredictable nature of working with these children even more.

Here are some of the things that we can expect:

- *Most players cry immediately when something is hurt. Some cry even when something is not hurt.
- *No matter how loud we shout, or how much we "practice" it, they can not or will not pass the ball.
- *Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field in

need of a toilet.

*The only player to hold a position is the goalkeeper (if you play with one). Don't even consider teaching positional play.

*Twenty seconds after the start of a game, every player will be within 5 yards of the ball.

*Several players will slap at the ball with their hands, or pick it up. Several parents will yell at them not to do that.

*A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get 99% of the player's attention. By all means, stop whatever you are doing and go watch for a couple of minutes!

*During a season, you will end up tying at least 40 .50 shoe laces. They will do something that is absolutely

*During a season, you will end up tying at least 40 .50 shoe laces.

*They will do something that is absolutely hysterical. Make sure that you laugh!

COACHING RATIONAL

It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 6 year old, in general, do not do so by their own choice. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives.

With the above assumptions, let's look at some things that we can do to energize the U-6 players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically initiate the sign up for next year!

*Each session should be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible.

*Involve the ball in as many activities as possible. Basic movements such as running, skipping, hopping, etc. need to be emphasized. If these can be done while kicking, catching, rolling, or dribbling a ball... all the better!

*Training should not last for more than one hour. This is primarily due to physical fatigue and attention span considerations. Train once or twice a week. Any more than this may lead to their and your burnout.

*Have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can get into one hour. Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!

*Every player should bring his or her own size #3 ball.

*Remember, although they may have very similar birthdates, their physical and / or mental maturity may vary as much as 36 months. Activities need to accommodate these individual differences whenever possible.

*Team play and passing is an alien concept to these players. They know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they often will steal it from their own teammates. Do not get uptight if they do not pass, let them dribble to their heart's content.

*Plan for at least 4, 90 second drink breaks, especially in warmer weather. Their "cooling system" is not as efficient as in older players.

TYPICAL TRAINING SESSION

Here are some items that should be included in a U-6 training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that may or may not involve the ball. They can chase their ball as it is thrown by the coach, bringing it back with different parts of their body. Or, they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball. “Soccernastics” activities are very appropriate, like: rolling the ball with the bottom of their feet, with their elbows, backwards, with the back of their neck while holding on to it; throwing it up and catching it; keeping it up with their feet while sitting.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1 v.1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or “Red Light Green Light”, or a game where players are trying to knock their ball through gates. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of “inclusion” instead of games where the “looser sits”.

PLAY THE GAME: Move on to the real game, but, make sure it is a 2 v. 2, 3 v. 3, or 4 v. 4 games. Switch the game every 5 minutes or so. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Use cones if you don’t have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. It is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their thigh and then catch it. It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

U-6 PRACTICE IDEA:

“Keep Your Yard Clean”

Here is a game that involves kicking and is a good example of parallel play in that it involves all players on the team at one time, but, they are all acting as individuals during the game. This allows for individual differences in skill. The game is simple, fun, and easy to adapt to account for team size and experience.

THE GAME: Create a ‘neutral area’ between the two teams where no player is allowed into. This area can be as small as one yard and as big as 10 yards wide. The width is determined by how far the players can kick the ball. Each player starts with a ball at his / her feet. On command, each team tries to keep their

side of the game free of balls by kicking their ball over to the other teams' side. After an appropriate amount of time (when the balls become too scattered, or, the players are losing focus), call the game and count which side has the most balls on their side. Distribute the balls evenly for another try if the players are still interested. After players have found some success with this basic game, try these variations:

- *Players can only use their left foot.
- *Throw the ball back.
- *Punt the ball back.
- *Dribble the ball around a cone that has been set up in the middle of their "yard", then, kick the ball back.

U-6 PRACTICE IDEA: "Red Light..Green Light"

Here is a game that should be familiar to most U-6's. Again, the game is fun, simple to set up, and has direct application to the game. The skill that it is targeting is dribbling.

THE GAME: Each player has a ball, except the one player that is designated as the "light".

Lines from start to finish should be approximately 20-30 yds..

Players start from the line opposite the "light". The "light" then turns away from the group shouting out "GREEN LIGHT". At this signal, the players start to dribble towards the "light". When the "light" turns back around, calling out "RED LIGHT", players must freeze their bodies and their ball.

If the "light" catches players or a ball still moving, that player must take 5 steps back. The first player to cross the line where the "light" is standing is the winner and becomes the new "light".

You can start the game without using balls for younger players, then have them roll the ball with their hands, then use their feet.

Written by **Jeff Pill**, NHSA Director of Coaching. Special thanks to **Dr. Thomas Fleck and the**

National Youth Coaching Staff, **Bill Buren Dr. David Carr, Dr. Ronald Quinn, Virgil Stringfield.**

DRILLS

"KNOCK-OUT" GAMES

DRIBBLING AND TACKLING GAME

DURATION: 10 TO 20 MIN.

GROUPS: THE MORE THE MERRIER, 1 BALL PER PLAYER

GOALIES: NO

EVERYONE FOR THEMSELVES:

Players are instructed to dribble around the inside of a circle. On command, players try to keep possession of their own balls while trying to kick other players' balls out of the circle. Once a player's ball goes outside of the circle, he/she is out of the game. The last one in the circle is the winner. Allow the first three players out of the circle a "second life" (they can reenter the game).

ONE AGAINST ALL:

One player without a ball is "it." He/She tries to tackle the ball from any other player. Once he/she wins control of the ball or a ball leaves the circle, the player who lost the ball becomes the defender. Play continues.

VARIATIONS

--Before you start the game, have players work on dribbling moves or ball-touch exercises. Yell out instructions like "dribble with left foot only" or "stop (and go)," or "jump over the ball 10 times," and so on.

COACHES

Most players love these types of games. They are fun and competitive and help to develop dribbling skills. They also foster a player's ability to know what is happening around him/her. Players must always have their heads up and be aware what is happening around them.

Don't let players stand and protect their balls, instruct them to keep moving and trying to knock other players out of the game. If play is dragging on, send in a "pirate" or another player to help kick balls out of the circle.

Instruct players to be careful so that no one gets unnecessarily hurt. Some players end up kicking other players in the legs.

INSTRUCTIONS

"Keep your heads up"--Whenever possible.

"Don't leave your ball"--Players must keep the ball within playing distance at all times.

"No 'teaming up"--Don't let players play favorites. It's everyone for themselves.

FIRST TO THE BALL

DRIBBLING, TACKLING, AND SHOOTING

DURATION: 15 TO 30 MEN.

GROUPS: 2 LINES (3 TO 4 PER LINE), SERVER, SUPPLY OF BALLS

GOALIES: YES

Players line up on opposite sides of the goal post (form two lines). A server positioned behind the goal plays a ball into the field 15 to 20 yards from the end line. At the moment the ball is served, the two players at the front of each line race to the ball.

Both players try to win the ball and score on the same goal. The player who gets to the ball first tries to beat the other player and score. If the other player wins possession of the ball, he/she then tries to score. Each line is a team. Keep score.

VARIATIONS

Easier

--Play without goalkeepers.

--Pair players of even abilities.

--Change the starting position of the players or server. (Players start near midfield and run toward the goal).

COACHES

Watch closely how the player who reaches the ball first tries to turn and face the defender. Good players will try to create space between themselves and the defenders, and then turn face in the direction they want to go as soon as possible after getting to the ball.

When running at the ball, players can use their upper bodies and shoulders to gain (and keep) possession of the ball. This is called a shoulder tackle. This tackle is “legal” only if the player is going straight for the ball. The arm can not be extended. Only the shoulders (and upper arm) are allowed to make contact with the other player.

Instructions

“Go for goal”--Discourage players from dribbling away. Implement a time limit if players are taking too long to shoot.

“Stay goal-side”--Defender should always try to stay between the goal and the ball.

“**Beat the defender only once**”--attacker shouldn't hesitate after “beating” the defender. Don't give the defender time to get back in position.

“FUN” DRIBBLING DRILLS

“**Bees**”- **One** they really seem to like is to dribble in an area (tell them they are bees and to buzz), then after awhile, have the coaches (or a few parents) walk around inside the area. It is the job of the “bees” to “sting” the big people with the ball (a pass or kick). The need to keep looking for a target and hitting it. They really seem to enjoy this one.

“Sharks & Minnows” or “**Freeze Tag**”- Again, mark off an area (20x20, or whatever makes sense for the number of kids) and have each kid with a ball (minnows). Then release a shark into the area (one of the kids without a ball). The shark's job is to get the other kids balls. I play for just a touch, can also have kick out of the area. Once a ball has been played, the dribbler (minnow) is frozen, have them take the ball over their head and put their legs apart. To be unfrozen (released), another player (minnow) needs to put a ball between their legs (usually dribbled). Switch the sharks every 30 seconds to a minute.

“**Wave Game**”- Another game is with a 20x20 area (easily could be bigger). Have all the kids with a ball at one end. Their job is to dribble inside the square to the square to the other end. Start with the coach or other person in the middle. They are to try and kick the ball out of the area. If a person loses their ball, they help in the middle. Play starts on a go command, so there is a big wave of people trying to get across.

“**Rapid Fire**”- Can also play this where the person in the middle has all of the balls and they try to hit the runners (below the waist) with a good pass/kick. For U6's, this can be a bit hard...

Rules for U6 Games

Duration of Game and Number of Players

- U6 play (4) 9 min. quarters and players on field 3V3 No Goal Keeper.

- **Safe Play is #1 priority.** If a player is down in the area of active play, stop the game. If a player is hurt, stop the game. Check player for injury. Substitute if needed and restart the game. A drop ball will be used where the play was stopped or at least 5 yards from the goal area.
 - Goals may be scored at kick off however, it is not recommended.
 - All players are to play a minimum of (2) quarters (1/2) the game.
 - Quarters should be immediate change and Half time should not exceed 5 minutes.
 - All fouls are considered Indirect kicks regardless of being committed in the penalty area and should be touched by another player before a goal can be scored. They should be taken at the spot where the infringement occurred, or at least 5 yards from the goal area.
 - When a team is ahead by 3 goals they should pull their top scorer back to a defensive position or have them pass to a teammate. If they should score a goal it will still count.
 - If the ball goes out over the goal line and the last person that touched the ball was the offence then a goal kick is awarded to the defense from the corner flag.
 - If the ball goes out over the goal line and the last person that touched the ball was the defense then a corner kick is awarded to the offence from the corner flag.
 - If the ball goes out over the touchline the team that did not touch the ball last will receive a throw in or kick in. We strongly recommend that you teach the children the proper way to throw in (behind head and both feet on the ground, no lifting of the foot) instead of kicking, however it is not mandatory.
 - If a goal is scored the opposing team will receive a kick off. U6 does not play with goalies. Placing a child in front of a goal in an attempt to be a goalie is not recommended. Coaches please do not stand in front of the goal or get in front of players.
 - In this age group the offside rule does not apply.
- - No Jewelry can be worn during game “not even stud earrings covered with tape or band-aid”
- **Not enough players to play?**

If your team does not have enough players, you may have substitutes on your team, however, you cannot play at full strength and the substitutes can not play down in age. They can only be pulled from a Division 04 Recreation team registered to play that season, for White House Youth Soccer. You should never have a child on your team on the bench while a substitute is on the playing field. The only exception would be if a player has been injured during the game.

Reminder: Your children are just beginning to learn the game of soccer. Please be supportive and encourage them, at this age they just want to have fun. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact a [Board Member](#).

Rules provided by Kimberly Trobaugh, WHYS Director of Referees

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