

CYS U12 Suggested Coaching Curriculum

Principals of age appropriate development¹:

- Developing good technique is essential at this age.
- 1v1 and 2v1 attacking and defending situations are important to develop individual skills as well as the passing techniques to develop the necessary team game.
- Use small-sided games to develop basic attacking and defensive principles.
- Other important aspects of tactical training are possession, combination play, transition and finishing in the final third, as well as zonal defending.
- Players will rotate in two or three different positions to avoid early specialization.
- Speed, coordination, balance and agility are the main physical aspects to improve at this stage.
- Between U12 and U14, roughly 75% of players will quit playing soccer. This dropout rate is seen across all sports and is a startling number that we need to be aware of at all times. These players need to be allowed to have fun and soccer should be enjoyable above all else.²

US Youth Soccer³ recognizes player development has four key areas: tactical, technical, physical and psychosocial. At this age group focus areas are:

Tactical: Develop attacking/defending principles and combination play

Attacking Principles: penetration, support, mobility, width, depth (length), improvisation (deception, creativity)⁴

Defensive Principles: recovery (immediate chase), cover, pressure, compactness, counter attack⁵

Technical: Accuracy and speed in individual and collective techniques. Focus on quality of passing and receiving technique as well as ball control in game situations.

Physical: Compete to increase speed, agility, coordination and balance in competitive games.

Psychosocial: Cooperate with teammates in collective tasks. Increase collective self-confidence.

Recommended Formations: 3-3-1

3-3-1: three defenders (backs), three midfielders, one forward (striker)

By end of U12 players should capable of:

- Demonstrate good technique at speed in game situations
 - Changing speed and direction to beat an opponent
 - Shielding well and learning to use the shoulder (not hand or arm) to win and keep a ball.
 - Accurate ground and air passes at 20 yards
 - Short passes to feet and on the ground so the ball is playable on arrival.
 - Passing with the inside and outside of both feet.
 - Passing to space so players can run onto the ball.
 - Playing a good first touch consistently
 - Good shooting to the posts while dribbling with both feet

¹ US Soccer Coaching Curriculum, Dr. Javier Perez, 2011, US Soccer Federation

² MA Youth Soccer E Manual

³ US Soccer Coaching Curriculum, Dr. Javier Perez, 2011, US Soccer Federation

⁴ Statewide U6-U12 Curriculum, Mass Youth Soccer

⁵ Statewide U6-U12 Curriculum, Mass Youth Soccer

- o Able to trap the ball with feet, thighs, abdomen, chest and head
- Application of attacking tactics
 - o Recognizing when they are under pressure and protecting the ball
 - o Recognizing when they are not under pressure and moving the ball ahead (penetrating)
 - o Able to change point of attack when needed including switching the field.
 - o Wall passes, give-and-goes and other creative combination plays to move the ball forward.
 - o Movement without the ball to support a player or create space
 - o Playing the ball with intent. (No aimless kicking.)
- Application of defending tactics
 - o Staying between an attacker and our goal when we do not have possession – even if that attacker does not currently have the ball.
 - o Compressing space when we lose possession
 - o Understanding of the roles of pressuring and covering (1st and 2nd defender)
 - o Recognition of opportunities for and support of counter attacks
 - o Good tackling
- Moving around the field as a team in reaction to the play of the game
- Active communication with teammates in game situations
- Understanding the difference in risk in the three areas of the field (defending third, the midfield and the final, attacking third) and playing appropriately

Typical Characteristics of U12 Players ⁶

- All children are maturing at different rates and are sensitive to that fact.
- Need to warm-up and stretch as muscle pulls and nagging injuries are common.
- They like to solve problems.
- Players will typically understand elemental abstract concepts and hypothetical situations.
- Peer evaluation is a constant - their egos are sensitive.
- Coordination may depend on whether or not they are in a growth spurt.
- Technique still needs to be reinforced constantly.
- Playing too much can lead to overuse injuries.
- Playing too much and not feeling like they have a choice in the matter can lead to burnout and drop-out.
- This is the dawn of tactics!
- Keep asking the players to be creative and to take risks! We never want them to stop doing these things and they will enjoy the freedom of being creative.
- Ask for feedback from them - they will tell you how things are going.
- Try to hand over leadership and ownership of the team

Practice Suggestions:

Remember, the game is the best teacher. Every practice should end with some type of small sided game. This allows for the most contact with the ball in a game-like environment.

⁶ MA Youth Soccer E Manual

Emphasis on using techniques to solve tactical problems. These players still need constant technical repetition and we must halt our urge to overly stress tactics in our practices. If we are spending more than 20% of our practice time stressing tactics, we are overdoing it.⁷

Warm-up and stretching now becomes important. Open with a light motion activity with multiple balls in play that you can add players to as they arrive. Warm-ups should incorporate a technical and/or tactical element as a lead in the training session. Once muscles are warm, it is a good idea to complete some dynamic stretching (high kicks, gates, lunges, etc.) Finish warm-up with static stretching if desired.

Female athletes are particularly susceptible to ACL injuries with data suggesting they are 2-10 times more likely to sustain ligament damage.⁸ Please consider adding some knee strengthening activities to your warm-up. Reference:

The Santa Monica Sports Medicine Research Foundation The PEP Program: Prevent injury and Enhance Performance

<http://smsmf.org/smsf-programs/pep-program>

Week 1: Dribbling Turn

Week 2: Dribbling to beat an opponent

Week 3: Passing for Possession

Week 4: Passing for Penetration

Week 5: When to dribble, when to pass

Week 6: Defending 1 v 1

Week 7: Defending (Roles of Defenders – 1st, 2nd)

Week 8: Shooting

Please Don't Include⁹:

- long lectures
- running for its own sake
- specialization by position – especially keepers
- emphasis on winning – remember their definition of fun is different from yours

Special Topics (mix in as needed):

Throw-ins

Free kicks including set plays

Corner kicks – defending and attacking

Volley kicks

⁷ MA Youth Soccer E Manual

⁸ - Why women have an increased risk of ACL injury, Timothy E. Hewett, PhD, American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, 2010 <http://www.aaos.org/news/aaosnow/nov10/research3.asp>

<http://www.aaos.org/news/aaosnow/nov10/research3.asp>

⁹ - Soccer Calling, A handbook for Youth Soccer Coaches, Dean Conway, 2005

Heading – on occasion to practice safe technique

Example: Underhand toss from one player to another for a light head

References:

Mass Youth Soccer U12 Weekly Practice Plans

http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/coaching/practice_plans_u12.aspx