

U6-U8

Things to Remember

- **Players have no “dimmer Switch”.** That is, they will run hard until they drop, rest and then run hard again! Taking frequent breaks for water and/or sprinkling in some low energy activities (like juggling) will keep them refreshed.
- **They don’t play 3v3, they play 1v5!** Often in this age group (especially at U6, but still there at U8 for many), there is one “toy (the ball)” and everyone wants it.
- **Everyone with a ball** as often as possible!
- **It’s all about dribbling for ball control!** Challenge them with using both feet, all surfaces of the foot (except the toe!), and accelerating after a dribbling move.
- **Watch the toe!** Don’t let players dribble and pass with their toe without showing them the right way. Using the toe will help them get it through the high grass, at this age, but it’s the wrong way!
- **Passing doesn’t exist at U6!** So, don’t ask them to do it! At u8, they are just beginning to understand what a pass is, but they really don’t want to do it! If you practice passing (and you should at u8), do it in partners, rather than groups. Dribbling and ball control must still be the priority here.
- **Play skill games that are “inclusive”, rather than “exclusive”.** Nobody wants to be eliminated from a game and watch. If you do play games like “Knockout”, create a way for players to re-enter the game (Five touches on top of the ball gets them back in the game, etc.).
- **Keep it positive!** This age group loves to be praised! They love to show off. Let them and then praise them.
- **Be careful with any discipline.** If there are issues that come up (pushing, teasing, etc.) talk to the whole group about it. Singling out one player often results in tears and quitting. Be careful!
- **Be creative!** This age group loves to pretend! Telling them that they are “Salmon” (swimming up the river) or Mice trying to evade the “Cat” is fun!
- **Spend time on body movements** (hopping, skipping, and tumbling)! Help them get in touch with their bodies!
- **Players develop at different rates!** One U6 player may not want to leave Mom’s lap, while another is quite skilled and accomplished! You must find a way to challenge each player at his/her own level. If you have a dominant U8 player that finds it too easy to score, asking them to help get another teammate an opportunity to score by passing may challenge two players at once!
- **Keep it Fun!!!**



Running a Training Session

Before the session begins:

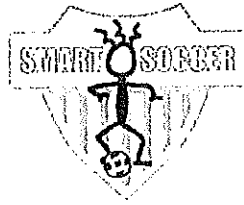
- **Have a goal**- What do you want to get out of the session?
- **Have a plan**- write it down! Make notes on size of space, how many players (what will you do with an odd number?), coaching points, etc.-Be organized! Plan should follow the outline below. It should move from warm-up to scrimmage, small numbers to bigger numbers and from simple to complex.
- **Check the playing area for safety issues**- 1st aid kit?
- **Check your equipment**- Do you have extra balls, scrimmage vests, cones, etc.?
- **Arrive early**- greet players as they arrive! Have an idea for a "sponge activity" as you get set up.

During the session:

- **Get the players' attention!** As you introduce the activity, are the players facing away from distractions? Are they all facing you, standing still in front of you (not in a circle) close enough to hear you?
- **Be clear and concise!** Have you made the point of the activity clear? Do the players understand how to begin and how to proceed? Can you get the activity going quickly (within 2 minutes)? Is it better to just get it going in a basic form and add rules as you go, rather than explaining everything at once?
- **Let them play for a few minutes before stepping in.** Use the time to assess, rather than talking to them.
- **Look for coaching points!** Be careful not to watch the game for your entertainment (it's easy to do!). As the play proceeds, can you make a coaching point? If so, do it briefly! Stop play (if necessary), get in and make a point, and then get out and let play continue. If the point involves only one player, can you just pull that player aside (while play continues), rather than stopping everyone?
- **Stay off the field!** You'll just be in their way. Position yourself in an area (off the playing area) that will help you find coaching points.
- **Keep your comments to a minimum.** Talking too much (choreographing) during play just forces players to tune you out (white noise). When you say something, it should be worth listening to!
- **Ask questions!** Don't give all the answers. Getting players to think about how and why will make them smarter players. If the players aren't getting it, give choices (hints) that will help them think of the answer.

After the session ends:

- **Wrap up**- review what was covered. Ask the players to tell you the purpose of the practice and repeat any important coaching points.
- **Be sure everyone has their belongings and has a ride home- Safety!**



Practice Plan Outline

Topic _____

"Sponge" Activity

This is an activity that "absorbs" players as they arrive for practice. Having something constructive for the players to do (such as "street soccer" or juggling) as they arrive is very useful. It will give you a chance to give 1-on-1 attention to a player, reward a player for being early, and discourages the "social circle" from getting started.

Technical Warm-Up

This should be an activity that incorporates a technique that relates to your session topic. It should allow for many repetitions of the technique in a short amount of time, as well as an opportunity for the players to warm their muscles. This is a great place for a "fun" game, like "Tag", etc.

Small Sided Activity

This should be an activity that begins to resemble "soccer", but that allows for increased repetitions of situations, such as 1v1, 2v2 or 3v3. It should be simple but continue to reflect the topic of the session.

Expanded Small Sided Activity

This game should resemble "soccer" in that it should have goals (even if those goals are "targets" or "end zones") and direction. It may have increased numbers such as 3v3, 4v4 or 5v5 and it can be more complex, but should still reflect the topic of the session.

Scrimmage

There should be a period of uninterrupted play built into this portion of practice. This will allow players to "feel the game out" and experiment. Conditions should closely resemble that of a match (5v5, 6v6, 7v7, etc.) with keepers, if appropriate. The scrimmage should occupy about 1/3 of your practice. Let them play soccer!