

Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association



Coaching School

G License Manual 4 Hour Course

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The **Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association** (Mass Youth Soccer) is the official representative of the United States Soccer Federation (US Soccer), the national governing body for soccer in the United States, and United States Youth Soccer Association (US Youth Soccer) in Massachusetts. At the international level, Mass Youth Soccer is a member of the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). FIFA is the worldwide governing body for soccer and is responsible for organizing, developing and promoting the game of soccer throughout the world. Despite the geographic size of Massachusetts, Mass Youth Soccer is the second largest of 55 state youth soccer associations with over 200,000 members.

Mass Youth Soccer exists to promote and enhance the game of soccer for the youth of Massachusetts and to encourage the healthy development of those players. It does so by offering and sponsoring a variety of programs designed to improve the quality of players, coaches and administrators. We strive to serve players and coaches at all levels:

- The recreational player and coach who are out solely to enjoy the game.
- The club or travel team player and coach who enjoy the spirit of competition.
- The premier player and coach who are looking to raise their play to its highest levels.

The Mass Youth Soccer membership is made up of more than 181,000 players and 24,000 adults. Members are affiliated by more than 427 separate soccer organizations throughout the state (towns or clubs). While these organizations administer their own local programs, they often take advantage of the assistance provided by Mass Youth Soccer (1) to develop and educate their coaches and players, (2) to provide insurance coverage for their participants, (3) for administrative assistance, (4) for board development, (5) as an encyclopedic resource for soccer, and (6) for help in setting organization goals in fitting with development of soccer in this state and the country.

Programs our Instructional Staff currently run to serve these goals include:

- Coaching Licensure Program - we are the **ONLY USSF approved coach licensing body** in the state.
- Coach Education Program - through 2 hour Specialty Clinics and working with specific teams and age groups for towns and clubs, we provide continued education year-round.
- Skills Academy - we run weekly sessions focused on technical training and allow coaches to shadow and ask questions to develop both coaches and players.
- GK clinics - we provide player and coach specific GK sessions as you need them.
- Board Education - our professional staff will attend your board meetings to help serve as an unbiased resource or to meet with board members to help focus organizational goals.
- Team/Player Development sessions - we will run age specific sessions for your team or all the players in your town or club to help with player development and educate coaches.
- Player Camps - we will come to your town to run day camps for your players.
- ODP Coaching Education - we allow coaches to join our Olympic Development Mini-Camp to apprentice with state, regional, and national staff coaches to learn what is being focused upon with our elite players.
- Online G Course - the interactive instructor insures coaches will increase their education.
- Website - provides a wealth of information, including session plans for each age group

Whatever your needs as an organization, we are happy to help you as we all hope to provide the best experience for everyone involved in this wonderful game!

Dear Coach,

Welcome to the Massachusetts Youth Soccer Coaching Instructional Program! Those of us who run this program are passionate about helping children enjoy the game of soccer. By taking this course, you are telling us that you share this passion. Thank you greatly for taking the time and committing the effort to provide a fun and positive experience for the young players throughout Massachusetts. At over 200,000 strong and growing, these children are fortunate to have caring people like you involved in their lives.

It is our hope that all of us can strive to provide young players with a fun and challenging atmosphere at every practice. We hope that we can help children enjoy every game they play, regardless of the score. Through soccer, we not only have the opportunity to teach the game, but also to facilitate the learning of social skills, sportsmanship, an understanding of commitment, discipline and the importance of teamwork. Throw in teaching techniques and other aspects of the game and it is clear we have quite a lot on our agenda. Have no worries however, just as we break the game down into its simplest components for our players, we will do the same in the coaching arena.

This course should provide you with: 1) an understanding of the basic components of the game; 2) the ability to teach technique and correct basic technical errors made by players; 3) numerous activities to use in practice and the understanding of how to organize a practice most effectively; 4) insight into children between the ages of 5-8 that will aid in making sure every child has an enjoyable experience; 5) recommendations on how to educate parents; 6) the needed information to be a confident coach who enjoys coaching as much as your players enjoy playing; 7) connections with others who share your passion!

Whereas we will have suggestions for activities to use and methods by which to coach, the most valuable skill you bring to coaching is your ability to relate with young children. Your personality, your smile, and your enthusiasm are keys to creating an optimal environment for the players. By showing your character and being yourself you will prove to be the most effective coach and the children will benefit optimally.

Thank you very much for taking the time to make children's experience a positive and fun one. Hopefully, you will find this course to be a similar experience. We wish you the best of luck in your upcoming seasons and hope you enjoy coaching for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Tom Goodman, Technical Director Mass Youth Soccer.

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G Course Schedule

Time Period	Topic
0 – 20 minutes	Course Introduction
21 – 60 minutes	Methodology -- Player Characteristics -- No Laps, Lines, Lectures -- Guided Discovery -- Role of Coach -- 4 components -- Economical training -- Mass Youth philosophy
61 – 180 minutes	Field Activities -- Age Appropriate Activities -- Technical skills -- Dual field set-up
181 – 220 minutes	Team Management -- Parent communication -- Ideal Coaching style -- Safety Guidelines
221 – 240 minutes	Closing -- Length/frequency of training -- Q & A -- Long term development -- THANK YOU!

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course is specifically intended for coaches working with children in the U6 and U8 age groups. Beginning coaches will find this a vital course to help them not only get through the season, but to help them enjoy it. More experienced coaches already know that U6 and U8 players provide specific challenges that are unique to these age groups. These courses is designed to help all of us understand what players of this age are and are not capable of doing and to teach skill-sets helpful in making your experience and the players' experience as positive and fun as possible.

No phrase better emphasizes our philosophy of coaching more than “The Game is the Greatest Teacher”. Children learn through playing. Through trial and error, players learn what works and what does not work. By playing the game, they will learn lessons to help them be more successful (however we measure success). That is not to say that we cannot provide guidance and insight when needed; however, they need to experience those trials and errors in order to learn and to have fun. One thing we know for sure is that children know how to play without adult instruction. All we need do to test this truth is to watch a group of children at the park or during recess. Therefore, our first task as a coach is to let the players play without too much intrusion.

Of course, typical practices will consist of a variety of activities. We sincerely hope one activity included in every practice is the actual game (3 vs. 3 for U6 and 4 vs. 4 for U8). After all, are we not practicing for the game itself? Due to that fact, we need to allow the players to experience the game every time they play. On the Mass Youth website, you will find many activities with which to fill your practices. A few commonalities seen amongst these activities are that they always include a ball, do not include **lines**, and are constructed to give all players many touches on the ball. Lines typically require children to wait, sometimes minutes, before their chance to play. Children have told us resoundingly that they enjoy playing more than waiting, so we need to set up activities that allow them to do just that, not stand in a line. And yes, **laps** are counted amongst lines.

Another fundamental truth of coaching that needs attention is that lecturing is not a recommended route of instruction. Children do not enjoy being lectured. In reality, even if we do lecture, the lingering question is that of how much of our lecture the players actually listen to before tuning us out. One might liken us to the teacher on the Charlie Brown cartoon when we are lecturing. Does anyone remember one word that teacher uttered?

If we put these “rules of thumb” together, we come up with the slogan, **“No laps, no lines, and no lectures.”** If we can remain true to this slogan, we are making huge strides toward insuring that players enjoy practices. Read on and you will find many more ideas to help insure that the players have fun. Players who have fun are more likely to keep on playing and it is our hope that we all do our best to start these players on a lifelong soccer playing journey.

METHODOLOGY

The game of soccer can be easily broken down into four components: technical, tactical, physical, and psychological. Whenever running a practice we should do our best to insure that our activities include all of these components. Although we should try to incorporate the four components into all of our activities, we also need to recognize it is important to teach and coach in a manner that is appropriate to both age and ability. Here is a description of each of the four components:

Four Components of the Game

Technical

Technique is the mastery of the ball using various body parts. Skill is the application of that mastery during the course of a game. At the U10 and U12 age levels, players need to continue to work on their technical proficiency and should be placed into situations in which we hope will increase their ability to manipulate the ball when under pressure. Technical proficiency needs to be shown at full speed and with defensive pressure.

Tactical

Tactics are the parts of the game in which players have to make on and off the ball decisions based upon the position of teammates, opponents, where the ball is, where they are on the field and where the goals are in relation to the ball or themselves. U10 players are capable of learning angles of support, how and when to spread the field and the roles of the 1st and 2nd attacker and defender. The U12 age group is often referred to as “the dawn of tactics.” Players in this group should recognize width, depth, support, combination play, and the roles of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd attacker and defender.

Physical

Each player has physical attributes such as strength, speed, agility, size, quickness and endurance. These areas can be maximized but are limited by the genetics of the athlete. At different ages, the development of different parts of the physique should be emphasized. Players do not need strength training but do need to know how to stretch properly and we should focus upon aiding their balance, coordination, and agility.

Psychological

The psychological aspect of the game refers to the mental portion of the game. This includes competitive mentality, optimism, leadership and overall attitude among many things. The mental make-up of athletes can have a vast effect upon their performance and their enjoyment of the sport. Coaches and parents can have a large affect upon young people’s attitude towards sport and their opportunity to enjoy the game. Teambuilding becomes important at these ages, as does teaching our players to be resilient. 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. If we fail to create this environment, we need not talk about any of the components of the game, as we simply will not have children who are willing to play.

Economy of Training

Training economically means the inclusion of more than one of the four components of the game into the same activities within a training session. An example of an uneconomical practice would be running for a whole practice. Fitness might be improved (though injuries increase); however, players would not improve tactically or technically. An example of an economical activity is ball tag which includes manipulation of the ball (technical work), turning, stopping, and running (physical), decision making (tactical), and if the coach sets the environment for success, confidence can be built by the coach (psychological). With the little time we spend with players, economical training is a must.

Age Specific Coaching

These two age groups often prove to be the most gratifying for coaches. The children are typically enthusiastic, thirsty for information, and have yet to enter into some of the rebellion often seen in teenagers. What encourages us even more is the fact that we see hints of the “the real game” at these ages and we see ourselves having a direct effect on the game as we make tactical decisions that drastically effect the game. As exciting as this can be, we must not sacrifice each of our player’s long-term development for an immediate goal. 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.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Although sometimes we may mistake 5-8 year-olds for little adults, they are clearly not little adults. They have many years of childhood and development to enjoy before they are able to look at life in a similar fashion to adults. The reason for this is that they need time to intellectually, emotionally and physically develop. In order to fully understand the children and to make practices run as smoothly and happily as possible, it is extremely important for us to understand the following characteristics about U6 and U8 children.

Typical Characteristics of U6 Players

- *Focused on themselves* – reality to them is solely based on what they see and feel.
- *Unable to see the world from another’s perspective* – it is “the world according to me” time. Asking them to understand how someone else is seeing something is unrealistic.
- *Everything is in the here and now* – forget about the past and future, they live in the moment.
- *Heating and cooling systems are less efficient than adults* – we need to give frequent water breaks (every 8-10 minutes) or they may just run until they cannot run anymore.
- *Enjoying playing, not watching* – they feel no enjoyment from watching others play when they could be playing too. Every player should have a ball in practice.
- *Limited attention span* (on average 15 seconds for listening, 10-15 minutes when engaged in a task) – keep your directions concise and to the point. When in an open environment, such as a park, their attention span will dwindle towards 10 seconds.
- *Effort is synonymous with performance* – if they have tried hard, they believe they have done well. This is a wonderful quality and we should be supportive of their enthusiasm.

- *Active imaginations* – if we utilize their imaginations in activities, they will love practice!
- *Look for adult approval* – watch how often players look to you for approval or to see if you are looking. Also be encouraging when they say “Coach, look what I can do!”
- *Unable to think abstractly* – asking them to think about spatial relations or runs off the ball is unrealistic.
- *Typically have 2 speeds* -- extremely fast and stopped.
- *Usually unaware of game scores* – we should keep it that way.
- *Often like to fall down just because it is fun* – they are just children having fun ☺
- *Often cannot identify left foot vs. right foot* – they know which foot they use most and if they point to their feet you can help teach them left and right.

Typical Characteristics of U8 Players

- *Tend to play well in pairs* – unlike 6 year-olds; these children enjoy playing in pairs. Try to set up the pairs yourself to control the games and manage the personalities.
- *Are now able to take another’s perspective* – they now have a sense of how other people are feeling.
- *Still unable to think abstractly* – still do not have this capability, be patient.
- *Heating and cooling system still less efficient than adults* – still make sure to give frequent water breaks.
- *Still much prefer playing to watching* – keep everyone active during practice and remember no lines.
- *Limited attention span (on average 15-20 seconds for listening, up to 20 minutes when engaged in a task)* – this may vary greatly on any given day depending on school, diet, etc. Try to get a gauge each day and do not fight crankiness.
- *Have an understanding of time and sequence* – they now understand “if I do this, then that happens”.
- *Many have incorporated a third or fourth speed into play* – not all players, but many players now have incorporated a speed or two between stopped and as fast as possible.
- *Extremely aware of adult reactions* – be very aware of your verbal and nonverbal reactions, as they look for your reaction frequently.
- *Seek out adult approval* – be supportive when they ask about their performance or try to show you skills. They very much need reassurance and you need to help build their confidence to try new things at this age.
- *Begin to become aware of peer perception* – a social order is beginning to develop. Be sensitive to this.
- *Wide range of abilities between children at this age* – children all develop at varying paces. You may have an 8 year-old who seems more like a 10 year-old and one that seems more like a 6 year-old on the same team. Your challenge is to manage this range in a way that challenges each player at a level that is reasonable for that player.
- *Beginning to develop motor memories* – by attempting beginning technical skills, they are training their bodies to remember certain movements.

- *Some will keep score* – the competitive motors churn faster in some than others. Surely some parents are fueling the motors with their own. Regardless, we do not need to stress winning and losing at this age. Results should not be important at this age.
- *Less active imaginations than U6 players* – still have active imaginations by adult standards, but some of the silliness that 6 year-olds allowed will not be appreciated by this group. However, children at this age are still quite silly, just in a different way. Still use their imaginations, but watch their reactions to games to read how far you can go with things. Always keep things fun!

Psychological/Fun Aspects of Coaching U6 and U8

The most important aspect of working with these age groups is FUN. If not having fun, children will no longer want to play. Children remind us adults of this fact over and over again when asked in research studies and anecdotally. Psychosocial development is also a very important focus for this age group. Children are still learning how to enter and interplay within a social group and we can help with this through soccer. It is important that we praise children of these ages regularly and help build self-esteem and a willingness to be creative. In this manner, we can support them as individuals and help facilitate their entry into the world of group play.

Five and six year-olds have a short attention span and loads of energy. As a result, quick instructions and simple activities work best. Activities that utilize their active imaginations are preferred and will help keep their attention. These players all want to play with the “toy” on the field, which is the ball. In practice, make sure to have a “toy” for each player.

The U8’s, like the U6’s, need activities that have fun as a central theme. From a psychosocial standpoint, the U8 player has a high need for approval from adults and can be easily bruised psychologically by negative comments from adults. They are very aware of not only what you say to them but how you say it. U8 players are more involved socially, and do enjoy working with a partner; however, they will struggle with larger group sizes. It is important to note there is a wide degree of variation in the social and physical development at this age.

Technical Development of 6-8 Year Olds

Fun, dribbling, and motor development (running, skipping, galloping, turning, jumping) should be the central soccer themes in U6 practices. In order to become comfortable on the ball, U6 and U8 players need to touch the ball as often as possible. The U8 player is now ready to continue the development of dribbling skills, and begin passing and shooting; however, maximizing touches on the ball while having fun is still the focus from a technical standpoint. As we have said repeatedly in this manual, players tell us they play soccer in order to have fun! What we must remember is that one of the main components of fun, according to young players, is seeing themselves improve at something. For this reason, helping them see their technical improvement when they make improvements and praising them for it is vital. It is important that each player be shown their own improvement and that we do not compare all players to the “best” player. This will be discussed further in this manual under “Slanty Line Concept”.

We cannot stress enough that tactical instruction should be kept to a minimum at these ages. Below are recommended guidelines for you to follow in your work with these young players.

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Skill Priorities</u>
U-6	Dribble with all sides of both feet Dribble out of trouble Dribble past someone Soft first touch
U-8	Dribble with all sides of both feet Dribble out of trouble Dribble past someone Shielding Soft first touch Introduce proper shooting technique Introduce passing

GUIDED DISCOVERY

If you ever attended a youth soccer game, you are likely to hear many specific directions from coaches and spectators alike. We then expect this young player to sort through the information and then make a quality decision. All the contradicting information interferes with the player's ability to solve the problem. As a result, the player now tries to kick the ball as far as possible or lower their head and run with it. It's simple and sometimes gets results however, that doesn't make for better soccer players.

If we asked these players to explain their decisions to us at the end of the game, or even immediately after their actions, it is unlikely they would be able to provide us with a rational explanation. If these players are placed in the same situation at a later time, they will not have experience from which to draw upon when faced with a similar situation. Many times the player will continue make the same mistake or randomly try something else in order to please the adults. This creates frustration for the player and can cause the player to stop playing all together.

So what can we do as coaches to prevent players from making the same mistakes and sense of frustration? We could continue to yell louder and hope they are listening to us. Of course, that will continue to make the game less enjoyable for the player. A better choice is to provide the players with the tools to make these decisions for themselves. If our players understand when it is best to kick the ball forward or to run forward with the ball and why they are making all the decisions they are making during a game, then they will be able to improve their own play and be rewarded with success. Further, if they become thoughtful, strategic players they will have more fun, gain confidence, and your team's performance is more likely to improve continually.

By asking our players questions to which they must come up with answers, we can insure that our players are thinking, as opposed to mindlessly following our directions. By asking guided questions, we can help maintain focus and direction for our team and help provide learning experiences for our players.

When referring to guided questions, we mean that our questions should place our players on the right track (guide) in order to be able to solve the questions we pose. Some such questions may be quite direct and simplistic such as:

- What part of the foot do you use to make a short pass?
- Where should you aim when shooting on goal?

Questions such as these are called “low order” questions as they demand factual, memorized answers. In contrast, we could ask “high order” questions that challenge our players a bit differently by asking them to weigh options within the framework of a larger process. High order questions beg interpretation and comprehension over memorization or recall. Examples of “high order” questions include:

- How can we get the ball down the field quickly?
- Why should we play high-pressure defense?

Utilizing questions such as these will help our players learn and retain information that will aid them in making optimal choices as they play. It is not better to ask “high order” or “low order” questions, as they both serve helpful roles in learning. Our task as coaches is to find the proper balance of “high order” vs. “low order” questions for each of our players. In consequence, rather than waiting for us coaches to fix errors of play at half-time, our players will likely look to solve errors immediately during the game.

Through the use of guided questions, players develop confidence and learn to trust their own decisions. Of course, we must temper the difficulty of our questions to insure they achieve the success necessary to help build their confidence. Players may be a bit uneasy when asked these types of questions (especially high order) at first. For this reason it is a good idea to provide a few positive words before asking a question. For example:

- Great....so how could we do it faster?
- I like that answer...what other skill can we use to get the ball to our teammates?
- Now you're getting the idea! Where could you position yourself so that you could see both the player you are defending as well as the ball?

Now armed with the confidence and skill to evaluate situations and make decisions on their own, these players will look within themselves (not toward the sideline) in order to determine what choice to make on the field. As they become skilled at answering these questions, they will be able to increase their quality and speed of play. This will allow us to sit back in our chairs during games and appreciate the fruits of our practice efforts.

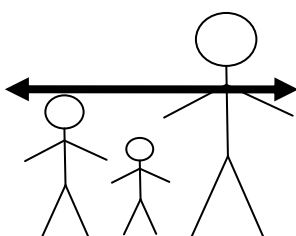
Using this method of coaching, we can help develop more competent players and more confident people. Although coaches and parents alike may find their sideline shouting ignored as players gain competence, I think both groups would be happy with that result. Here are a few more examples of guided questions to incorporate into your coaching:

- In a 3v3 situation, what's the best way to get the ball to your teammate? Try it!
- What happens when you pass the ball behind your teammate? Let's try it!
- Why didn't that pass work? So, how should we do it this time?
- How can we get the ball to the other side of the field?
- Why is it important for you to lift your head up when you have the ball?

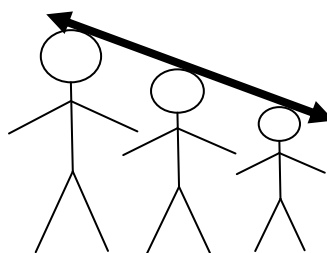
MOSSTON'S SLANTY LINE THEORY

As mentioned previously you will find a great range of abilities amongst the players on your team. Because children are maturing at various rates, our most challenging task may be to find a way to run a practice in which we challenge each player at a level that befits their abilities. Do you set goals for all your players that are based on the performance of your best player? If so, do your lesser players have any chance of actually attaining these goals or are they constantly faced with failure? In contrast, do you set your goals according to the abilities of your lesser players in order that everyone on your team can reach the goals? If you do this it is likely your better players will find practice extremely boring and they will not develop or have fun. We are stuck with a problem if we do either of these things, so what do we do?

STRAIGHT LINE



SLANTY LINE



Think of practice as a jumping contest. If we hold a stick parallel to the ground and eight feet in the air (see picture above) and then ask all players to jump as high as they can and touch the stick with their hand, we will find most players have no chance of success. However, if we hold this stick at a slant and challenge players to touch the highest part of the stick they can reach, then each player can experience some success. Each time they jump, we can challenge them to try to improve the height they reach on that slanted stick. Therefore, they experience success and have reachable goals to strive for going forward.

This is Mosston's Slanty Line Theory in practice. By challenging each player in a manner that befits their abilities we will keep every player engaged and cognizant of challenging, yet reachable goals. By doing this, we are much more likely to aid in every player's development rather than challenging all players at a standard that only befit a few. Allowing each player to reach new goals will clearly enhance their enjoyment!

CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Children all develop at their own pace. They develop in differing ways and react to the same situations differently. Despite certain coaching behaviors proving extremely effective for many players, we may find there are still other players who do not react to our coaching in this manner. Some young players may not react to the social situation created in practice or games in the way you might hope. At these ages, many children typically display aggression or hyperactivity. In addition, social cliques may cause great rifts in your team that may generate avoidance behaviors. Unfortunately, there is no easy recipe for controlling these behaviors as they may be present in many different forms. We can discuss general methods that have proven successful at times.

Aggression

- Children displaying aggressive behavior are often most alarming as they may endanger others. It is our duty as coaches to provide a safe environment for all.
- An aggressive child should never be allowed to repeatedly endanger others.
- If a player demonstrates overly aggressive behavior, we must immediately talk to them and make sure they understand the behavior is inappropriate. It is best to set up clear guidelines such as, “If you do that again, you are going to have to sit out.”
- Severity of the behavior will determine if you need to take the player off the field or if you could give him/her “3 strikes” before being taken out. Once the player reaches the condition you set, it is important that you take the action you promised as empty threats will not deter overly aggressive behavior.
- You can explain why (in a few words) and show them where they need to sit
- After a short time (3-4 min.), we recommend that you ask the removed player to tell you why they were taken off of the field. If they calmly tell you and agree to discontinue his/her behavior, then the player should be allowed back on the field. If the player is stubborn and will not reveal why they are sitting out, he/she is not ready to return to play and should be given more time to cool off.
- If the behavior does not improve, you should talk to the player’s parents and enlist their help and guidance. You should also make your age group director or the appropriate board member in charge of your program aware of this difficulty to make sure it is seen as a team difficulty and not seen as a personal conflict.

Hyperactivity

Children are often energetic. However some children are not only energetic but actually hyperactive. These children may constantly fidget, have attention spans that are extremely limited and may prove disruptive to the rest of the team at times. It is our task to make sure we use their energy positively and try to minimize any disruption. If a player is fidgeting as you are giving directions and it is not bothering the other players, you do not need to stop the fidgeting. Once it begins to bother others to the point they are unable to pay attention, you need to put it to a stop.

- Be careful in your evaluation of hyperactivity, as often times what we believe is hyperactivity is simply the result of our being too long-winded or not allowing the children to play enough to utilize their abundant energy.
- Give brief descriptions of activities; keep the kids playing! As the game begins you can then give further instructions. If the child still does not comprehend what to do by watching others play. Take a moment to reiterate your explanation. Remember, give clear, concise and be direct in your communication.
- If a hyperactive child returns from water breaks faster than others you may wish to ask him/her to juggle the soccer ball and beat their record of the previous week by one. If setting up cones or picking up cones, utilize their help. Try to think of ways to use their energy as opposed to curbing or fighting it.

Withdrawn Behavior

Our attention is often dominated by overly aggressive or rambunctious children. Rightly so, we look to control the sometimes unruly environment that confronts us. Unfortunately, this might result in our not recognizing children who avoid social play and do not connect with other children. When players are crying in trepidation about leaving their parent or joining the group, it is easy to see their difficulty. However, if a player is quiet, we sometimes fail to see that they need help socializing and “joining” the team.

- Often times, these players simply need a “safe bridge” into group play. This bridge may be provided by you (the coach) being that child’s partner for a bit during the first activity or two. If the attachment to the parent is overwhelming, it is acceptable to use the parent in this role with the understanding that the parent will be stepping away as soon as possible. The preferred action is to pair the child with another child who can serve as the social bridge. Use your judgment and try to find a more mature and social player in the group who is friendly and typically helpful. If the withdrawn child is beckoned onto the field by a friendly peer, it is much more likely the child will become part of the group.
- If children are extremely hesitant to come onto the field and despite your personal efforts to engage him/her in play and your efforts to partner him/her with someone else, do not force the child onto the field. The child may simply need time, and soccer should not be forced on any player at any age.
- It is the parent’s responsibility to comfort and talk to the child and when the child is ready to play, even if it is in the middle of an activity, be flexible and welcoming to that child. Please recognize that it helps to give abundant praise to a withdrawn child when encouraging that player to join the group and after that player has joined the group. Reassure them and help quell their worries in their nervous state and they will feel more comfortable and are more likely to play.

LEARNING

It is critical for us to recognize that children have varied learning styles. Some children (20-30%) learn when they hear things described to them. Others (45%) learn best when they see things but the majority (nearly 80%) learn best by doing. Here are brief descriptions of the varied learning styles:

Auditory Learners

Auditory learners learn best by listening. They often understand the nuances of speech we convey through tone, speed, or pitch. On the field they will listen intently to your words. It is important you provide clear, concise, and direct instructions.

Visual Learners

Visual learners learn best by seeing. They will benefit most not from your description of activities, but rather by seeing a demonstration. The adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” is often very true to visual learners. In school, these children prefer diagrams and overheads. On the field, they prefer to see what they need to do.

Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic learners learn best by doing. The large majority of your players will excel through this means of learning. They learn through exploration and touching. You may actually find some children who are easily distracted unless completely engaged.

Overall, we need to make sure all of our players understand the messages we are trying to provide. The important thing to note is that the large majority of players will understand most easily by doing. Therefore, we need to make sure they are active as much as possible. Giving brief directions, providing a clear and simple demonstration, and then having the players engage in the activity will prove the optimal method of teaching. By doing this we quickly cover all types of learning.

Amount of Information

Eight to twelve year-old children do not have the same information absorption capacity as adults. For this reason we must consider how much information we can expect them to retain in one practice session or during one season. Keep the focus of your practices to just a few points, typically points that all fall under the same topic.

Remember children need repetition. It is not necessary to come up with new activities and challenges every practice. This does not add to development as much as confused them. We need to place them into situations in which they are being given the opportunity to solve similar problems and practice similar actions, especially as we ask players to perform skills at a faster pace with more pressure. They need to be given many opportunities to learn how to perform skills under these demands. As we teach tactics, the players need to see a similar picture time and time again in order to be able to recognize the cues they will use to guide their decisions. If children walk away from a practice remembering 2-3 related things, we have done a fantastic job of coaching that day. Remember, developing a soccer player is a marathon, not a sprint.

STYLES OF COACHING

When working with players of any age it is most important to know that coaches need to adjust their styles of coaching to best fit the age level and personalities of the players. We suggested that a person who is an “activity leader” and facilitates fun and development would be an ideal fit for the U6 and U8 age groups. For the U10 and U12 age groups, we recommend that you serve as a “coach”. The primary role of the coach is as a person who leads players to discovering the options and optimal choices through the use of guided discovery. Coaches should not be telling players what they need to do, but rather be encouraging players to see all their options; allowing them to discover what choices is correct. Below are characteristics of a few common coaching styles.

Activity Leader

An activity leader is someone who sets an environment of play which allows “the game to be the teacher”. They choose the activities and what the object of the activity is, gauges and marks the size of the activity area, and figures out how many players should be involved. They will manipulate the duration of the activity, and how one activity transitions into another. An activity leader gives minimal feedback, and spends time watching to see if the activities are being successful. Success for U6 & U8 players can be measured by answering two questions. Are the players understanding and enjoying the game? Are the players touching the ball a lot? People working with U6 and U8 players need to be Activity Leaders.

Coach

A coach is a person who is not only able to be an activity leader, but who is also able to work with older players and make tactical and technical coaching points. Once players get to approximately eight years of age, they are ready to receive “some” coaching. It is still very important to let the players play as much as possible and not intrude on their playing too much in hopes of “coaching”. Coaches set up an appropriate environment and identify basic technical and tactical breakdowns to help players make improvements.

Trainer

The trainer is someone that is ready to work with teams who are playing 8v8 to 11v11, and who can make both tactical and technical points to boys and girls who are 12 and above. They tend to have high level coaching licenses and are able to teach tactics and general strategy to players in a very specific and educational manner. Trainers need to be able to analyze a game, identify team and individual problems, and be able to design practices that can re-create opportunities to correct and improve teams and individuals. They need to have a vision of what a good team/player is and what actions need to happen in order to get players and teams to that vision.

Whichever style of coach you are and whatever age level you are working with, it is important to be able to relate to the players so they recognize your ability to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Regardless of the activities you arrange or the points you make, you need to make a personal connection with players and make sure they realize their importance to the team.

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

LENGTH

- 45-50 minutes in length for U6
- 50-60 minutes for U8

ACTIVITY DURATION

- U6 activities should last 6-8 minutes at most--- one practice there should be 6-7 activities
- U8 activities should last 8-12 minutes---one practice there should be 5 activities

WATER BREAKS

Players at this age need a lot of water breaks due to the fact that they are typically running at full speed and that their bodies cooling systems are not as efficient as that of adults.

- Water breaks after every 2-3 activities or every 10-12 minutes, more if extremely hot.

BODY POSITION AND INTONATION

- Always position yourself so that you can see all players
- Coaches should look into the sun or any distractions to help maintain player attention
- Let the wind carry your voice, do not talk into the wind
- Speak to the children at their level and make sure you have gained eye contact
- Only raise your voice with players when you need to show authority and gain control
- Change the tone of your voice and be animated—this helps makes activities fun and helps maintain focus

GENERAL COACHING GUIDELINES

- Keep your instructions to a minimum. Talk for MAXIMUM of 20 seconds at a time
- By counting down the last 5 or 10 seconds of an activity you can add excitement to it
- If you see players not understanding or enjoying a game, be flexible and change it
- Keep all players involved all the time. No players knocked out who then sit and watch
- When sending U6 players on a water break, have them go backwards or have them act like a rabbit or frog and hop. Have them act like a monkey or dinosaur, or anything else they come up with for fun and to help coordination skills
- Encourage creativity
- HAVE FUN!

PRACTICE DAY PREPARATION

- Make sure you prepare your lesson plan before arriving at the field
- Check the field for safety once arriving
 - make sure the goals are secure and will not blow over
 - make sure there are no dangerous holes in the ground
 - make sure there is no broken glass, rocks, or other dangerous objects on the field
 - make sure the ball, if shot, will not travel onto the road or into a dangerous area
- Set up your cones before players arrive. Do not have to take time during practice.
- Teach your players to get into an activity (such as ball tag) that they immediately begin playing when arriving at the field. You can then watch both arriving players and those playing. This helps the players focus for practice and is fun.
- Always finish your practices with a scrimmage

END OF PRACTICE

- Have players gather all cones, pennies and balls
- Check for injuries
- Make sure everyone knows when and where the next practice or game is
- Insure every player has a ride home. Do not leave until all players are picked up
- Review the practice in your head
 - What went well? What would you change next time?
 - Did the players have fun? Did you have fun?
 - Were the activities appropriate?
 - Did the players learn what you hoped they would learn?

GAME DAY CONSIDERATIONS

BEFORE THE GAME

- Make sure you have your medical kit and ice
- Welcome all your players individually as they arrive
- Organize the players into an appropriate warm-up (never start with stretching)
 - The warm-up should not include lines or laps
 - Players should get a lot of touches on the ball
 - Players should have to move in multiple directions (just like in the game)
 - Players should develop a sweat before the game
- Make sure the players are properly hydrated
- Let the players know who is starting (and on what field if using the dual field set-up)
- Make a few coaching point reminders that pertain to the week's training
- Be enthusiastic and encouraging
- Relax and enjoy the game!

DURING THE GAME

- Sit in a chair and relax if you are not needed to referee the game
- Encourage the players, do not shout instructions (you are a model for the parents)
- If there is a referee, be supportive of the referee.
- At U8, if you must give instructions, give simple instructions and keep them to an absolute minimum
 - It is better to give individuals one on one advice personally than to yell out general instructions
- Manage your substitutes fairly
- Relax and let the kids play!

HALFTIME CONSIDERATIONS

- Make sure there are no injuries
- Allow everyone to get some water
- U6 coaches should praise everyone and ask them if they are having fun
- U8 coaches should ask the players if they are having fun then ask what is going well on the field and what they could improve upon
 - Focus on one or two points to improve upon at most
 - Set performance goals (do better at a specific skill) not result-oriented goals (win)
- Make sure players know who is on the field to start the half
- Relax and enjoy the second half!

END OF GAME

- You and your players should shake hands with the other team and the referee
- Make sure no one is injured
- Ask the players if they had fun
- Point out a few positives from the game
 - Give every player an individual complement after the game (not formally)
- Remind the players about the time, day and place of the next practice
- Make sure all the players have a ride home
- Relax and enjoy the rest of your day!

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Dribbling Coaching Points

- Bend knees and stay low
- Use arms for balance and to find out where opponents are
- Use insides, outsides and soles of the feet to dribble the ball
- Try to keep your head up once comfortable with ball at feet
- Change of direction and speed
- Body sideways between defender and the ball, ball on outside foot, with arm providing protection when shielding
- After performing a move, get away from pressure or go past the opponent quickly
- Balance and body control are of great importance
- Use outside of foot and toe for speed dribbling
- Creativity and instinctive play
- Encourage attacking soccer and taking players on

Passing Coaching Points

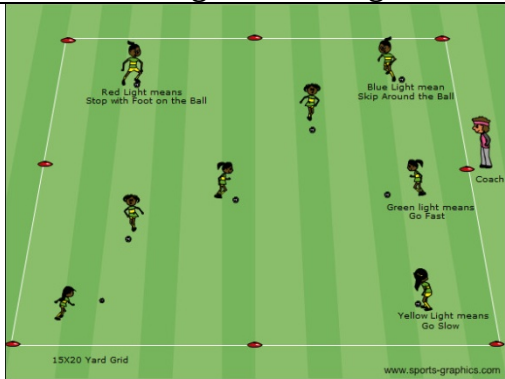
- Locked ankle
- Toe up (inside of foot) or down & turned in (outside of foot)
- Eyes on ball at instant of contact
- Placement foot pointed to target and parallel to ball
- Be on your toes and balanced
- Go to the ball, do not wait for it
- Follow through to partner
- Strike ball solid through the middle
- Knees bent and balanced
- Accuracy, weight and timing of pass to feet or space

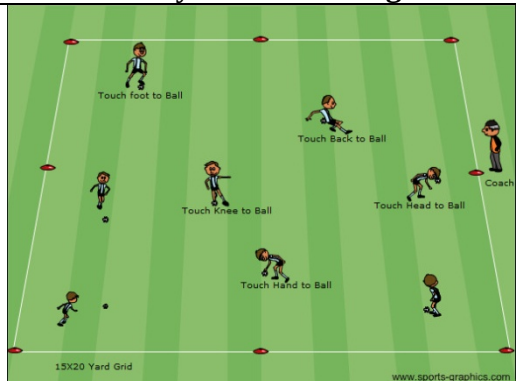
Shooting Coaching Points

- Ankle locked, angled approach to ball; non-kicking foot beside ball
- Knees bent, head down, hips and knee over ball, body slightly leaning over ball
- Eyes on ball at instant of impact
- Follow through to target
- Strike center of ball; move through ball and land on shooting foot
- Strike ball with laces so that ball strikes hard bone on top of foot
- Proper technique and body control
- Find a way to score and frame the goal!

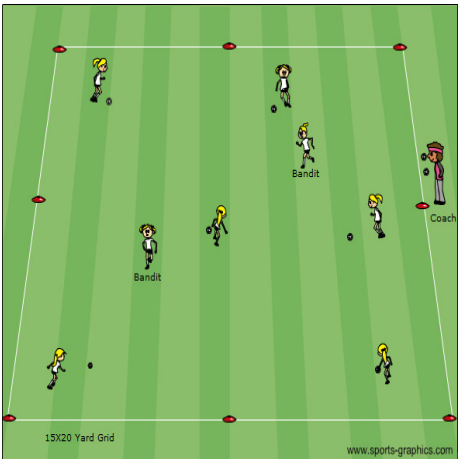
SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

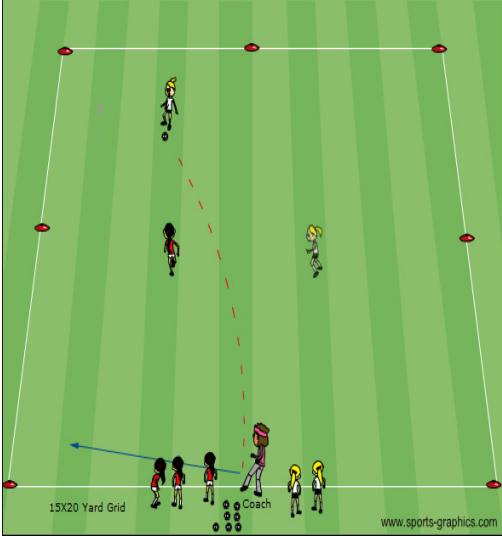
Free Dribble	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	- Each player dribbles a soccer ball in a 15x20 yard grid. - Players should use as many surfaces of their feet as they can. - Coach will prompt players to work on change of speed, direction, quick feet and simple turns.	- Players can be challenged to use different surfaces of foot. - Players must dribble with their head up. - Encourage players to try something new.

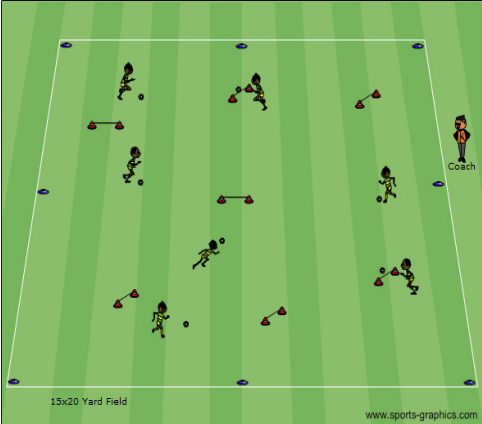
Red Light/Green Light	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	- Each player dribbles a ball in a 15x20 yard grid. - If the Coach calls Green Light, the players must dribble as fast as they can. - If the Coach calls Red Light, they players must stop the ball under their foot. - Coach can call other colors and give the players a challenge for each color such as Yellow Light, the players dribble very slow.	- Challenge the players to start and stop their ball quickly. - Encourage players to use several surfaces of their foot. *Remember, not all challenges have to be soccer specific (skip, jump, hop, etc.)

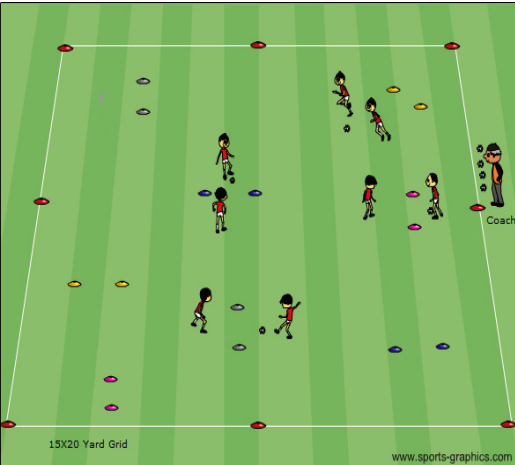
Body Part Dribbling	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	- Each player dribbles a ball in a 15x20 yard grid. - When the Coach calls out a body part, the player must touch that body part to the ball as quickly as possible. - Coach should vary body parts and the rate at which he calls out body parts. - At times, call out body parts consecutively.	- Encourage the players to keep the ball close. - Players can make simple decisions.

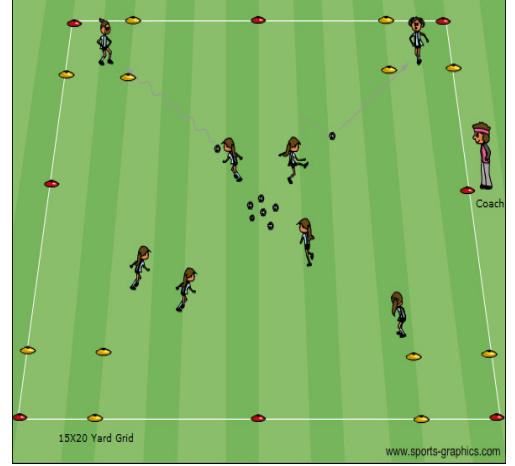
Freeze Tag	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	- Each player dribbles a ball in a 15x20 yard Grid. - Coaches can pick 1 or 2 players to be Freeze Monsters. - Freeze Monsters run around (without a ball) and try to tag players with a ball. - When a player is tagged, they must freeze with their legs apart and ball held above their head. - The coach has the magic power to unfreeze players by touching their soccer ball.	- Players must be aware of the Freeze Monster by keeping their heads up. - Dribbling, changing speed and direction

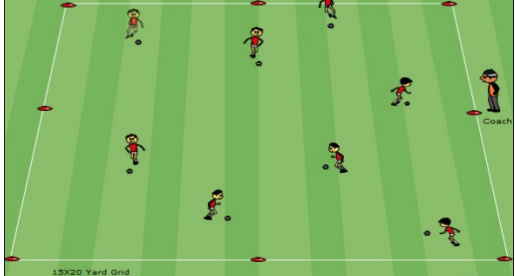
Bandit Ball	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	- All but 2 players dribble their soccer ball in a 15x20 yard grid. - The 2 without soccer balls are bandits. - When the coach say, "Watch Out for Bandits", the bandits try to steal someone's soccer ball. - Once they steal a soccer ball, they try to keep it and are no longer a bandit. - If a player loses their soccer ball, she becomes a bandit and attempts to steal any soccer ball (doesn't have to be their soccer ball). - If a soccer ball is kicked out of the grid, it cannot be brought back in. - At the end of each round, (30-45 seconds) each player with a soccer ball gets 1 point.	- Dribbling for individual possession and shielding. - Tackling (winning the ball)

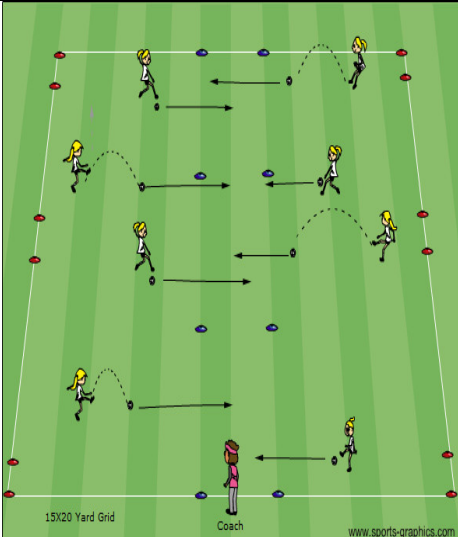
Combat	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
 15x20 Yard Grid www.sports-graphics.com	• Coach set up a 15x20 yard grid. Coach has all the soccer balls on the sideline. Players are split into 2 color-coded teams. One team lines up on the coach's left and the other on the coach's right. • When the coach kicks the ball into play, the game begins. • If, before putting the soccer ball into play, the coach calls out, "White", then 2 white players from the white team and one from the red chase after the soccer ball and we have a 2v1 competition in favor of the white. • A point is awarded to the team that gets the soccer ball back to the coach in the allotted time. • Once the coach gets the soccer ball back, they play it back into the field and another game begins. • After the coach kicks the soccer ball into play, they should move left or right away from the other players to encourage getting the players to look for the target.	• Attacking and defending skills • Decision making with uneven numbers • Basic shape (the team with 2, along with the coach, form a triangle) *Coach can also increase the numbers to 3v2 or allow teams to play even numbers.

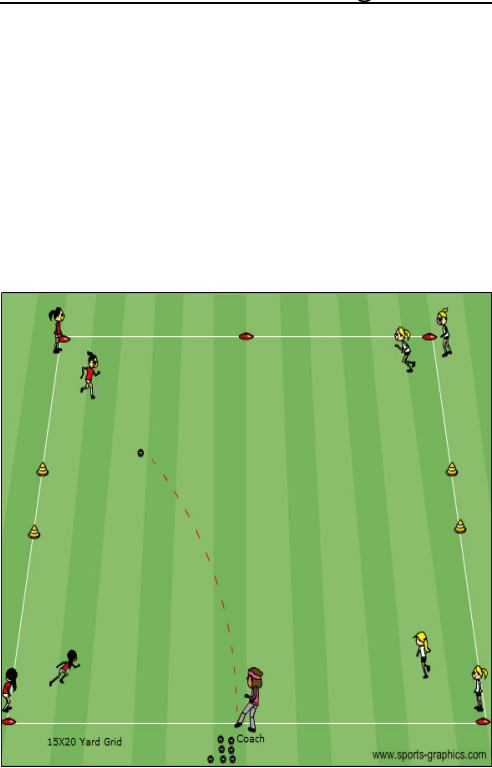
Gate Dribbling	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
 15x20 Yard Field www.sports-graphics.com	• Each player dribbles a ball in a 15x20 yard Grid. • Coaches need to set up 1 gate per player. • Gates are 1-2 yards wide and about 5-7 yards between gates. • Players dribble through one gate then find another gate to dribble through. • Coaches can challenge the players to get through as many gates in 20 seconds as possible.	• Players must keep the ball close in order to change direction toward the next gate. • Players will keep their head up in order to find the next gate.

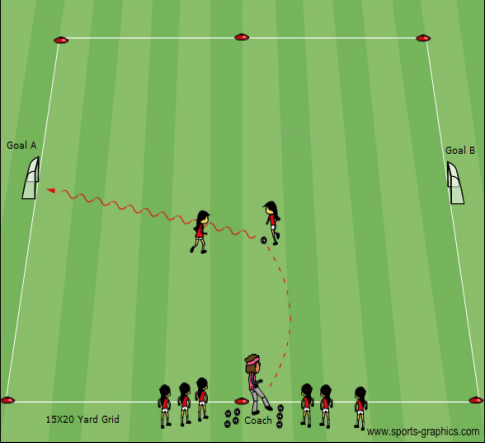
Gates with Partners	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
 15x20 Yard Grid www.sports-graphics.com	• Same set up as Gates Dribbling • Coach divides players into groups of 2. • Players have to make 1 pass through a gate and to their partner for a point. • Players move to a different gate to repeat the same pass for another point. • How many goals (points) can you score in 30 seconds? • In the next round, each group of 2 tries to beat their score by at least 1.	• Sharing the ball with a teammate by passing. • Very brief passing technique, i.e. using the inside of their foot. • Working as a team to get to the next gate together.

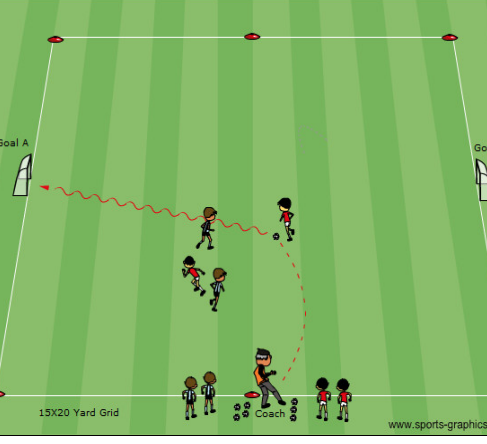
Capture the Ball	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
 15x20 Yard Grid www.sports-graphics.com	• Each player dribbles a ball in a 15x20 yard grid. • Set up 3 to 4 home bases in the corners of the grid. • Divide the players equally in the bases. • All soccer balls in the center of the grid. • On the coach's command, all players try to get as many balls as they can into their home base. • Teams can steal balls from other bases. • Team with most balls after 30 seconds, wins the round.	• Scheming (how to attack the soccer balls, steal soccer balls from other home bases and how to defend your home base) • Decision making (dribble or pass)

Paint the Field	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
 15x20 Yard Grid www.sports-graphics.com	• Each player dribbles a ball in a 15x20 yard grid. • Coach explains to them that their ball is actually a paint ball and wherever it rolls on the field, it paints that area. • How much of the field can they paint in the allotted time?	• Players can be challenged to use different surfaces of foot. • Keep their ball inside the playing area.

Clean Your Backyard	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	• Each player with their soccer ball in a 15x20 yard Grid with 3 goals on each end line and a 4 yard neutral zone in the center. • Coach divides $\frac{1}{2}$ the players on one side of the neutral zone and the other $\frac{1}{2}$ on the other side of the neutral zone. (Coach can clear balls from neutral zone) • Both teams try to score on any of the other team's goals. • After a player shoots their soccer ball, they can get any other soccer ball in their $\frac{1}{2}$ of the field and try to score again.	• Basic shooting technique, i.e. where to strike the ball and what part of the foot to use. • Simple decision making by looking for the open goal. • Lots of shooting repetition. Shoot every time they find a ball.

4 Corner Shooting	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	• Coach sets up 15x20 yard Grid. Coach sets up on the side line with all the soccer balls. • Team is split in half with half the players split into 2 lines, one on each corner. The other team does the same on the other side. • The coach serves a soccer ball into play. At the moment the soccer ball is in play, the first player from each of the 4 line comes out and play 2v2. • Play continues until a goal is scored or the soccer ball goes out of bounds. • When this happens, all players get off the field, the coach serves another soccer ball and 4 new players enter the field for a 2v2 match. • Game continues until the coach is out of soccer balls. • At this point the coach says he is out of soccer balls and asks the players to retrieve them for him. The players must dribble the soccer balls back to him. • Once the soccer balls are collected, a new game begins.	• Technique under pressure of a game • Decision making in the competitive game environment. • Dribbling, passing, receiving and shooting

Get “Outta” There (1v1)	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	• Coach sets up in the middle of the field and on the sideline with all the soccer balls. • Team is split in half with half the players on the coach’s left and the other half on the coach’s right. • Team on left tries to score in Goal B and the team on the right tries to score in goal A. • The coach serves a soccer ball into play. At the moment the soccer ball is in play, the first player from each side enters the field and plays 1v1 till a goal is scored or the soccer ball goes out of play. • When the soccer ball goes out of play, the coach calls “Get Outta There”. The players leave the field; the coach serves a new soccer ball and the next 2 player’s play 1v1. • Game last until all soccer balls are gone.	• 1v1 attacking and defending • Creativity and scheming • Decision making *Variation: game can be played without goals and a point is scored by dribbling over the sideline.

Get “Outta” There (2v2)	Activity Description	Coaching Objective
	• Coach sets up in the middle of the field and on the sideline with all the soccer balls. • Team is split in half with half the players on the coach’s left and the other half on the coach’s right. (identify teams with pinnies) • Team on left tries to score in Goal B and the team on the right tries to score in goal A. • The coach serves a soccer ball into play. At the moment the soccer ball is in play, the first 2 players from each side enters the field and plays 2v2 till a goal is scored or the soccer ball goes out of play. • When the soccer ball goes out of play, the coach calls “Get Outta There”. The players leave the field, the coach serves a new soccer ball and the next 2 players from each side play 2v2. • Game last until all soccer balls are gone.	• Learning to share the soccer ball. • Creativity and scheming *This game can also be played 3v3.

SMALL-SIDED GAMES

As each year passes, we gain a better understanding of the game of soccer. Every year that passes, we understand child development more as well. It is because of this growing knowledge that soccer and child development professionals worldwide promote small-sided games for children. United States Youth Soccer promotes playing 3 vs. 3 with U6 players and 4 vs. 4 with U8 players. In fact, not only does the National Director of Coaching promote this, every men's and women's national team coach and every state director of coaching in our country does as well. Not only do the soccer leaders of our country promote this, but the soccer federations of France, England, Holland, Australia, Germany, Brazil, Canada and many more do as well. Virtually every country around the world is recognizing that small-sided games are better for children for a variety of reasons. The first reason is that children get to play more and have more fun. If that singular reason does not stand on its own to convince you that small-sided games are best for children, these other reasons will provide further rationale:

Enjoyment

- Children enjoy participation more than observation
- Every player gets more exposure to the ball - more participation!
- In 3 vs. 3: 6 players per 1 ball - In 11 vs. 11: 22 players per ball
- In a 40 minute game: each player in 3 vs. 3 averages 6 min 40 sec on the ball
each player in 11 vs. 11 averages 1 min 48 sec on the ball
- Research shows seeing oneself improve is a large component of fun for youth players
With increased time on the ball, children are more likely to see improvement

Technical Development

Repetition is the key to technical development, and in small-sided games, players get more technical repetitions:

- More overall touches on ball
- More dribbling
- More shooting
- More receiving
- More passing

Defensive repetitions also occur more often:

- More stealing ball from opponent
- More intercepting ball
- More blocked shot attempts

Developmentally Appropriate

Small-sided games are physically more appropriate for young players:

- Children's legs are smaller—the field should be as well
Average adult step = 2.5 → 3.5 feet
Average child step = 1.5 (age 6) → 2 feet (age 14)
- Children essentially have to run twice as much as adults to cover the same space
- Their cooling systems are less developed. Young players heat up faster and cool down slower than adults → big fields make them overheat!

Small-sided games are mentally more appropriate for young players:

- Players are forced to problem-solve more often in small-sided games
- Most importantly, players face reasonably difficult problems
- Young players have limited ability to conceptualize abstractly and think in terms of 1 to 2 degrees of separation from themselves - they need exposure to problems within these frames so they can experience problem-solving success
- In small-sided games, they have repeated exposure to reasonable problems
- Learning is dependent on repeated exposure. Small-sided games do just that
- Players experience more problem-solving success and build confidence
- Success + confidence = FUN!

Building Athletic Mentality

- With fewer players on the field, players need to maintain focus
- No time for regrets; with small numbers you need to get back in the play immediately
- Immediate defensive recovery needed
- Second chances arrive quickly, more chances for success
- Smaller field and increased involvement fosters positive aggression

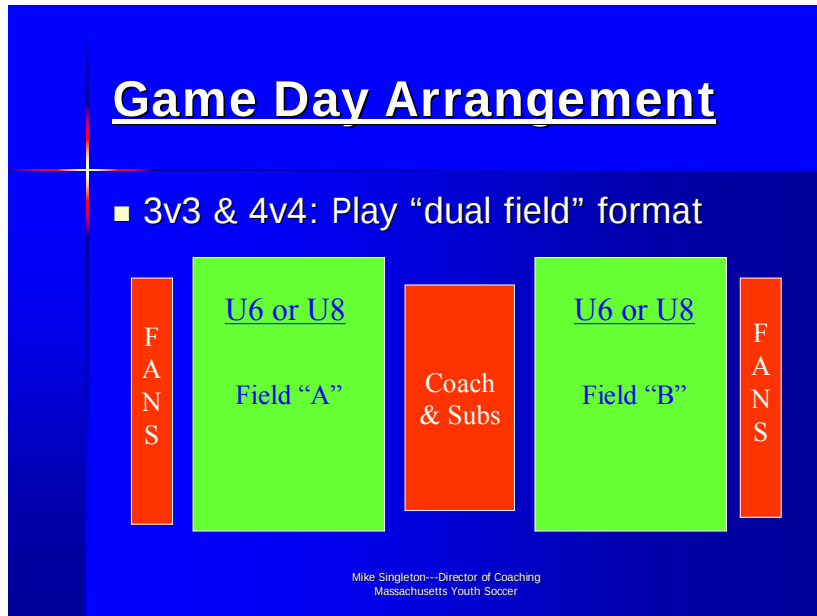
Coaching Considerations

- Allows for more individual coaching
- Helps build relationships
- Easier to see shape and paint pictures
- Do not have to worry about subs as much
- Can set up match-ups that allow children to play against others of equal ability

US YOUTH SOCCER GAME RECOMMENDATIONS

Dual Field Arrangement

Teams can still consist of 8-12 players and on game day, coaches can stand in middle of two small fields and have players playing on both fields. This dual field set-up will allow the children to play more, and allows the coach to place players into competitive situations that are fair to them, and prevent clubs from having to recruit twice as many coaches.



U6’s play 3v3 (No GK)

Field Size:

Length: 20 to 30 yds

Width: 15 to 20 yds

Ball: #3

U8’s play 4v4 (No GK)

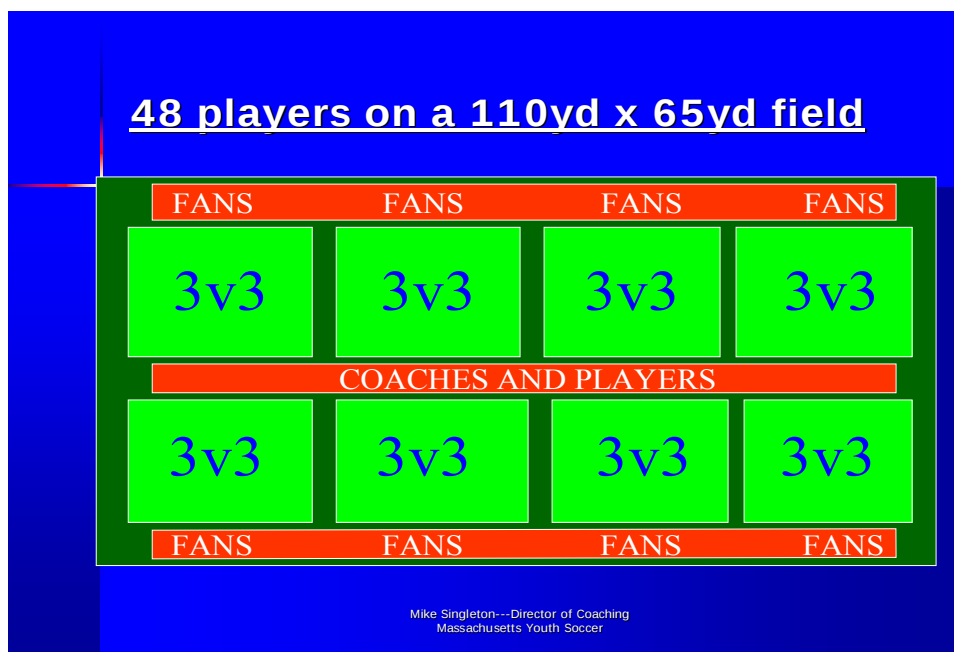
Field Size:

Length: 25 to 35 yds

Width: 20 to 30 yds

Ball: #3

More players can play in the same amount of space previously used for games, including teams of larger numbers.



Small-sided games help with all aspects of development for young players. It allows them to enjoy the game much more due to their increased involvement. It is true that there are some administrative challenges in switching over an entire program to small-sided games. However, the benefit to young players far outweighs the burden of those challenges. Feel free to contact the state office for any help in implementing small-sided games into your organization. Whether it is organizational guidance or educating your board or coaches, we are happy to help.

Use of Goalkeepers

Using goalkeepers is not recommended for these age groups. One reason for this is that modern day goalkeepers must be able to control the ball with their feet and pass as well as field players. U6 and U8 are critical ages in developing those skills which is best done when children play as a field player. Another reason is that most children's hand-eye coordination is developed quite well by everyday activities and other sports; however, foot-eye coordination is not. We need to make sure we spend every second we have developing foot-eye coordination. In addition, one bad catch that ends up with a ball hitting a player in the face may lead a player to be fearful of the ball for a long time. Currently, even the best goalkeepers in the world did not begin playing goalkeeper until after the age of 10.

As discussed earlier, children enjoy participating in the game. Having a player back in goal, stuck in a penalty box, often prevents him/her from participating and having fun. Some clubs not only refrain from using keepers at U8, but also have a rule that, for a goal to count, all the players on the attacking team must be in the other team's half. This rule helps get everyone involved and paying attention. It also helps teach everyone to move up and down the field as a unit and ingrains good habits in future defenders. In addition, it might eradicate the discouraging sight we often encounter in U10 play, where the defenders are standing rooted close to their goal, uninvolved, while the ball and the action are deep in the other team's half.

RISK/ INJURY MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION

An integral component of all coaching and playing activity throughout the season must be the prevention and management of injury to players (and coaches). There are numerous simple tasks a coach can and should do in order to secure the health of his or her players. Before the season begins, the coach should make sure all parents know the emergency procedures for all situations (injuries, accidents, weather problems). This procedure should be clear and simple. If it includes cell phone use, the coach should make sure they get reception at all sites.

Field Safety/Weather Conditions

Before starting practice or a game, it is important to check the field for dangerous objects. Often glass and other sharp objects can be found on fields, as well as holes and other hazards. Goals need to be inspected and anchored properly, or moved away from the playing area if not being used. When moving goals, it is important to utilize adults and to supervise them, as often it is the first time they are moving goals. They may not know how to move them or realize how heavy they are.

At every field, look to see where you could go in case of lightning or heavy rain. Is there a building or public bathroom nearby where you could fit all the children? If not, do enough parents stay to watch practices and games in order that all the children could fit in their cars in case of severe weather? At the first sign of lightning, get the players into a safe environment. This is where your written emergency plan comes into use. Lightning detectors are already in use at many of the parks in which you play. Make sure you know the meaning of all signals coming from this system. If you do not have a lightning detection system, seek out ways to get one installed.

Second Adult Present

Always have a minimum of two adults at every practice. This allows one person to care for injuries or bathroom breaks as the other tends to the rest of the team. It also provides for another witness in the case of injury or accident. Make sure that both of you are present until the parents of the last child arrive. You should stress to parents they should arrive on time to pick up their children.

Injury Prevention

Before the season starts, check to see if you have a player whose parent is a doctor or nurse. Also ask parents if their children have any pre-existing conditions and how they normally deal with these conditions. Ideally, the coach is CPR and First Aid qualified. The coach should have a simple first aid kit and ice (or ice packs) at all events. It should be mandated that players always wear shin-pads and come to practice with water. Parents should be told to apply sunscreen on their children on sunny days. If players come to the field with a hat on to protect their head from the sun, ask that they wear a soft-brimmed hat, as baseball caps could cause eye injuries to other players.

Seeing all the Children

Players can not be let out of your sight. Often times, young players need to go to the bathroom. Make sure they are supervised when they go (preferably by their parent). Never allow a child out of your sight without adult supervision.

What to Do in Case of Injury

When a player goes down with an injury, it is important to remain calm, and ask your assistant or a parent to take care of the team. If you have had to stop practice, it must be fairly serious. Even if you are qualified, you need to make sure that you get immediate assistance for the player. The most likely problems you may encounter are two children running into each other and banging heads, heat exhaustion, prior medical issues (i.e. inhalers) and dehydration. Make sure that the parents of an injured player know their son or daughter was hurt during practice. Err on the side of safety.

- Cuts – If blood is involved, always wear latex gloves for protection. Clean the wound and apply a clean, sterile bandage. If a deep cut, apply light pressure to the wound to control bleeding. Recommend that the parent immediately take the child to the hospital for a professional opinion.
- Head Injuries – When approaching a player who has suffered an apparent blow to the head, do not try and move them until you have been able to establish communication with them and can confirm they are conscious and in no immediate severe pain. If the player is unresponsive, **immediately call 911**. Do not move a player who has suffered a head trauma, as there may be internal damage. Only *consider* moving an unconscious player if their airway is obviously blocked due to the position of their head and body (i.e., face down with face in the grass). If the player is responsive, ask him/her to identify where he/she was struck (head, face, and jaw or neck area) and if and where he/she is experiencing any pain. If the player is experiencing any pain, dizziness, or nausea, he/she should be removed from the field and not be considered for re-entry into the game. Immediately contact the parents so that they are aware of the nature of the injury and can decide to take their child to the hospital or doctor. It is best for both safety and liability issues to ask the player to provide a doctor's note clearing him to play before allowing a head injured player to participate in any future training or game.
- Heat Exhaustion – A player with heat exhaustion may feel sick and dizzy, have a high body temperature, and is still sweating. This may come on suddenly. Have the player stop playing, find some shade, and cool him/her down by using cool water on his/her clothes, head and neck. Ice may shock the body and can be dangerous. Use cool water to gradually reduce body temperature. If the player is able, it is alright to have him/her take sips of water.
- Nose Bleed - Place the player in a sitting position with the head forward. Apply pressure to just below the bridge of the nose. Use ice when necessary. Be sure to wear latex gloves before you treat the player! If you suspect a head or neck injury, do not try to control the bleeding. Instead, stabilize the head and call 911.
- Heat Stroke – If a player shows signs of heat stroke their sweating will stop, the player may be confused or dizzy, have pale skin, an extremely dry mouth or be unconscious. It is important to call an ambulance immediately. This can be life threatening. While waiting for the ambulance, similar steps to that which are taken for heat exhaustion should be followed. Making sure your players are properly hydrated will help prevent heat injuries.

- Fractures & Dislocations - If a body part does not have a normal appearance or function, then suspect a fracture. Do not move the player, keep warm and make comfortable, call 911. With a possible dislocation, the joint will have a marked deformity with intense pain. If a player can walk, immobilize the joint and immediately transport to hospital. If the player is unable to walk, call 911.
- Abrasions - Abrasions are very common sports injuries that are usually caused by a fall on a hard surface. As the athlete falls or slides on the ground, friction causes layers of skin to rub off. General treatment of abrasions includes treating the area by cleaning the wound with mild soap and water or a mild antiseptic wash like hydrogen peroxide, and then covering the area with an antibiotic ointment and a dry dressing. Be sure to wear latex gloves before you treat the player!
- Sprains, Strains and Contusions - R.I.C.E. Principle (Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation) is the best method of dealing with these injuries. Using these four immediate first aid measures can relieve pain, limit swelling and protect the injured tissues.

The R.I.C.E. Method of Acute Injury Treatment:

- **Rest:** Resting is important, as it will allow the injured area the time to heal itself, as well as help prevent further injury.
- **Ice:** Use ice bags & cold packs to limit swelling by reducing blood flow to the injured area. Do not leave ice on an injury for more than 20 minutes at a time. Compress or wrap the area with an ACE bandage around the swollen part of your body. If throbbing occurs, remove the bandage and re-wrap the area so the bandage is a little looser.
- **Compression:** Compress or wrap the area with an ACE bandage around the swollen part of your body. If throbbing occurs, remove the bandage and re-wrap the area so the bandage is a little looser.
- **Elevation:** Elevating an injury reduces swelling. It's most effective when the injured area is raised above the level of the heart. For example, if you injure an ankle, try lying on your bed or sofa with your foot propped on a couple of pillows.

Two Important factors for dealing with Field Injuries of this Mature:

- 1) If you see clear visual evidence of abnormal deformity to the injured area, call emergency professional care immediately.
- 2) If symptoms persist (pain, swelling, severe bruising) after 24-48 hours of using the R.I.C.E. method, consult your doctor.

Stretching and Warm-ups

Players who are under 8 years of age do not need to stretch. These age groups will actually stretch through the activities that you play with them if you use active warm-ups that demand coordination and change of direction. Games that promote body awareness and balance will serve as stretching.

PARENT EDUCATION

As players and parents are both often new to the game and the soccer world, it is extremely important to communicate with parents. This should be the job of both the team coach and the organization. Included in this section you will find guidelines and a sample parent handout for you as the coach.

At the start of the season, we recommend that you (the coach) hold a parent meeting to clarify goals and expectations for the team. Initiating this communication will help prevent confusion and stunt potential problems. It is recommended that you have something in writing to hand to parents at this meeting. By doing so, you are insuring your words are not being misconstrued. If there is a concern down the line, you can reference the document to provide clarification.

In this document, it is important you list your coaching philosophy and your goals for the team and players. It is also important that you discuss attendance expectations and disciplinary measures, as these areas are often the genesis of most problems. You may wish to inform parents how and when they can contact you if they have questions. Questions about players should not be asked in front of other players or other parents. Parents should not be asking questions during a game or practice or at any time you are with the team. Coaches have been known to have parents call at midnight or at 6 am to talk about their children. If you want to avoid this, make it clear in your meeting and on your handout. Finally, make sure to address sideline behavior. Parents need to remember they are role models for their children and uncontrolled behavior on the sideline is not acceptable. Each meeting will differ based on the age and level of the players you are coaching. However, here are sample handouts for a parent meeting:

Sample U6 Parent Meeting Agenda

Team Goals: Our primary goal as a team is to have fun. We will help the players improve their balance and coordination and give them endless opportunities to dribble a soccer ball while playing childhood games that may not seem like soccer to adults at times. We want to use their imagination and insure that they all enjoy the game. Although it may not look like soccer, the activities we use will help socialization, coordination, encourage the players to solve problems and at times make them laugh. Winning will not be a priority or even a goal for our team. We will be making fun our priority.

Style of Play: I will be encouraging the players to try new things and to be creative. We will focus on developing dribbling skills, but will not spend time on passing, receiving, and shooting skills as U6 players are not typically physically and mentally ready to do this. Also it is best for them to develop dribbling skills before trying to do anything else. It is my hope that players have the confidence to show their skills in the game and practice. The game may look like a swarm of bees at times and that is OK. We will not be coaching positions. In reality, even if the game is 3 vs. 3, in our player's minds it is really 1 vs. 5. That is fine, and we will let the players have fun at this age without forcing adult concepts upon them.

Attendance: I will be at every practice and game, foregoing any unforeseen emergencies. Please make every attempt to have your child at every practice and game (on time) as well as it is part of learning the responsibility of being on a team. Given our hectic lives, I do understand that players may have conflicts here and there. Please let me know before the first game of any conflicts you might have for the season so I can prepare my practices accordingly and we can make sure our team has enough players at every game. Please have your children at the field 15 minutes before the game starts and please pick up your children promptly after every practice and game.

Discipline: I have been told that I run a tight ship and will continue to do so. If players are acting out, I will ask them two times to fix their behavior. If they fail to do so after these warnings, I will sit them down at practice or during a game. If the behavior continues, we will need to talk about it to find a way to help resolve the behavior best, without it detracting from the rest of the players' experiences on the team. The more we communicate, the more I can assure the practice environment is fun and safe for everyone.

Communication: I am typically a difficult person to reach by phone. The best way to contact me is via email at soccercoach@sampleclub.com. Should you wish to talk by phone, my office number is 654-852-6666 and the best time to reach me is between 12pm and 3pm. If these times do not work, let's schedule a time that works for both of us. Please, if you have a concern, do not talk to me during a practice or game or when your child or other people can hear. I do encourage open communication and questions, as we all hope to make this a great experience for the children.

Sideline Behavior: Please be supportive and enthusiastic on the sideline during games. The players and I will truly appreciate your applause and encouragement. However, if everyone is coaching, this will only confuse the players. Please do not coach from the sideline. The players need to make their own decisions and we need to support them and educate them at practice. Remember, you are a role model on the sideline for the players. Please set a good example.

Overall: I am excited for a great year and I hope you and your child are as well. Let's all have fun and enjoy the game. If you have any questions, please, let's keep open communication. ☺

**** Have the schedule of all practices and games and the weather/medical emergency plan attached to this agenda.*

Sample U8 Parent Meeting Agenda

Team Goals: Our primary goals as a team are to have fun and to develop as young soccer players. I hope to be able to teach the players needed skills that will help them improve in the game. We will have fun practices that focus on technical skills. Winning will not be a priority for our team. Team priorities will be developing skills and enjoying the game. If you watch practice, you may at times see us engaging in activities that do not look like “real soccer”. Please be assured that all activities we do will help with skill building, motor development, and enjoyment.

Style of Play: I will be encouraging the players to try new things and to be creative. We will focus primarily on developing dribbling skills, and also spend time on passing, receiving, and shooting skills so players begin to develop in age appropriate skills. It is my hope that players have the confidence to show their skills in the game and show comfort on the ball. We will try to move up and down the field as a team and I will be moving players into multiple positions to help them learn all parts of the game. We will not be spending a lot of time on positions and organization. We will spend most of our time on skill development.

Attendance: I will be at every practice and game, foregoing any unforeseen emergencies. Please make every attempt to have your child at every practice and game (on time) as well as it is part of learning the responsibility of being on a team. Given our hectic lives, I do understand that players may have conflicts here and there. Please let me know before the first game of any conflicts you might have for the season so I can prepare my practices accordingly and we can make sure our team has enough players at every game. Please have your children at the field 20 minutes before the game starts and please pick up your children promptly after every practice and game.

Discipline: I have been told that I run a tight ship and will continue to do so. If players are acting out, I will ask them two times to fix their behavior. If they fail to do so after these warnings, I will sit them down at practice or during a game. If the behavior continues, we will need to talk about it to find a way to help resolve the behavior best, without it detracting from the rest of the players’ experiences on the team.

Communication: I am typically a difficult person to reach by phone. The best way to contact me is via email at soccercoach@sampleclub.com. Should you wish to talk by phone, my office number is 654-852-6666 and the best time to reach me is between 12pm and 3pm. If these times do not work, let’s schedule a time that works for both of us. Please do not ask to talk to me during a practice or game or immediately before or after the game or in front of your child. I do encourage open communication and questions, as we all hope to make this a great experience for the children.

Sideline Behavior: Please be supportive and enthusiastic on the sideline during games. The players and I will truly appreciate your applause and encouragement. However, if everyone is coaching, this will only confuse the players. Please do not coach from the sideline. The players need to make their own decisions and we need to support them and educate them at practice. Remember, you are a role model on the sideline for the players. Please set a good example.

Overall: I am excited for a great year and I hope you and your child are as well. Let’s all have fun and enjoy the game. If you have any questions, please, let’s keep open communication. ☺

**** Have the schedule of all practices and games and the weather/medical emergency plan attached to this agenda.*

SAMPLE ORGANIZATION PROGRAM RATIONALE FOR U6 AND U8

Skill Priorities

The game of soccer has a number of basic skills, or ***techniques***, that players have to learn, such as dribbling, receiving passes, making passes, shooting, and heading. These skills make up the foundation of the game. However players always need to learn how to use these skills. This includes making decisions during the game, such as when to dribble, when to pass, and to whom to pass. These players' decisions are referred to as ***tactical*** decisions.

The first principle of soccer development is that players should master the basic techniques before they can learn the tactical side of the game. **Technique before tactics!** Think of techniques as vocabulary, and tactics as the grammar rules for forming sentences and paragraphs. Now, imagine a young immigrant who arrives in America without speaking a word of English. Before we can teach this immigrant about the rules for joining nouns, verbs, and adverbs to form a sentence, we have to give him a chance to learn a number of nouns and verbs in order to construct a sentence. If a child knows no words, than knowing the rules by which to organize the words is useless. If this child knows words, we can typically understand the gist of what he is trying to say, despite his lack of grammatical knowledge. Of course, the more grammar this child learns, the more we will consider him fluent in the language. The same is true with soccer. Teaching the players tactics when they do not have the skills to complete them will prove fruitless. Teaching them technical skills will allow them to play and the games we watch will seem somewhat like soccer, but not like the soccer we see on television. Once they master the skills (grasp the words), then we can teach them how to use the tactics (construct sentences and paragraphs). Then their game will look like the game we see on television (or be fluent). This will not happen at the U6 and U8 ages.

In terms of soccer development, your child is just beginning his/her 'schooling'. We use the word 'schooling' here because there are many similarities between a regular school and a youth club, which can be considered as essentially a soccer school. Some techniques should be taught before others. The first technique that children should learn is **dribbling**. The ability to dribble is absolutely critical, since dribbling is the foundation skill and preparation for all the other fundamental techniques of soccer, such as receiving, passing, and shooting. When players are receiving the ball and making preparation touches prior to passing or shooting, they are essentially engaged in a mini-dribble. Young players need to learn to dribble within a variety of playing situations, such as dribbling forward unopposed, changing speed and direction with the ball, shielding the ball from opponents, dribbling past an opponent, and dribbling to get away from pressure. A limited ability to dribble leads to a limited range of passing or shooting. There are also times in the game when the player with the ball has no passing options and the only way out of tight pressure is to dribble.

Aside from the fact that dribbling forms the foundation for all the other skills, there are many other reasons why we need to focus on dribbling at U6/U8. First of all, it takes years to become a comfortable and confident dribbler. Players have to learn to combine body control, agility, coordination, and balance with the mechanics of dribbling, and the sooner they start, the better. Just like any complex bio-mechanical skill such as skating or gymnastics, the later you start, the harder it is to achieve perfect form.

Secondly, the process of learning to dribble involves trial and error. At first, the players' rudimentary attempts at dribbling will often result in failure as they discover the contrast between a soft touch and a hard touch on the ball. The players will slowly develop a 'feel' for the ball as they experiment at controlling and propelling it. Young players do not get discouraged easily if they do not succeed. They are not thinking in terms of peer assessment. They live for the moment, in the here and now, and the fact that they did not succeed the last time they dribbled will not even enter their minds. Of course, since we play 3 vs. 3 or 4 vs. 4, we guarantee that players will get another chance to show their skills very soon, so they would not even have time to think about it if they were capable of doing so. If we wait for the players to mature before we emphasize dribbling, many of them will lose their confidence if they do not succeed and will become reluctant to dribble. Once they become aware of others' perception and peer review, they will not be so daring and creative.

Thirdly, in 3 vs. 3 and 4 vs. 4 play, the fields are so small that dribbling is always an option since the ball is almost always within reach and the goals and other players are also close. Once the game moves to the larger sized fields, dribbling becomes less effective on its own and must be combined with passing to get the ball from point A to point B. Lastly, it is better to go through the process of trial and error when game results are not important and standings are not kept. At the older ages, game results assume more importance, making it hard for the parents, other players, and coaches to show patience and tolerance for mistakes, and putting added pressure on players to 'get rid of the ball' rather than risk losing it. Once games become competitive, the resultant environment is not ideal to start learning how to dribble.

To Cheer or Not To Cheer—That is the Question

Most coaches and parents of beginner players unknowingly emphasize the wrong skills. In a typical U-6/U-8 club play, the players are encouraged by both the parents on the sidelines and the coaches to 'boot' the ball up the field. Shouts of "get rid of it!" and "kick it!" are all too common. The further forward a player kicks, the louder the cheers. Players are so indoctrinated to 'kick it forward' that very few of them dare to get out of pressure by dribbling. Even when no one is around to pressure them, we see players just kicking the ball without any thought. Part of this might be because of the cheering they get from the sideline when they do this. However, kicking is not a skill. All of us, with no learning, can kick a ball. What we really want to emphasize is learning and skill development. So, please, do not cheer for kicking, cheer for dribbling and creativity. We do not want to 'coach' the players out of developing ball skills and showing creativity, do we?

On the surface, it is easy to say that results at U6 and U8 do not matter and that there is no need to keep standings. In actuality, players at this age often do not know the score when the game ends. It is likely that they know the directions to the nearest ice cream store however. Even with this understanding, it is hard for you to watch your child lose the ball in front of his own goal and for the other team to score. It is difficult to not place importance on the score as we are tallying it in our head. Despite this, we need to remember what is best for the players. Partner with your spouse or a friend and help stop each other from saying "kick it". It is especially hard when the ball is front of their goal and you want them to clear it, but please remember, every time they kick it, they lose another opportunity to learn to dribble.

Many of you may be wondering about teaching passing, as that is certainly part of soccer. However, just as in school, we are taking one step at a time. Before we do multiplication and division, we are doing addition and subtraction. There is a progression to learning and the players are most capable of learning dribbling at this age. You will not typically see any passing in a U6 game, and very little in a U8 game. Passing is simply beyond the ability of U6 and most U8 players. Most players realize there is only one toy on the field and they want to play with the toy. They do not understand the logic in giving their toy to someone else. If they do that, they no longer get to play with the toy. Think of dribbling as ‘passing to oneself’. If players cannot pass to themselves, how can they be expected to pass to a teammate 15 yards away? Despite our grandest hopes, let us be honest with ourselves as well. Some of those kicks that end up going to teammates are still just kicks. The fact that they randomly ended up with a teammate does not make the kick a pass. ☺

Weaning Young Players Out of Adult Dependency

In addition to technical development, we want to help players with mental development. Just as they practice technical skills to improve their play, they also need to practice decision making. This can very easily be done by placing them into situations repeatedly and allowing them to make decisions on their own. If natural consequences do not teach them what the best decision is, then the coach can help clarify that with the player. If we constantly tell these young players what to do and prevent them from making these decisions, they will never improve their decision making skills, a very important part of the game. Typically, children aged 4 to 8 are naturally dependent on their parents for many of their daily needs. In youth sports, this dependency is manifested as parental coaching from the sidelines. The players themselves will tend to look to their parents for help since they are conditioned to be dependent on them. Although it can be very hard, we need to allow these players to make their own decisions. The hardest part will be that some of the decisions will be faulty. However, we must allow them to learn from their successes and failures, as both provide vital information and help in development. Therefore, another important objective of our U6/U8 program is to wean the players out of their dependency on adults during games. This is crucial for the development of soccer players. Since coaches do not have time outs and the game runs continuously, coaches have very little control over games once they start. Soccer players must learn to think for themselves, and the sooner they learn to stand on their own feet, the better. Since results do not matter at these age groups, no one should be overly concerned if players make mistakes that lead to goals. Parents and coaches must resist the urge to tell their players what to do for the good of the players. Not surprisingly, children tell us that they actually have more fun when they are not being told what to do constantly. Imagine that!

Commonly, we see parents sitting and standing very close to the sidelines and even encroaching onto the field. We realize that we get excited and are enthusiastic and that is great! However, parents sitting so close to and on the field impacts the players’ behavior, response, and performance. If we want to give the players a sense of freedom and the ability to make their own decisions, we need to physically step back. This is why we ask you to sit some distance from the field, where you can still enjoy watching without your presence intimidating the players. What we lose in coziness, we gain in giving an invaluable sense of independence to the players.

Individual Concept vs. Team Concept

As parents, you are mainly and thankfully concerned with the welfare and development of your child. When your child goes to school, you become very interested in how he/she is progressing in school. Do you care how the class is doing as a whole? You are likely happy as long as your child is doing well, the teacher creates a supportive learning atmosphere, and the teacher is keeping pace with the required academic standards for his/her age. It seems laughable to imagine parents boasting that their child's class average was higher than the class next door. It does not seem to be a concern. The class concept in school is seen as a logistical convenience where children of like-age are grouped together to learn academics and social skills within the dynamics of a group. The same concept should be applied to youth sports. Just like a classroom, a youth team should be seen as a convenient way to group players of similar age and ability together, to learn how to play soccer, as well as develop social skills. Just as we do not brag about how strong our child's entire class is in academics, we should not brag about the strength of our child's team in soccer.

People want to be part of a team. They feel safe and comfortable. There are many positives in a team environment, such as building lifelong friendships, sharing common goals, learning to trust and depend on others. But when the team assumes too much importance or consumes your life, it can lead to tension and conflicts. Games become more stressful. The mood of the family unit for the rest of the day hinges on the game result. 'What's best for the team' overrides what's best for the individual players. The negative aspects of the team concept manifest themselves in many ways: The amount of playing time players get, rivalry between teams spilling over into arguments and even hostility, coaches fighting over players, referee abuse, etc.

Though we are ingrained in the American culture to place a high value on winning, we urge you not to place importance on winning, but rather on making sure your child is having fun and is being given the opportunity to play and learn the game. Your child's U6 or U8 team's record will have absolutely no impact on the future well being of your child. Mia Hamm is not playing for the National Team because her U10 team won the state championship. She is on the national team because she has developed into a skillful and athletic player. Your child might develop into a high level player or he/she might not. Some of this depends on our genes and is pre-determined before your child was even born. As long as he/she is having fun and developing a lifetime habit of healthy participation in sport, we should all be happy. Remember that the team is there to serve your CHILD'S needs. Your child is not there to serve the team's needs. If the team's performance produces strong emotions in you, you need to step back and take a deep breath and suppress these emotions. If your child is having fun, that is the most important thing. The team is just a logistical way to engage a bunch of children in play. Tomorrow, your child will be part of another team.

Parents must beware of coaches who seem intent in building a 'dynasty' at these young ages. If a coach approaches you with the intent to recruit your child into his/her team because "he wants to build a strong team", you should question his agenda. The chances are he/she will emphasize the wrong type of development and training. The chances are that he/she will replace your child down the road when a better player pops up.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the game and about children. We sincerely hope you enjoyed this course and find coaching to be more enjoyable in your upcoming seasons. If you walk away from this course remembering only a couple things, we hope you remember these tenets:

- The game is the greatest teacher
- No laps, no lines, no lectures
- Let the players play
- Keep everything age appropriate—stress technique over tactics!
- HAVE FUN!!!

With these tenets as your guiding principles, both you and your players will have great seasons.

Just as life is a constant learning process, so is coaching soccer. We hope you continue your education by watching others, talking with friends from this course, seeking out information in books, videos, or on websites, and attending clinics or future coaching courses. We have many practice plans and age appropriate activities on our webpage www.mayouthsoccer.org that you can utilize at any time. You will also find more information about coaching, coaching clinics other courses, and contact information so that you can call or email us with any questions. We are one big family promoting this game, so please do not hesitate to call on us if we can be of any help.

We wish you the very best and hope to see you in the future!



MASS YOUTH SOCCER COACHES CODE OF CONDUCT

The Board of Directors of Mass Youth Soccer and the leaders of the affiliated leagues expect all coaches, adult volunteers, club administrators, and referees to conduct themselves in a responsible and principled manner at all times, and to always keep the best interest and well-being of the children they are responsible for as the highest priority.

We want to ensure that games are fair, positive, and enjoyable experiences for all the children and adults involved. A soccer game should be friendly and unifying – a spirited athletic and social occasion for the players, coaches, referees, and spectators.

We jointly expect all coaches to conform to this code of conduct:

- Before, during and after the game, be an example of dignity, patience, and positive spirit.
- Before a game, introduce yourself to the opposing coach and to the referee.
- During the game, you are responsible for the sportsmanship of your players. If one of your players is disrespectful, irresponsible or overly aggressive, take the player out of the game at least long enough for him/her to calm down.
- During the game, you are also responsible for the conduct of the parents of your players. It is imperative to explain acceptable player and parent behavior in a preseason meeting. Encourage them to applaud and cheer for good plays by either team. Discourage them (and you may need to be forceful and direct) from yelling at the players and the referee.
- During the game, you are also responsible for the conduct of spectators rooting for your team.
- During the game, do not address the referee at all. If you have a small issue, discuss it with the referee calmly and patiently after the game. If you have a major complaint, or if you think the referee was unfair, biased, unfit, or incompetent, report your opinion to your league. Your reactions will be taken seriously if they are presented objectively and formally.
- After the game, thank the referee and ask your players to do the same.

We stress two points:

Referees, especially young and inexperienced ones, are like your players and yourself in that they need time to develop. You can play an important role in helping them to improve by letting them concentrate on the game. You can help by encouraging them, by accepting their inevitable, occasional mistakes and by offering constructive post-game comments. On the other hand, you could discourage and demoralize the referees by criticizing their decisions, by verbally abusing them, and inciting (or even accepting) your own players' overly aggressive behavior.

Your example is powerful, for better or worse. If you insist on fair play, concentrate on your players' enjoyment of the game and their overall, long term development, and support the referee; your players and their parents will notice. If you encourage (or allow) your players to play outside the rules, if you are overly concerned with results, and if you criticize the referee harshly, your players and their parents will also notice.

Think about what you are doing during a game! Uphold the spirit of the game! If you follow the expectations described above, the spirit of the game will be alive and well in Massachusetts and will grow, along with the enjoyment of all. Coaches who do not follow the expectations described above will be disciplined or removed.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do you deal with discipline problems?

- a. Model the behavior you want the kids to emulate.
- b. Avoid potential discipline problems; create an active training environment with age appropriate activities.
- c. Address the potential problem in timely fashion; do not let the behavior persist.
- d. A time-out on the sideline is a way the child might change his/her behavior. Having a player sit on the side for a minute, without a soccer ball or friends around him/her, might make the child realize he/she needs to behave appropriately.
- e. Talk to the child about why he/she is sitting out, so the child understands what he/she did is wrong and to encourage more appropriate behavior.

2. How do you coach your own child?

- a. Have a discussion with your child and make it clear that no preferential treatment will be given to your son or daughter.
- b. Avoid talking with your child about his/her performance before and after practice.
- c. Keep roles of parent and coach separate. When you are on the field, be the coach, and when you are in the car, at home, etc, be the parent.
- d. Make it clear that your expectations and your child's expectations are the same. If the expectations are different, the child will feel different and isolated. Do not be overly tough with your child.
- e. Try not to bring home things that happened in practice and games, unless the child initiates the topic of conversation.
- f. You can also have your assistant coach actively involved in coaching all the players so your child hears a different voice.

3. How do you deal with "Superstar Player" who dribbles through everyone and scores all the goals?

- a. At the very young ages, rotate him/her into both teams, so one team does not gain a huge advantage. You can also throw another ball into play so all players may participate.
- b. Get players to recognize when is a good time to dribble or pass.
- c. Putting the player in different positions will help him/her to be aware of different things he/she needs to learn about the game.

4. **How do you coach a team that has a wide range of ability?**
 - a. Do not compare your players with each other; measure them by their individual improvement and amount of effort they put out when they are in practices and games.
 - b. Coaches should challenge the more advanced players by asking them to play with only two touches or use the non-dominant foot.
 - c. Avoid separating players by skill; keep them playing and improving together.
 - d. Provide opportunities within the training session for players to play with others of their own ability level.
 - e. On the field of play, blend the more skilled and less skilled players in complementary positions that provide supportive opportunities.
 - f. Challenge the players to set their own personal bar higher every time an activity is run.
 - g. As a coach, try not to focus on just the good players. All players need attention. Recognize that simple words of praise will help motivate those players that may lag behind skill-wise.
 - h. Use your best player(s) as neutral player(s) during scrimmages and small-sided games.
5. **At what age should a player specialize in one position?**

It is good to start specializing in one position between the ages of 13 and 14 years old.
6. **At what age should a player start to focus on one sport?**

Players should start focusing on one sport between the ages of 14 and 15 years old.
7. **At what age should GK skills be introduced and when should a player start focusing on just being a GK?**

9 years old is a good age to start introducing GK skill, and between the ages of 14-15 the player should start specializing in the position.