

Oxford Youth Soccer Coaches Practice Guide



Coaching U6

- Give brief directions; repeat when necessary.
- Many activities of short duration.
- Lots of water breaks.
- Limit training sessions to 45 minutes
- Emphasize familiarity and confidence with the ball (every child must have access to a ball throughout every training session)

Sample Game/Activities

It is important to vary the activities from practice to practice. New and different activities can be added over the course of the season. Each activity can also be modified to make it more or less challenging (this depends on the developmental levels and abilities of the children in the group). Remember, every child must have a ball. The following series of activities can be utilized during every training session although it is wise to develop new activities and games and introduce them over the course of the season.

Game 1:

Ball Retrieve (Body Awareness/Target Game) The coach stands in the middle of the training site and collects all of the balls. The coach then explains that he will throw the balls in different directions and that each player must bring their ball back to the coach as quickly as they can. The coach puts various conditions on how they retrieve the ball (an example: with one hand; one hand with the ball touching the forehead; both hands and the ball touching their belly button, etc.). Once the children show comfort with the exercise, they are asked to maneuver the ball with their feet. Once a comfort level is reached again, the coach then creates a different challenge for the players to solve.

Game 2:

Body Part Dribble (Body Awareness) Each player has a ball in an area such as a 20 x 20 yard circle or square. Players dribble their ball in the space and avoid touching other players. While they dribble, the coach or leader calls out a body part, such as "forehead," "elbow," "chin," "knee," etc. Simon Says is a good variation of this activity. After the player has touched the body part to the ball, the player should then immediately continue to dribble. This activity promotes listening skills and reinforces the knowledge of body parts. Very young players do not understand left or right direction. If you say "left elbow", don't expect compliance from the player.

Game 3:

Glob (Target Game) Players like this so much they would likely perform this activity for the entire training period if permitted. Begin without a ball. Use cones to outline the sidelines and the finish line (a 20 x 20 yard space should be adequate). Stand in the middle of the area and talk and act like a Glob, challenging the players to TRY to run (without the ball) across the space without being caught (tagged) by the nasty Glob. Ham it up a bit to have more fun. Then, have them try to get across Glob Country by dribbling their ball while the coach tries to touch their ball out of bounds. Their re-entry back into the game can be done in many ways, (i.e. three foot taps on the ball, throw the ball in the air clap twice and catch it, etc). This is not an elimination game.

Game 4:

Everybody's It (Maze Game) This activity borders on the edge of controlled mayhem. In an appropriately sized space (approximately 20 x 20 yards), develop boundaries. Each player runs around, staying inside the boundaries, trying to tag as many other players while at the same time trying to not get tagged themselves. Give a signal of when to begin and let 28 them play for 30-45 seconds. It's a game of total vision, requiring the players to have full awareness of what's around them. They need to learn how to move into spaces to attack (tag), and out of space to retreat (avoid being tagged).

Game 5:

Gates (Maze Game) The coach places cones throughout the training area (20 x 20 yards) in pairs about three feet apart. Upon command, players dribble a ball through as many "cone gates" in the time specified by the coach. Sixty seconds work well. Parents should help the player's count how many times they pass through the gates as the ability to dribble through gates and count is difficult at this age. Each player gets a chance to repeat the exercise to try and beat their own score. It is appropriate for younger players to compete against themselves, not other players. In all the games, start first without a ball. After the players understand the objective and the rules of the game, introduce the ball. We end each age-specific chapter with a graphic representation of the tactical characteristics of players in this age group. Our first tactical sign for the U-6 player is demonstrated with a One-Way Sign.

Coaching U8

- Much of the same mentality applies with U8 as it does with U6. Keep your instructions, and descriptions brief. Practices should rotate various drills to keep things fresh. Below are suggestions for drills to both create a positive learning experience but to make practice exciting and a place where the children can develop skills.



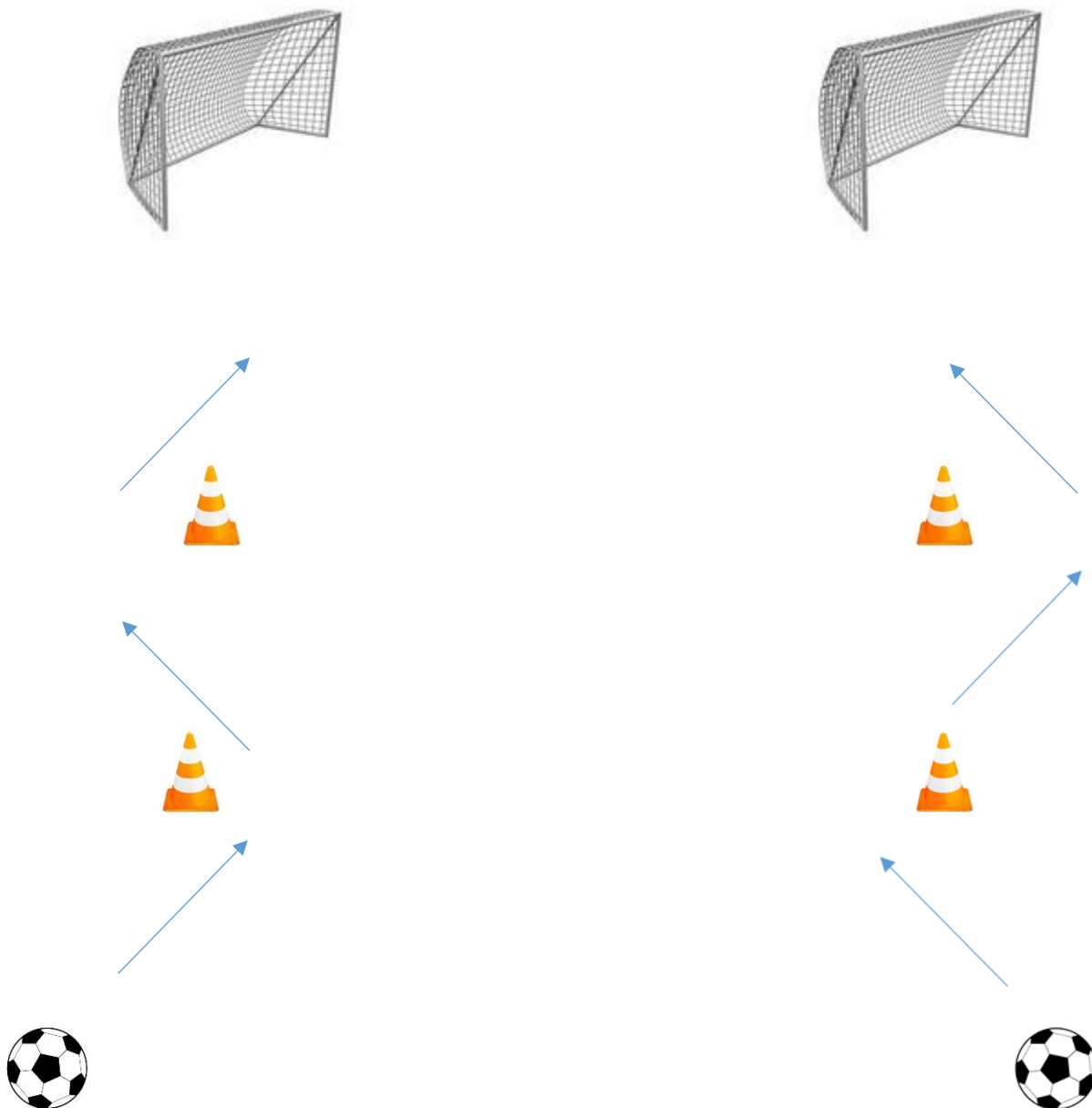
This is the age where players can begin to understand the concept of working with a teammate. The notion, or willingness, to intentionally pass the ball to someone is just beginning to take hold. In the U-6 year old age group, efforts from coaches and parents to encourage the player to pass the ball usually Chapter 5 31 failed. Coaches and parents will have more success encouraging players to pass the ball in the seven to eight year old age group. In this age group, the player begins to think beyond their personal needs and actively looks to pass to a teammate. In many cases they will pass to their best friend and not necessarily the player in the best position to receive the ball.

Some players will be more developmentally mature and seem more advanced than others. To help offset this, encourage continued practice without creating an elitist attitude. Some players will go back and forth between egocentric play and cooperative play while others will appear to lag behind due to a slower developmental path.

The “two players-one ball” concept that applied to this age group should encourage a coach to design activities in which players are sharing a ball. However, this does not mean that players should no longer do activities that require individual ball work. Even professional players work individually with a ball! An NBA player will go to the gym and work on their dribbling skills and jump shot. Do not ignore exercises used in earlier developmental stages.

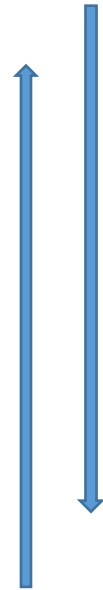
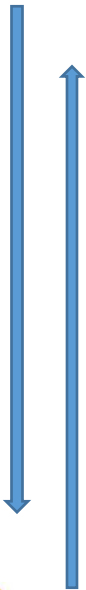
Dribbling Relay Race

- The object of this drill is to get the children to dribble with both feet while navigating around cones. Creating two lines alternate dribbling with their feet, and finally finishing with scoring.



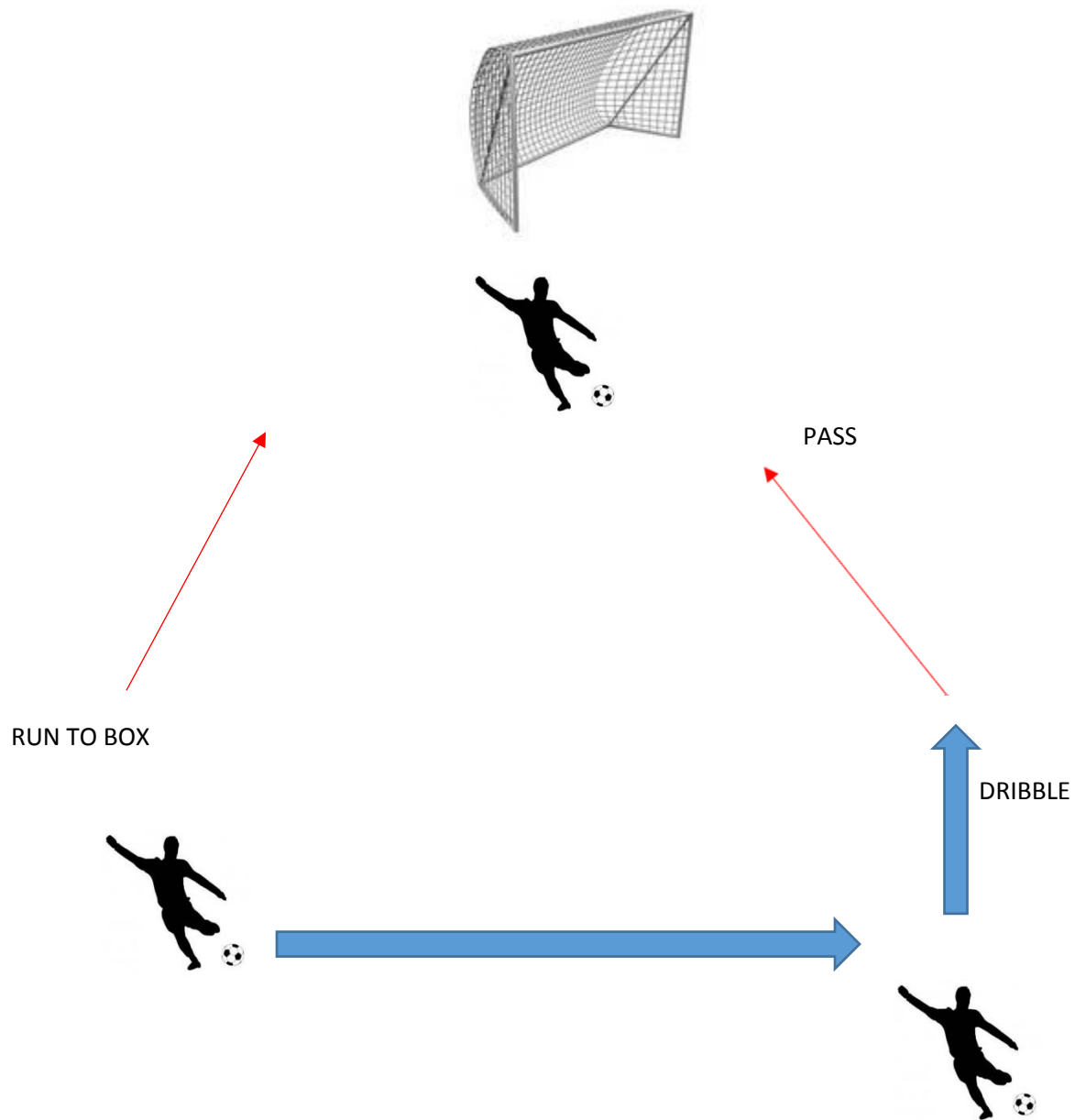
Pullback and footwork

- The following drill is to focus on the “pullback”. After reviewing the pullback technique have the children start at the goal line, place the cones ten yards away from the goal. Have the children dribble to the cone and practice their pull back, after coming back you can have them either practice passing to the next child in line, or shooting on net.



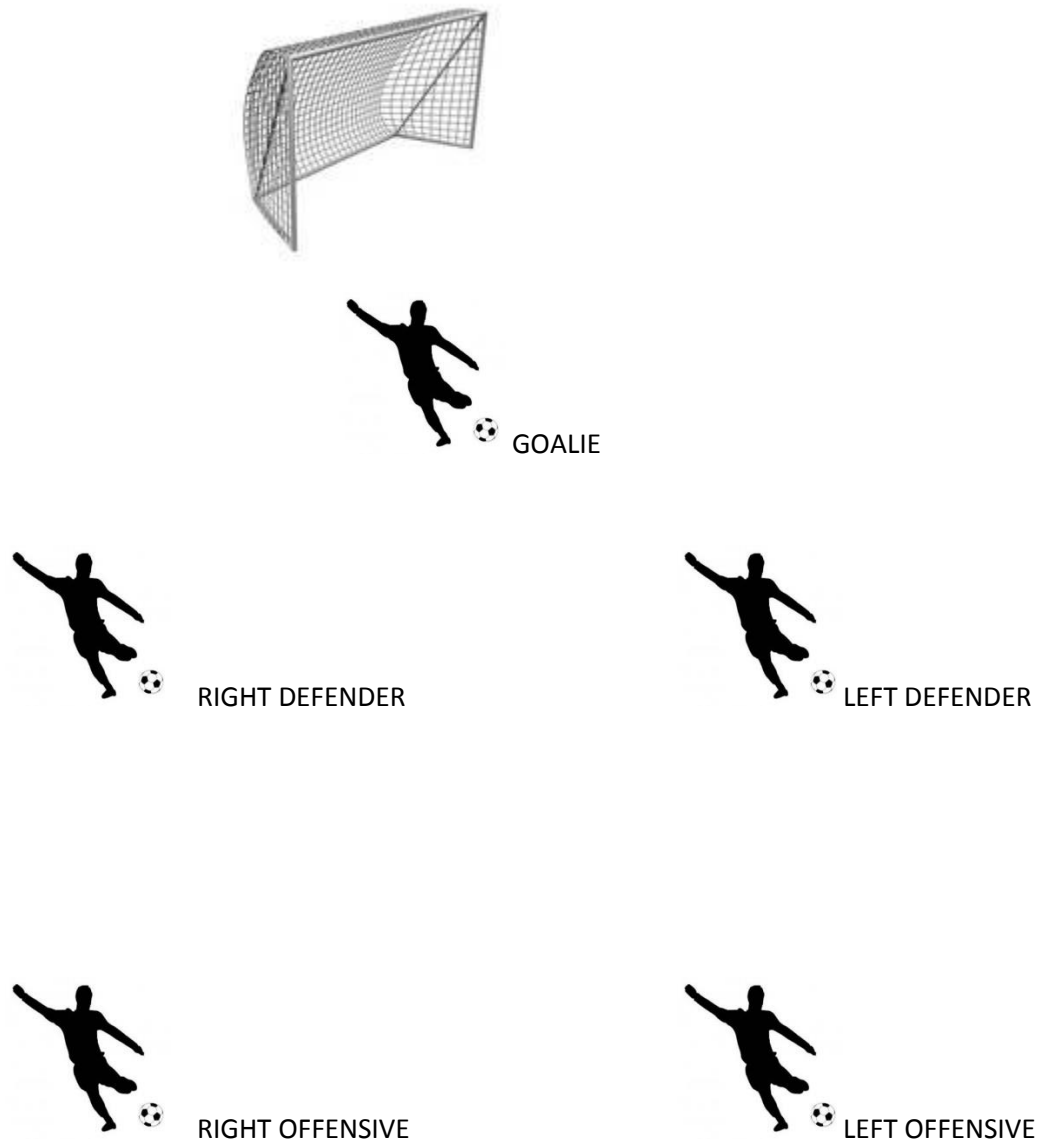
2 on 1, Crossing Pass Drill

- 2 on 1. This drill is to teach the girls spacing and crossing the ball both to their teammates as well as into the box. A key skill to teach the younger players is the space they need to play within, as well as passing. The defender can be a child, but also a coach to help encourage quick passing.
- Teaching the children to move without the ball, and where they should run to is also a key point to this drill.



Defensive and Offensive Positioning

- Positioning is an important concept for the children to learn. Dividing the field into quadrants to reinforce this is often a good idea. Being consistent in the terminology we use can help the child know where they should be. Below demonstrates where the children can be positioned as well as the position names.
- Giving reminders of where they should be and not to just follow the ball around the field will assist in their development.



- Putting the children in these positions and having them call out the names, is a helpful reminder throughout practice. Offensive players are encouraged to work from midfield forward, while defenders from their own goal line to midfield.

Ball Retrieve in Pairs (Target Game)

Work with one ball between two players. Using general field space, start from the middle of the field. One pair of players hands the coach a ball who tosses it away and calls out a number from 2-10. Whatever number the coach calls, each pair of players must return the ball to the coach by passing the ball with their feet in exactly the asked for number of touches. The players decide how to solve this problem. The coach should rapidly toss balls away to keep the activity flowing. The coach can also move to a different space after the ball has been tossed so that players must be aware of where they are going. The activity encourages working in pairs, pacing of passes, playing to a target, and keeping the heads up to scan the environment.

Pac Man (Maze game)

Each player has a ball in a confined area of approximately 20 x 20 yards. Adjust the space to accommodate the number of players. All but two players must place their ball outside the area. The two players with the ball are the Pac Men. Pac Men dribble their balls and attempt to hit other players below the knee with a pass. Players try to avoid being hit by running, dodging and jumping. Once a player is hit, he/she gets their ball and becomes a Pac Man. The game continues until all players have been hit and have their ball. The activity encourages dribbling and passing to a moving target, decision making, changing direction, cardio-respiratory endurance, and allows all ability levels to play equally. If players are hit early, they will have more opportunity to dribble. If they manage to avoid getting hit until near the end of the game, their challenge increases greatly.

Monkey in the middle

Using the center circle, or constructing a circle with cones, have the players form a circle. Using one ball have one child at a time enter the center. Encourage players to make quick passes to teammates around the circle, while the Monkey in the middle has to intercept to be set free. The player passing the ball, or a rotation of players one at a time then enter the middle to have their turn. This encourages passing quickly and accurately to teammates. Encourage players to pass with the insole of their feet, rather than kicking wildly with their toes.

Sharks and Minnows

Build a grid approximately 20X25 yards this field should be adjusted based on the skill level and number of players participating. Each player should have a ball except for 2 (sharks). The players with balls (the minnows) attempt to protect their ball from the two "Sharks". The Sharks attempt to gain possession and knock the minnows (ball) out of the grid. Once this happens, the minnow can run around the grid once and return to the game. Each minnow has two changes, and the last 2 minnows remaining become the sharks in the next round.

Basic Concepts

The following is a list of skills, plays, and terms players should be familiar with when participating at the U6 & U8 levels.

- Pullback
- Outside of the boot
- Passing with the insole
- Toe taps
- Use of both feet
- Throw ins
- Corner kicks
- Goal kicks
- Goal Keeping
- Hand ball

* More drills and concepts can be found at *

http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/coaches/coachconnect_lessonplans

Throughout the season as a coach you should let your players know that:

- 1) You will always be proud of them as long as they give 100 percent effort (regardless of the outcome on the scoreboard).
- 2) Mistakes are an inevitable part of the game. If they are giving 100 percent and trying new things (as they strive to improve), mistakes are bound to occur. Your best players are those who find ways to quickly bounce back from mistakes.
- 3) “High Fives” and constant positive feedback is given no matter if your players score a goal, or have one scored on them.
- 4) Team huddles are used to create an atmosphere of positive reinforcement. Coming up with new team names to yell at the end of each game or practice allows for a fun environment which breeds a willingness to learn.
- 5) Lastly, coaches should create an environment of constant motion, and effort. The coach is the one who sets the tone for all players.