

**United Soccer of Auburn**  
**U5-U6 Coaching**  
**Tim Norris**

***Most Important Jobs of the U5 and U6 Coach?***

- A. Keep the kids safe.
- B. Teach the kids to enjoy soccer.
- C. Teach the parents how to enjoy their kids' soccer constructively.
- D. Teach the kids some soccer skills  
...and constantly improve yourself as a coach, i.e. through license courses.

**A. Safety:**

- 1. Have: First Aid Kit, emergency contact info, cell phone.
- 2. Check the field for hazards.
- 3. Do not leave them unattended or unsupervised (by a CORI checked adult).
- 4. Encourage parents to stay at this age.

**B. Love of the game**

- 1. Your enthusiasm is contagious.
- 2. Activities and games not "drills."
- 3. Make it fun so they want to come back.

**C. Parent Education: Get them started on the right foot.**

- 1. Consider having a meeting at the start of the season to go over how you do things.
- 2. No coaching from parents' sideline.
- 3. Reinforce good soccer, not big kicks. Keep it all positive: participation=success.
- 4. Get them in good habits: show up early with the right equipment.
- 5. Introduce them to the idea of parents' side and players' side in games and practices.
- 6. Deemphasize game results.
- 7. Reinforce the message throughout the season with emails, and chats before or after games and practices.

**D. Teaching Soccer to U5 and U6 players.**

**1. Understanding the Characteristics of the Player**

What you are able to teach at a given age is tied to the developmental level of the child. While there are variations above and below the mean that you will have to take into account, this is what the scientists at U.S. Soccer have come up with as the optimal approach to this group as a whole.

Soccer coaches look at players according to four characteristics: Physical, Psychological, Technical, and Tactical. Below is a breakdown of what you can expect for this age.

- a. Physical:** Two speeds -- full speed and complete stop. Easily fatigued with rapid recovery. Like to roll around and stay in constant motion until tired. Coordination is a work in progress. At this age we teach them to control their bodies: Balance, running, jumping, rolling, hopping, and skipping.

- b. **Psychological/Social:** short attention span; parallel play; individual not team; like to pretend and imitate; can't multitask; like to be goofy and show off, but can be sensitive to criticism.
- c. **Technical: what can we teach?**
  - Dribbling:** Keep the ball close (with toe, inside and outside of foot, laces and sole)
  - Kicking:** Kicking the ball at the goal (with toe, inside of foot, and laces).
  - Catching:** Toss to self and catch.
  - Turning with the ball, changing directions, Intro to juggling**
  - BUT NOT: passing, throw-ins**
  - Getting them comfortable with the ball at their feet is JOB ONE.***
- d. **Tactical: what can we teach?**
  - Direction of play, Field boundaries**
  - Intro to teamwork:** taking turns
  - Fair play:** basic rules; no hand ball, no pushing, goal kick
  - Intro to open space:** games of tag, bringing ball to a space
  - Dealing with the ball rolling towards, rolling away**
  - Decision making:** where should I dribble?
  - BUT NOT: positions, formations**

## 2. Teaching Methods/Coaching Principles

- a. They **learn by doing**, so engage them, show them, and get them doing it quickly.
- b. **Activities/Games** not drills: they should be fun, and involve as many players as possible.
- c. Ideally the Game conditions teach the lesson, not the coach. Let the players **discover**.
- d. **3 L's** – no laps, lines, or lectures...
- e. Ask yourself whether the activity is **soccer-like**?
- f. Use **positive** reinforcement to guide players to the behavior you want.
- g. **Minimize explanations:** get them playing.
- h. Don't over coach. **Let them play** a while before you interrupt.
- i. **Economy:** try to incorporate physical, psychological, technical, and tactical into each activity. (Think: fitness, pressure, soccer skills, and decision making).

## 3. Practice Planning

- a. As they get older you may want to have a **theme** for the practice. At this age, dribbling is always a central theme for every practice. Use the teaching methods above to guide you in selecting activities.
- b. **Prepare in advance!** (index card method).
- c. **Choose 6 games** to play so you have back-ups in case one bombs. You will probably have time for about 4 activities.
- d. Start with activities that use **1 ball per child**, and work on activities that develop skills and require lots of touches on the ball. Use the warm up to teach them to play the ball with different surfaces: toe-taps, foundations, sole-roll, inside and outside of foot cuts.
- e. **Progress the training** with games that add pressure and tactical elements. This can be by introducing competition for the ball, or other game pressures, like limited time, and/or targets/direction.

- f. Make sure you have **properly inflated soccer balls**, and make sure the kids know the difference.
- g. Always end with a **scrimmage** or “unrestricted” soccer game (or in U5... the game).
- h. Mass Youth practice plans: [www.mayouthsoccer.org/coaching/](http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/coaching/)

#### 4. Practice Management

- a. Get there at least 10-15 minutes **early** and set up.
- b. Wear a **watch**: manage the practice and get your game/scrimmage in at the end.
- c. Set your **cones** from the inside out so you can flow from one activity to the other.
- d. Have an activity for kids to do when they **arrive**. They won't all come at the same time.
- e. Have them bring their **water** to one place away from the parents (if possible).
- f. Use water **breaks** to give the kids a water break AND to **transition** your field set up.
- g. Kids are **visual**, younger kids need more **cones** to show the boundaries. If possible use different color cones for different purposes (goals, directional games). You can hide those cones under other cones, and have extra cones stacked to aid your transitions.
- h. Change the **size** of your field (dimensions, goals) if you realize it is not working. E.g., a ball tag game may be impossible for some kids on a larger field because the faster kids have too much space.
- i. **Bail out** of games that aren't working. Extend games that are.
- j. Use your **enthusiasm** and voice to spice up the game and generate interest. Be **silly**. Leave your dignity at home.
- k. **Stay focused**: engage with the kids and don't be chatting with parents or other coaches during practice.
- l. **Discipline**: engaging activity, positive reinforcement, extinction, warning, timeout, parents.
- m. Kids that **won't participate** (usually U5): encourage parents not to pressure them or get angry; parent can accompany the child on the practice field; it's ok to let the kid watch for a while. Usually they become more interested when they see how much fun it is for the other kids.
- n. **Can they all do this at the same time?**

#### 5. Game Management

- a. **3v3**: no positions or goalies (Pugg Nets for goals)
- b. **Sub** on the fly or at stoppages
- c. **Field**: 20-30 yds long x 15-25 yds wide; size 3 ball.
- d. **Restarts**: don't get hung up on restarts. No throw-ins; can introduce goal kicks at U6; for out of bounds at the touchline (sideline) can either have a pass in or an adult can roll the ball in.
- e. **Time**: U6 is 4 x 6-8 minute quarters. Be flexible and work it out with the other coach. Can play quarters or halves, 20-25 minutes is plenty for a U5 game.
- f. **Referees**: There are no refs. Coaches should keep play going and redirect when it gets outside the lines. Address your own players' vicious fouls.
- g. **Keep coaches and kids on one side and parents on the other.**

#### 6. Demo Practice