

CASL COACHING MANUAL

CENTRAL ALABAMA SOCCER LEAGUE

CASL - U6 COACHING MANUAL

Although sometimes we may mistake 5-6 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. Although we do live in the same world, when seen through our own eyes, the world both adults and children experience is quite different. In order to fully understand these wonderful 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 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 or feels 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. Make sure every player has a ball in practice so every player is always playing**
- **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 practice 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**

The U6 Age Group

The fascination for the ball, the desire to master it and the thrill of scoring goals provides the launching pad into a lifetime of soccer participation. The joy and pleasure of the game are best nurtured by encouraging freedom of expression and organizing children's play in small groups.

Role of the U6 Coach

The role of the coach in the U6 age group is as facilitator, friendly helper, organizer, and motivator. The coach should be patient, enthusiastic, and imaginative. The coach should experiment with fun activities that include all players, if possible. The environment and the activities are more important than technical coaching is at this level.

The U6 Player Characteristics

Mental/Psychological (cognitive)

- Short attention span
- Individually oriented...egocentric
- Sensitive...Easily bruised psychologically
- Love to use their imagination...pretend
- Tend to only one task at a time
- Can process small bits of information
- Immature understanding of time and space relations

Physical (psychomotor)

- Constantly in motion
- No sense of pace (full speed ahead)
- Easily fatigued with rapid recovery
- Eye/hand and eye/foot coordination is primitive
- Can balance on good foot
- Catching skills are not developed
- Love to run, jump, fall and roll
- About 36-40 inches in tall
- Weigh between 30-50 pounds

Socially (psychosocial)

- Love to show off
- Little or no real concern for team activities
- Tend to parallel play...play next to but not with a friend or teammate
- Influential person in their life is their MOM
- Like to mimic goofy actions

Boys and girls are quite similar psychologically and physically.

What to Teach U6 Players (Game Components)

Techniques (skills):

Dribbling

Keep the ball close (with toe and inside of foot).

Kicking

Kicking the ball at the goal (with toe, inside of foot, and laces).

Catching

Toss to self and catch.

Psychology (mental and social):

- Sharing
- Fair play
- Dealing with parental involvement (confusion)
- “How to play”
- Emotional management

Fitness (movement education):

- Balance
- Running
- Jumping
- Rolling
- Hopping
- Skipping

Tactics (decisions):

- Where is the field
- Moving in the correct direction (which goal to kick at)
- Dealing with the ball rolling away
- Dealing with the ball rolling toward

Rules:

The kick off

The goal kick

Ball in and out of play

Hand ball

Physical fouls (pushing, holding, striking, tripping)

Sample Training Games/Sessions

General Information

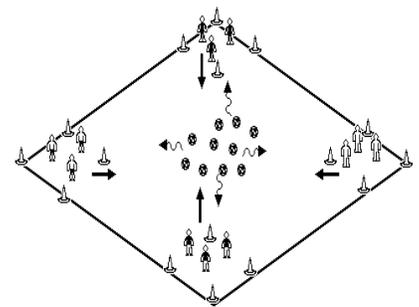
- ✓ The training session should involve fun and imaginative game like activities.
- ✓ Facilitate fun activities that draw out the skill in the player.
- ✓ Small-sided games such as 1v1, 2v1, 2v2, should be included as well.
- ✓ Training should always conclude with a 3v3 game without goalkeepers if possible.
- ✓ The duration of the training session should be 45-60 minutes.

Some Recommended Games for U6 Players:

- 1) **Tag**---Every child dribbles a soccer ball in the space defined while trying to tag other players with their hand. Players cannot leave their own ball. Have them keep count of how many people they have tagged and, if playing twice in a row, see if players can tag more people than they did in the first game. *Version 2:* Players must tag other players on their knees.
- 2) **Hospital tag**---Same as tag in that each player dribbles a soccer ball and that they try to tag each other with their hands. In this game, each time a player is tagged he/she must place their hand on the spot on their body at which they were tagged. Obviously, if tagged a third time, players have no more hands to cover those spots, so they must go to the hospital to see the doctor. The coach acts as the doctor and performs a magical task (pretend) to heal all the little soccer players so they can continue playing the game.
- 3) **Red light/Green light**---All players have a ball and dribble in a limited space (or towards the coach). When coach says “red light”, players must stop ball and put foot on top of ball. When coach says “yellow light”, players must dribble very slowly. When coach says “green light”, players dribble fast. Coach controls this game with frequency of light changes and variety of changes. Once players catch on to this game, add light of other colors and affix different actions to them. (i.e. purple light = hop back and forth over ball, orange light = run around the ball, black light = dance, blue light = hide behind the ball etc. etc.)
- 4) **Freeze Tag**---Break up the group into two teams. Everyone must dribble their soccer ball, but one team tries to tag (freeze) the other team. If they do tag a player on the other team, that player must freeze, place their ball above their head and spread their legs. Another player on their team must kick his/her ball through the frozen player’s legs to unfreeze the teammate. If all players are frozen, game ends and the frozen team becomes the taggers. Otherwise, stop game after a few minutes and have team reverse roles. *Version 2:* Coach can be the freeze monster and try to tag all the players with players unfreezing each other in same fashion

- 5) **Planets**---Set up cones into multiple squares or triangles that serve as planets (or cities). All players must follow coach's order and dribble into the planet he calls out. Coach can have all players follow same directions or break up team so they start at different planet and then have them dribble through the solar system in clockwise or counterclockwise fashion. Coach can have groups dribble in opposite direction through the solar system.
- 6) **Kangaroo Jack**---All players except two or three begin with a ball. Players without balls are kangaroo jacks and must hop like a kangaroo and try to tag players. If a player gets tagged, he/she becomes a kangaroo as well until all players are turned into kangaroos.
- 7) **Snake**---In an appropriate space for the numbers you have, have all players dribbling soccer balls except for 2-3 players to start. These players hold hands and work together as one snake to tag the other players, the players with balls try to avoid getting tagged by the snake. If they are tagged, they join hands with players making up the snake the snake grows until all players are part of the snake. The snake must stay together as one animal and not break off into little parts. Encourage fun by having the snake hiss. ☺
- 8) **Ball Tag**---Similar to other tag games except players try to tag others with their soccer ball instead of their hand. Have them keep count of how many times they kick their soccer ball and tag another person. Have the tag count if their ball hits another player or that player's ball. Can have the players tag the coach for 10 or 20 points. Then can have players tag other selected players for 50 or 100 points etc. etc. *Version 2:* Rather than having players tag each other; have them tag the coach by kicking their soccer ball. The coach moves around without a ball to avoid being tagged. Have players count up how many they got and can do the same variations as in the other game by affixing a lot of points to players.

- 9) **Capture the Balls**---Set up three or four "home bases" (squares) with cones roughly 2-3 yards wide. Break up the players into teams and have each team get together in their home base. Place all the balls in the center of the space between the home bases. On the coaches command the teams are free to gather as many soccer balls as they can into their home base. Players cannot use hands and there is no pushing each other or sitting/laying on the balls. Teams try to gather as many balls as possible into their home bases. Teams can steal balls from each others' home bases. Coach calls time and count up how many balls are in each space to determine a winner. Coach allows team 1 minute to make up a new team strategy before playing again.



- 10) **Moving Goal**---2 coaches use a pennie or an extra piece of clothing to form a movable goal with each coach serving as a post and the shirt serving as the crossbar. Players each have a ball and try to score by kicking their ball through the goal. However, the coaches constantly move and turn to force the players to keep their head up and to change direction as they dribble.

***** Every practice should include a scrimmage*****

CASL - U8 COACHING MANUAL

Although U8 children may begin to be far more physically and maturationally advanced than U6 children, we must remain patient and not try to force them to develop too quickly. Dribbling still needs to be the primary focus of our efforts, though passing and shooting should be introduced at this age as well. U8 players tend to work best when in pairs and we should allow them to work in pairs (coach selected) often. Similar to the U6 children, we need to make sure that fun is a central theme in practice. Player development will occur most appropriately and expeditiously if all players are enjoying themselves.

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's 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 to is to manage this range in your practice in a way that challenges each player at a level that is reasonable for that player**
- **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**
- **Beginning to develop motor memories – by attempting fundamental technical skills they are training their bodies to remember certain movements**

- **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. Still use their imaginations; just watch their reactions to games to read how far you can go with things.**

The U8 Age Group

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. 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 begins to cooperate with a teammate. However, players in this age group must continue individual ball work.

Role of Coach

The role of the coach in the U8 age group is to be a sensitive and patient teacher with an enthusiastic and imaginative approach. It is helpful if they have the ability to demonstrate and very important that they understand technique.

The U8 Player Characteristics

Mental/Psychological (cognitive)

Short attention span, but better than U6
 Love to use their imagination...pretend
 Limited ability to attend to more than one task at a time
 Beginning to solve simple soccer problems (i.e. pass to a teammate)
 Some understanding of time and space relations

Physical (psychomotor)

Beginning to develop physical coordination
 Improvement in pace regulation
 Skeletal system is growing; growth plates near joints
 Cardiovascular system is less efficient than an adult's; heart rate peaks sooner and takes longer to recover
 Catching skills are still not developed
 Improvement in dribbling and kicking
 Love to run, jump, fall and roll

Socially (psychosocial)

Self-concept and body image are beginning to develop
Sensitive...dislike personal failure in front of peers
Negative comments from peers and adults carry great weight
Limited experience with personal evaluation...effort is synonymous with successful performance
Inclined more toward cooperative activities (small groups)
Inclined to establish and cooperate with friends
Desire social acceptance; want everyone to like them
Influential person in their life is their father or significant parent
Like to play soccer because it is FUN; intrinsically motivated; play for enjoyment

What to Teach U8 Players (Game Components)

Techniques (skills):

Dribbling

With outside of the foot
Change of speed and direction

Receiving

Ground balls with inside, outside, and sole of foot
Bouncing balls with various body parts
Ball lifting and juggling

Passing

With toe, inside of foot and laces
Throw-ins

Shooting

With toe, inside of foot and laces

Tackling

Toe-poke

Catching

From self and from partner
Rolling, bouncing, and air balls

Psychology (mental and social):

- Working in pairs
- Sportsmanship
- Dealing with parental involvement
- “How to play” (social cooperation)
- Emotional management

Fitness (movement education):

- Introduce the idea of warm-up
- Agility
- Leaping
- Tumbling
- Eye/foot & eye/hand coordination

Tactics (decisions):

- Being exposed to all positions
- 1 v 1 attacking
- 1v1 defending
- 2v1 attacking
- Introduce the names of positions
- Shape (triangles)

Rules:

Review the kick off
Review the goal kick
Review hand ball
Review physical fouls (pushing, holding, striking, and tripping)
The corner kick
Direct kicks
Throw-ins

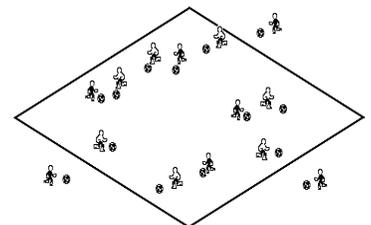
Sample Training Games/Sessions

General Information

- ✓ The training session should involve fun and imaginative game like activities.
- ✓ Light coaching on simple technique is appropriate (dribbling, passing and receiving)
- ✓ Small-sided directional games such as 1v1, 2v1, 2v2, 3v2, and 3v3 should be included as well.
- ✓ Training should always conclude with a 4v4 game without goalkeepers.
- ✓ The duration of the training session should be 60-75 minutes.

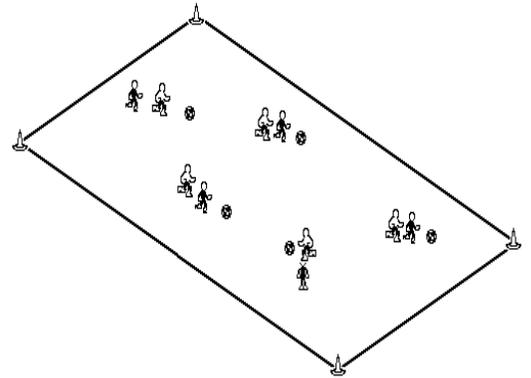
Some Recommended Games for U8 Players:

- 1) **Free Dribble**---Everyone with a ball, use inside, outside, and sole of the foot. Have players dribble with speed (outside of foot), change direction, and perform moves. Coach calls out moves or changes in direction and sets the pace as the manipulator of the session, kids carry the ball towards someone and try a move. *Version 2:* As players get comfortable, coach can walk around and put pressure on players as they are performing dribbling tasks. This adds fun and interaction.
- 2) **Knock Out**---In same space as previous activity, have players dribble balls while trying to knock other player's balls outside of the grid. Players can never leave their own ball. If their ball gets knocked out have them retrieve it quickly and get back into the game. (You may wish to have them perform a skills task before re-entering such as 10 toe touches or juggling 5



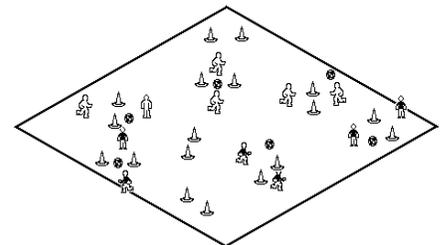
times).

- 3) **Shield-Steal**---Half of players in the group have a ball and half do not. If you do not have a ball you need to steal one from someone who does. If ball goes out of bounds, person who touched it last does not get possession. You can teach players the technical points of shielding as a group at start of activity. Show technique with body sideways, arm providing protection, ball on outside foot, knees bent, and turning as defender attacks, using feel to understand where defender is going. Fix technical shielding errors throughout this activity and make sure entire group knows how to properly shield.

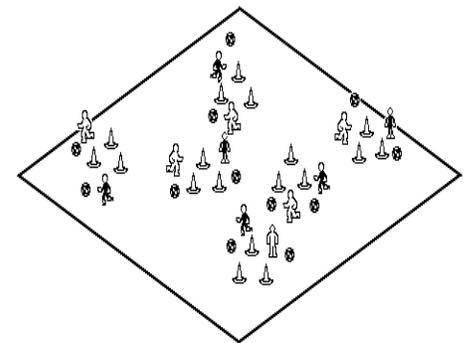


- 4) **Marbles**---Players are in pairs, each with a ball. This time instead of chasing each other, one player plays out his ball and the partner passes his own ball in an attempt to strike the ball his partner played out. Players should keep track of how many times they hit their partner's ball. *Version 2:* Once players understand this game, make it fast paced by having the players take turns at trying to hit each other's ball without ever stopping. If player 2 misses player 1's ball, then player 1 immediately runs to his own ball and tries to hit player 2's ball (player 2 does not get to touch his ball after missing player 1's ball). After player 1 has a chance, then player 2 immediately tries to hit player 1's ball right back. etc. etc. This game is continuous and players should keep score. Hint: If 2 balls are very close to each other a player should kick their ball hard at the other ball so when they hit it, it is more difficult for the other to hit their ball back.

- 5) **Gates Passing**---Players are paired up and must successfully pass the ball through the cones to their teammate to earn a point. Players try to accumulate as many points as possible in the time allotted. Have players pass only with their left foot or right foot, or the outside of their foot.

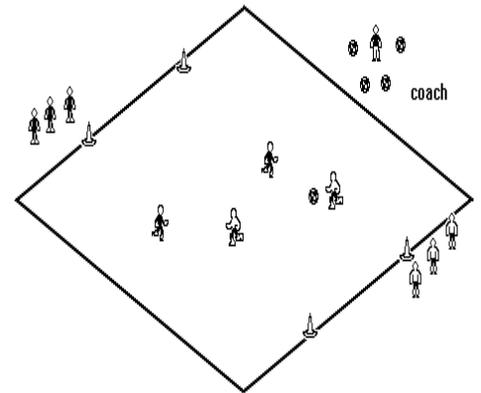


- 6) **Triangle Tag**---Set up cones in a triangle formation with each side of the triangle being roughly 1 yard long. Every triangle has a pair of players, each with a ball. Similar to the tag game, one player is being chased and one is "it". However this time the player who is "it" tags the player by kicking her ball and hitting the other player's ball or hitting the player below the knee. Players can dribble in either direction around the triangle and must stay close to their own triangle. Neither play can go through the triangle. *Version 2:* Allow the player being chased to go through the triangle. When in the triangle she is safe.

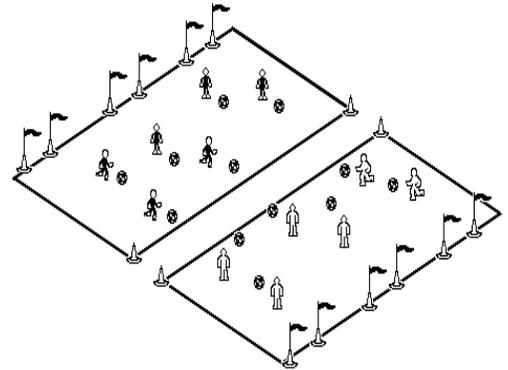


However, after going through triangle, player must go completely around triangle before she can go through triangle again. She cannot stop inside the triangle. *Version 3:* Allow pairs to move from triangle to triangle (incorporates speed dribbling and traffic). If two pairs are at the same triangle at the same time that is fine, but players still only compete with their partner. Note: To increase difficulty, do not count hitting a player below the knee as a tag.

- 7) **Get Outta Here**---Place two small (2 yard) goals at the end of a field 15 x 10 yards. Place half of team behind each goal and coach stands at halfway line with all balls. When coach plays out a ball the first two players run out and try to score on each other's goal. If the ball goes in the goal or out of bounds, the coach yells "get outta here" and plays in a new ball immediately for the next two players. *Version 2:* Coach can stop yelling "get outta here" after a while and see if players recognize when balls go out and are attentive. *Version 3:* Coach can vary service of ball. Sometimes play it to one player, sometimes toss the ball up in the air. *Version 4:* Have the first two or three players from each group come out each time a new ball is played and play 2 vs. 2 or 3 vs. 3.



- 8) **Clean Your Backyard**--- Break group into two teams and have each team stay only on their half of the field. Place a 6 yard buffer zone between halves that no one can enter or cross. Each player needs a ball. Place three small (2-3yd) goals at the far end of each side of the field. Have both teams shoot balls at other team's goals in an attempt to score through anyone of the small goals (below knee height). Players cannot cross the buffer zone or go into the other half. Balls get recycled naturally in the game.



This is a competition and teams need to keep score. Play 2 or 3 games and have teams re-strategize between each game. Teams can play defense though no hands. Only shots with laces count as goals.

- 9) **2 vs. 1 keep away**---In a grid 10x15 yds, three player's play 2 vs. 1 continuous keep away. Two attackers combine to keep the ball away from one defender. When the defender wins the ball, he or she immediately combines with the attacker he or she did not win the ball from and the attacker who lost the ball becomes the defender. Balls out of play are dribbled in or passed in.
- 10) **1 vs. 1 to Endlines**---In a space that is wider than long (15 x 20 yds) each player defends one endline and attacks the other. Players score by dribbling the ball in control over the opposing player's endline. *Version 2:* You can make this 2 vs. 2, 3 vs. 3 or 4 vs. 4.

***** Every practice should include a scrimmage*****

CASL - U10 COACHING MANUAL

As we move up the age ladder from the U8 level to the U10 level there are many differences we must attend to in order to provide an optimal experience for young players of this age. However, there are also many similarities. Just as in parenting, it is important to be consistent in coaching and we must make sure that we follow a progressive trend of development for young players. To this ends, we need to continue to focus on technique during our practices, as we did at the younger ages. Creating environments in which players get maximum repetitions of technical skills is key. Players at this age should still work on ball mastery and demonstrate growing familiarity and comfortability with a ball at their feet.

Typical Characteristics of U10 Players

- Attention span lengthens from U8--they start to show the ability to sequence thought and actions
- They start to think ahead and think “If this, then that”
- They are more inclined towards wanting to play soccer rather than being told to play
- Demonstrate increased self-responsibility – bringing a ball, water and all gear should now be their complete responsibility
- They start to recognize fundamental tactical concepts
- Children at this age begin to become aware of peer pressure
- Players greatly affiliate with their team or their coach—“I play for the Tigers” or “I play for coach Amy’s team”
- Players at this age are extremely rule bound—remember each rule you create is the equivalent of a bar in the prison in which you would like to live
- There is a wide continuum of maturity evident on most teams this is still a crucial age for technical skill development

U10 Age Group

The motivation to learn basic skills is very high at this age level. Children gradually begin to change from being self-centered to being self-critical and develop the need for group and/or team games. The game itself should be central to all skills training. Small-sided games continue to be the method of choice for this age group. This is an appropriate time to introduce some of the basic

Principles of play:

Attacking Principles

Penetration

Support

Mobility

Width

Depth (length)

Improvisation (deception, creativity)

Defensive Principles

Recovery (Immediate Chase)

Pressure

Cover

Balance

Compactness

Counter Attack

Role of Coach

The role of the coach in the U10 age group is to be a patient and motivating teacher. At this level, in addition to understanding technique, coaches should be able to provide environments conducive to problem solving (decision-making) by the players utilizing guided discovery methods.

The U10 Player Characteristics

Mental/Psychological (cognitive)

Lengthened attention span

Ability to sequence thought and actions; begin to think in advance of the ball...anticipate

Ability to remember, follow more complex instructions and solve higher-level problems (i.e. simple combination play)

Developing ability to focus and stay on task

More understanding of time and space relations

Physical (psychomotor)

Gain a tremendous amount of physical strength, endurance and power; this is related to body size and muscle mass

Motor performance includes a variety of motor tasks that require speed, balance, flexibility, explosive strength and muscular endurance; pace factor is developing quite well

Gross and small fine motor skills becoming refined

Children this age are in a linear growth mode (head to toe)

Height can approach 5 feet and weight can approach 80 pounds

Socially (psychosocial)

Self-concept and body image are important

Less Sensitive...but still dislike personal failure in front of peers

Begin to initiate play on their own...they want to play

Becoming more serious about their play
Inclined more toward small group and team activities
Peer group attachment and pressure becoming significant
Adults outside the family become influential (coach, teacher, etc.)
Gender differences becoming more apparent

What to Teach U10 Players (Game Components)

Techniques (skills):

Running with the Ball

At speed
Under Pressure

Passing

With outside of the foot
Heading

Instep Drive

Shooting
Crossing

Receiving Ground Balls with the Inside and Outside of Foot

Away from pressure
Past opponent

Receiving Air Balls

With the Instep (cushion) and sole, inside and outside of the foot (wedge)

Throw-In

Short and long distances

Moves in Dribbling

Half-turns
Step-overs

Introduce Heading

Juggling (alone and in small groups)
Feet in contact with the ground
Introduction to jumping

Tackling

Balance foot and contact foot (block tackle)

Goalkeeping (skills)

Ready Stance for Goalkeepers

Foot positioning
Body posture

“W” Grip

Positioning of thumbs
Fingers spread

How to Hold a Ball after a Save

Ball to chest
Forearm protection

Catching Shots at the Keeper

Body alignment path of ball

Punting

Distance and accuracy

Throwing

Bowling

Over-arm

Goal Kicks

Distance and accuracy

Psychology (mental and social):

- Working in groups of 3-6
- Staying focused for one entire half
- Sensitivity; learning how to win, lose or draw gracefully
- Sportsmanship
- How to handle parental involvement
- Communication; emotional management

Fitness (conditioning):

- Endurance
- Range of motion-flexibility
- Proper warm-up is now mandatory
- Introduce cool-down

Tactics (decisions):

- Roles of 1st attacker and defender
- Roles of 2nd attackers and defenders
- 2v1 attacking (simple combinations)
- Man-to-man defending
- Throw-ins to teammate's feet
- Introduction to the tactics of set plays/restarts (goal kicks, corner kicks, other free kicks)
- Introduction to setting up walls

Rules:

Review Fouls and Misconduct

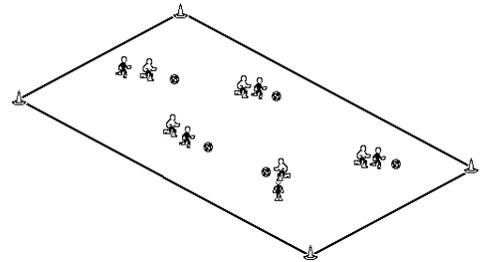
Training Games/ Sessions

- ✓ The training session should involve fun and imaginative game like activities, as well as technical and tactical repetitive activities.
- ✓ Coaching technical skills is very important at this age as well as light tactical concepts.
- ✓ The training session has a technical and/or tactical theme (focus). For example: dribbling technique, or passing and receiving, or combination play.
- ✓ Small-sided directional games such as 3v3, 4v3, 4v4, 5v4 and 5v5 should be included as well.
- ✓ Training should always conclude with a 6v6 game with goalkeepers if possible (5 field players and 1 goalkeeper on each team).
- ✓ The duration of the training session should be 75-90 minutes.

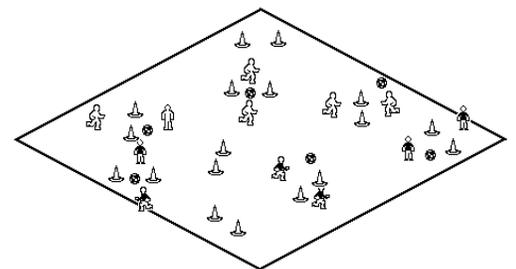
Some Recommended Games for U10 Players:

- 1) **Free Dribble**---Everyone with a ball, use inside, outside, and sole of the foot. Have players dribble with speed (outside of foot), change direction, and perform moves. Coach calls out moves or changes in direction and sets the pace as the manipulator of the session, kids carry the ball towards someone and try a move. *Version 2:* As players get comfortable, coach can walk around and put pressure on players as they are performing dribbling tasks. This adds fun and interaction. *Version 3:* Make the game a knockout game in which players try to knock each other's balls out of the grid while maintaining possession of their own. Note: You may wish to have them perform a skills task before re-entering such as 10 toe touches or juggling 5 times. You do not want players sitting out.

- 2) **Shield-Steal**---Half of players in the group have a ball and half do not. If you do not have a ball you need to steal one from someone who does. If ball goes out of bounds, person who touched it last does not get possession. You can teach players the technical points of shielding as a group at start of activity. Show technique with body sideways, arm providing protection, ball on outside foot, knees bent, turning as defender attacks, using feel to understand where defender is going. Fix technical shielding errors throughout this activity and make sure entire group knows how to properly shield.



- 3) **Gates Passing**---Same set up as previous game. However players are now paired up and must successfully pass the ball through the cones to their teammate to earn a point. Again, players try to accumulate as many points as possible in the time allotted. Similar to previous game, have them pass only with their left foot or right foot, or the outside of their foot.

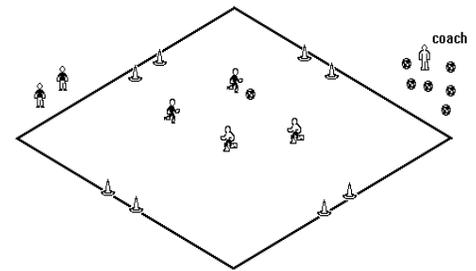


- 4) **1 vs. 1 To lines**---In a grid 10x10 yards, players line up on opposite sides. The first player in each line alternates attacking the player opposite them. When the attacker dribbles over the

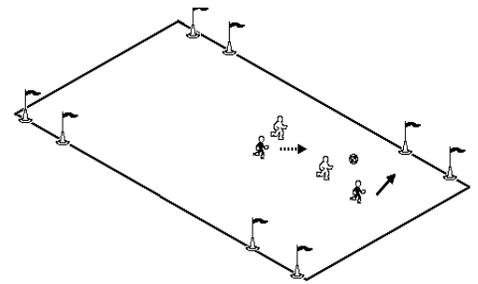
line they score a goal. If the defender wins the ball he or she can counter attack to the opposite line to also score a goal. The players switch to the opposite line if a goal is scored or the ball goes out of bounds. The coach rotates the lines so all players get to compete against each other. *Version 2:* Make the grid larger and make this a 2 vs. 2 or a 3 vs. 3 game.

- 5) **1 vs. 1 To Two Small Goals**---Same grids as above except now there is a three foot goal in the middle of each line. Attackers try to score by passing the ball through the goal. Defenders can counter attack to the opposite goal if they win the ball. Players switch sides after a goal or the ball goes out of bounds. The coach rotates the lines so all players get to compete against each other.

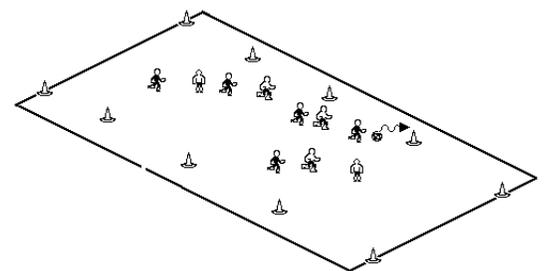
- 6) **2 vs. 2 to Four Cross Goals**---Teams defend one goal and have the opportunity to score on the other three, you must dribble through a goal to score a point. The goals are on the ends of a large cross in a square grid roughly 10yd X 10yd. Have one team of 2 on deck, they come on when a team gets scored on twice. Game is continuous, they must run on immediately.



- 7) **2 vs. 2 To Four Small Goals**---In a 15 X 15 yard grid with a small goal in each corner teams of two attack the two opposite goals and defends their two goals. The coach will set up as many grids as needed to accommodate the players. When the ball goes out of bounds it can be passed or dribbled in to play. The teams should be rotated every three minutes until all groups have played against each other. *Version 2:* 3 vs. 3 in a 20 X 25 yard grid. Teams should show a triangle shape in attack.



- 8) **4 vs. 4 Endzone Game**---Teams comprised of 4-6 players depending on numbers and space. To score you must pass the ball to a teammate into the opponent's end zone (created with discs). The player cannot go into the endzone until after the ball has been passed. Stress recognizing opportunities and timing of passes.



- 9) **Triangle Goal Game**---Make a triangle with three cones in the center of the field. The sides of the triangle each serve as a goal mouth so teams can shoot at three different goals. Place 2 goalies in the triangle and the 2 goalies must protect the three goal mouths. Two even teams play a normal soccer game, except they both can score on any of the three faces of the triangle for a point. The game is continuous and if a goalie catches the ball he just throws it out so the game continues. *Version 2:* Use two balls at the same time.

***** Every practice should include a scrimmage*****

CASL - U12 COACHING MANUAL

The period this age group is entering is often referred to as the dawn of tactics. Typically players of this age begin to understand the basic tactical situations of the game and are more aware of movement off the ball and the reasons for tactical choices. Problem-solving becomes systematic and these players tend to learn quickly. Children of this age typically are beginning to develop abstract awareness, so they can understand coaches when we talk about space and runs off of the ball. However, just because they understand these basic tactical concepts does not mean we should focus on these concepts entirely. Players are still developing technically at this age, especially as they go through growth spurts and awkward phases.

It is quite common to look out at a U12 field and see players that are physically the size of adults. Yet, other U12 players appear as if they could still be in the 3rd grade. These children are all growing at different rates and undergoing physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. The average age for the beginning of pubescence in girls is 10 years old with a range of 7 to 14; for boys it is age 12 with a range of 9 to 16. As coaches, we need to be sensitive to these changes and their social implications when coaching this age group. Some players may pick up skills quickly, where as others may struggle. However, it may be the case that this is simply the result of differences in maturation. In a year, the slower developer may surpass the player who developed earlier. For this reason we need to be patient and keep open minds about all players through these years. They are aware of their struggles more than anyone else as peer evaluation is omnipresent at these ages. When we see them struggling, it is important for us to help them and to keep the game fun.

Typical Characteristics of U12 Players

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

The U12 Age Group

The effect of the role model is very important at this stage of development. Hero worship, identification with successful teams/players and a hunger for imaginative skills typify the mentality of this age. Players at this age can be extremely self-critical. This is the “Golden Age of Learning” and the most important age for skill development. Demonstration is very important and the players learn best by doing. This is an appropriate time to introduce and teach basic

Principles of play:

Attacking Principles

Penetration

Support

Mobility

Width

Depth (length)

Improvisation (deception, creativity)

Defensive Principles

Recovery (Immediate Chase)

Pressure

Cover

Balance

Compactness

Counter Attack

Role of Coach

The role of the coach in the U12 age group is to be a patient and motivating teacher. At this level, in addition to understanding technique, coaches should be able to provide environments conducive to problem solving (decision-making) by the players utilizing guided discovery methods. Specifically, individual and small group tactics should be the focus of the training sessions.

The U12 Player Characteristics

Mental/Psychological (cognitive)

Fertile period for learning...eager to learn

Ability to sequence thought and actions and perform more complex tasks...can simultaneously run, strike a ball and think!

Ability to use more abstract thought to meet the demands of the game (i.e. well-timed overlapping run)

Use their teammates to solve game problems

Training must replicate the game

Physical (psychomotor)

Continue to gain a tremendous amount of physical strength, endurance and power

Flexibility training is key to prevention of injury

More confident with physical technical demands above their waist (receiving with the chest; heading the ball)

Goalkeeping skills are becoming refined

Children continue to be in growth spurts
Overuse injuries occur when age appropriate development is ignored
Height can be well over 5 feet and weight can be 100+ pounds
The age range for the beginning of pubescence in girls is 7-14, with the average being 10 years of age
The age range for the beginning of pubescence in boys is 9-16, with the average being 12 years of age

Socially (psychosocial)

Gender differences are more apparent
Whether a child enters puberty early or late has important psychological implications regarding relationships with their teammates
Spend more time with their friends and less time with their parents
Children tend to conform to peer pressure
Developing a conscience, morality and a scale of values

What to Teach U12 Players (Game Components)

Technique (skills):

Dribbling

To beat an opponent (penetration)
To possess (shielding)

Feints with the Ball

Subtle body movements to unbalance the opponent

Receiving Air Balls with Feet, Thighs and Chest

Away from pressure
To beat an opponent

Heading to Score Goals and for Clearances

Accuracy (direction)
Timing

Finishing

Chipping
Bending
Toe
Introduce Half Volley and Volley Shooting

Passing

Deceptive use of foot surface (toe, outside of foot, heel)

Crossing to Near Post and Penalty Spot Space

Driven
Flighted

Introduce Slide Tackle

Timing
Poke Tackle

Goalkeeping (skills)

Footwork for Goalkeepers

Post to post (lateral)
Forward

Throwing

Side-arm
Round-house
Baseball

Kicking

Drop-kick

Diving

Step and Collapse (low)
Step and slide onto forearms and thighs (forward)

Angle Play

Fast footwork
Body shape

Introduce Parrying and Boxing

One hand
Two hands

Psychology (mental and social):

- Teamwork
- Confidence
- Desire
- Mental rehearsal
- Intrinsic motivation
- Handling distress
- How to learn from each match
- Sportsmanship
- Parental involvement
- Emotional management

Fitness (conditioning):

- Speed
- Strength
- Aerobic exercise
- Proper warm-up and cool-down now mandatory

Tactics (decisions):

- 2 v 1 through 3 v 3 attacking & defending
- Introduce the principles of play
- Verbal & visual communication for all players
- Half-time analysis
- Beginning to identify potential roles for players (goalkeeper, defender, midfielder &/or forward)
- Commanding the goalmouth by the goalkeeper
- Near post play by the goalkeeper
- Saving penalty kicks
- Simple set play patterns
- Speed in setting up walls

Rules:

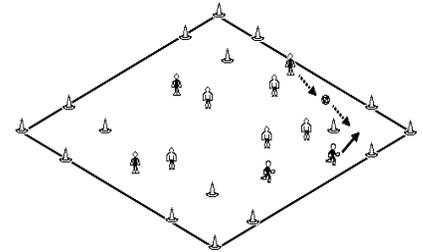
Offside's

Training Games/ Session

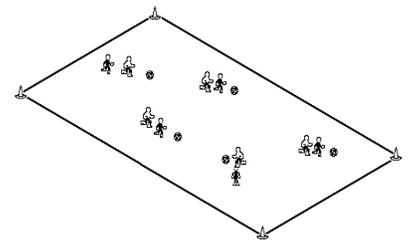
- ✓ The training session should involve fun and imaginative game like activities, as well as technical and tactical repetitive activities.
- ✓ The training session has a technical and/or tactical theme (focus). For example: dribbling technique and/or 1v1 decision making.
- ✓ Introduction to functional training (position specific) is appropriate.
- ✓ Small-sided directional games such as: 4v4, 5v4, 5v5, 6v5, 6v6 and 7v6 should be included as well.
- ✓ Training should always conclude with an 8v8 game with goalkeepers if possible. (7 field players and 1 goalkeeper on each team) The duration of the training session should be 90 minutes.

Some Recommended Games for U12 Players:

- 1) Four Square Passing---Form a grid 35x35 with squares roughly 4 yards across in each corner. Two teams of 4 to 6 players try to score by passing the ball to a teammate who makes a run into one of the four squares. Players in the squares cannot be defended against they can pass or dribble the ball out. Balls out of play can be passed or dribbled back into play.



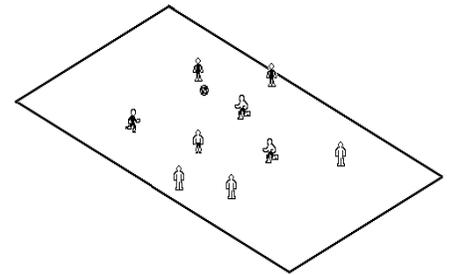
- 2) Shield-Steal---Half of players in the group have a ball and half do not. If you do not have a ball you need to steal one from someone who does. If ball goes out of bounds, person who touched it last does not get possession. You can teach players the technical points of shielding as a group at start of activity. Show technique with body sideways, arm providing protection, ball on outside foot, knees bent, turning as defender attacks, using feel to understand where defender is going. Fix technical shielding errors throughout this activity and make sure entire group knows how to properly shield. *Version 2:* make this competitive by breaking the group into two teams and seeing which team has more balls at the end of the time.



- 3) Colors-Warm Up---Half of the players in red pennies, half in blue. Teams playing together in the same space combine in the passing sequence blue-blue-red-red-blue-blue-red-red etc. etc. Ball can never stop, players can never stop moving, and ball cannot leave area of play. Coach can limit touch-count, mandate which foot to pass with or which side of foot to pass with as sees fit. When players can do first sequence adequately and without frequent errors change the sequence to blue-blue-blue-red-red-red-blue-blue-blue etc. etc. Stress

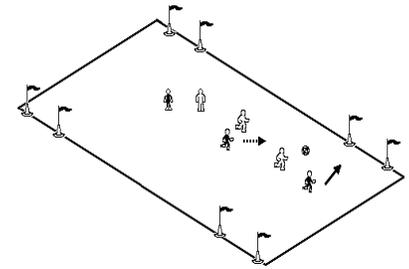
communication and technical passing points throughout. Make this activity competitive by counting errors and setting goals by lowering allowed errors.

- 4) 2v2+2 or 3v3+3---Three distinct teams in colors (red, green, white), one team starts as defenders and the other 2 teams play together to keep the ball away from the defense (so it is actually 4v2 or 6v3). When the ball is taken by the defense, the color (two/three players) they stole it from becomes the new defenders. Players must pay close attention to who the defenders are, to score the teams in possession must make 6 passes before losing possession. If they do this, both teams on offense receive 1 point.



- 5) 2v2 with 2+2---In a grid 15x15 yards, each team has two players in the grid and two on the outside, on opposite sides from each other. The teams score by either making six passes (with teammate inside the grid or support players) or by executing a 1-2 (wall pass) with a support player. After 3 minutes switch inside and outside players.
- 6) 5 Goal Game---4v4+2 in 35x40 yard grid. Five 2-yard goals are spread out throughout the grid. The plus 2 players are always on the attacking team. The teams score by passing through any of the goals to a teammate. Must receive with inside of foot, then outside, weak foot inside/outside are different expectations that can be put on the players. First team to 10 points wins. Players need to be able to see where the open goals are, and receive with a “picture” of what is around them. With this in mind, if the players are advanced enough, the player receiving through the goal must play 1 touch. Coach could require receiving player to perform a feint before touching ball.

- 7) 3v3 or 4v 4 To Four Small Goals---In a 30x30 yard grid, two teams attack the two opposite goals and defend their two goals. The goals are three feet wide and setup near each corner. With three attackers the players now have the 1st attacker (ball) and 2nd attackers (support) and a triangle shape in attack, looking to change the point of attack away from pressure. The defending team now has the 1st defender (pressure), 2nd defender (cover), and 3rd defender (balance). This game can be played to lines, goals with keepers, four squares or targets.



- 8) Bread and Butter---Typical 4 vs. 4 but with an additional 4 players who stand on outside of field and can be used by either team as outlets (with only 2 touches). If a team gets scored upon, they become the team on the outside and the outside team plays on the field. Use approximately a 20x25 yard area. Stress correct technique, receiving sideways on, and facing where they wish to play. May restrict the players to 2/3 touch to force quicker decisions, and better body position before the ball arrives. Keep score and make the game competitive.

- 9) 6v6 team touch---Play a normal 6v6 game except for the fact that every player on a team must touch the ball before their team can score. This forces players to show for the ball, to communicate, and to spread out the field. Version 2: If players are advanced, you can enforce a 3 or 2 touch limit on players.

10) 8v8 dual sided goal---Using a coerver goal or setting up a goal in which the goalie must protect both sides of the goal, play 8 against 8. Both teams can score from either side of the goal. If a goalie makes a save she just punts the ball out. Teams must learn to change the point of attack and must give support to each other and communicate constantly. This will help teach teams to make the field big when on offense and to try to compact the field on defense.

***** Every practice should include a scrimmage*****

For additional Practice Plans, weekly sessions, and coaching tips please visit the
“**Coaching Resources**” page of the Birmingham United website.

www.birminghamunited.com