



## **Player Development Age Group Guidelines**

Children do not learn in the same way as adults, especially when the learning process involves both intellectual *and* physical activity. Age conditions the way a person perceives and interacts with the world and with others. In any learning process, age is the key component in selecting appropriate content and methodology. Soccer is no different. For this reason we must not train 6 year old players the same way as 13 years old players. Training sessions must be adapted to the age of the players. Taking into consideration the characteristics of human and player development as highlight, we have structured the curriculum into four age groups.

### **Initial Stage U6-U8 Development Guidelines**

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Coaches working within this stage are the influential figures that will enhance and create a players love for soccer and ensure the retention of soccer players post little kickers and beyond.

The player's world usually revolves around their home and their everyday surrounding. All activities should be fun, challenging and competitive with the added boundaries of no hands, tripping, pushing or hitting others. Steer clear of lines, laps and lectures and keep language clear, simple and understandable. Creativity is needed to engage each player's imagination and concentration throughout practice. Use practice names in everyday to home life i.e. cartoons, movies, games and characters to relate soccer to. At this stage, children are very egocentric and are especially concerned with them. A player at this age hates to share their toys and the same is true of their soccer ball, which they are unwilling to relinquish.

#### **Ideal Conditions for Development:**

- 4v4 without goalkeepers
- 20 to 30 yd long X 15 to 20 yd wide
- Size 3 ball

#### **Practice Structure:**

Within our practices we can use the different methods of practice design. Specifically within this age group flexibility and adaptability is key, to ensure a constructive and effective practice.

- 1 Session per week for K and Grade 1. 2 sessions per week for Grade 2 (practice & game)
- 30mins practice time - Consisting of fun, creative 'game' practices. Try to avoid the **drill** based practice and terminology that players will not understand to allow for the players learning development.
- 30-45mins Scrimmage (Grade 2 Saturday Games)

**Practice Guidelines and Content:**

- **Outcomes are achieved** by giving clear and simple instructions to players throughout the sessions.
- **Creative repetition of technique** is an excellent method to use. Players will learn from repeating technical challenges. As our practice will encourage the creative development of players it is really important for repetition to take place for learning to happen. Higher goals can be set throughout repetitive actions in order to avoid boredom.
- **Fact finding** tasks are really important and useful tool to use. Ask the players to 'discover' different aspects of the game. This way they will be at the center of the learning process and feel a sense of success and build self-esteem.
- **Guided discovery** is similar to fact finding, but we actually provide the players with a problem to solve. This will ensure ALL players within the group are catered for and challenged.
- **Maximum ball contact** during the fundamental stages of development is vital. Give players as much of this as you can, through fun games and challenges, this is what players want!
- **Multi-directional practice** is a great tool to develop tactics through technical development. Challenge players technically by providing large target goals and zones to reach in different areas of the field. Soccer is a game of un-limited decisions if we can challenge players to be comfortable in all directions it will be evident in their **long-term** development.

**Development Criteria of a U6-U8 Player:**

<b>Technical</b>	<b>Tactical</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planting the seed for passing, receiving and dribbling</li> <li>• Dribble with all sides of both feet</li> <li>• Stop, start and turn</li> <li>• Dribble out of trouble</li> <li>• Dribble past someone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spatial awareness</li> <li>• Multi directional movement</li> <li>• Playing at different speeds</li> <li>• Understanding the direction of play</li> </ul>
<b>Physical</b>	<b>Psychological</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heating and cooling systems are less efficient than adults</li> <li>• Development for boys and girls is quite similar</li> <li>• Constantly in motion, but with no sense of pace, typically have 2 speeds -- extremely fast and stopped</li> <li>• They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly</li> <li>• Physical coordination and balance limited</li> <li>• Eye-hand and eye-foot coordination is not developed</li> <li>• Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short attention span, can attend to only one problem at a time</li> <li>• May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated</li> <li>• May or may not understand or remember – What lines mean on a field, what team they are on, and what goal they are going for.</li> <li>• Easily bruised psychologically</li> <li>• Need generous praise and to play without pressure</li> <li>• Needs to find success to build confidence</li> <li>• Very individually oriented (me, mine, my)</li> <li>• Active imaginations</li> </ul>

## Typical U6-U8 Training Session

When designing a training sessions for this age it is important that they do not exceed approximately 60 minutes. Keeping the training sessions shorter will keep the players engaged.

Here is the basic progression for a typical session:

- Warm-Up (Approx. 15 Minutes) - The warm-up should include a lot of movement education and fun activities. You should plan on having 1 - 1 exercises to keep the players focused. The players will have a short attention span so it is key to have different games to keep them interested. Start to introduce partner activities.
- Main Activities (Approx. 25 Minutes) - A mix of individual and partner activities. Add more maze-type games to encourage decision making.
- Final Game (Approx. 20 Minutes) - The final game should be 5v5 to small goals, flags, or cone goals with no goalkeepers. Every session should end with the players having the opportunity to play the game. This is why they are there! If needed, you can play bigger numbers or play with multiple fields so that all the players can participate.

Here are a few things to consider when you are designing a training session:

- Are the activities fun?
- Are the activities organized?
- Are the players involved in the activities?
- Are creativity and decision making being used?
- Are the spaces used appropriate?
- Is the coach's feedback appropriate?
- Is the coach guiding or controlling the players?
- Are there implications for the game?