



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 highlighted, we have structured the curriculum into four age groups.

Advanced Stage – U14 - U18 Development Guidelines

The players are now just leaving the FUNdamental stage of their development and entering their 'adolescent' years. This stage of development is now where the coach is having to deal with a high amount of psychological factors as well as enhanced tactical development than in years previous. The players now will start to absorb more and understand a more tactical approach to the game with the technical development becoming more of *technical maintenance*.

The foundation of practice now is now built on small sided game practice, understanding decision making in attack and defense, learning to create and play overloaded and the principles of attacking and defending as a unit. Now the players also will have the knowledge base and use principles from other sports in soccer, this is important to emphasize as the players can directly relate to this and we can use it as a tool.

As the players develop technically it is important that as coaches we challenge decisions in a high game spectrum practice. The highest point on the game spectrum would be playing the game itself, with the other end of the spectrum being the 'line drill' where decisions are almost made for the players. Both are a necessity as we come away from the foundation ages of soccer development and into more results and performance driven play.

Ideal Conditions for Development:

- 11v11
- Full-size field and goal
- Size 5 soccer ball
- Longer practices (but not exceeding a **game** length) i.e. 90 mins max
- Formation to support your players

Practice Structure:

Within our practices we can use the different methods of practice design (as described in the Generic Coaching Guidelines). Players will like to be challenged and play a high amount of game related practices.

- ***The use of 'line drills'*** in Practice will **maintain** the technical development of players. Ideally this would be short distance and **highly repetitive**.
- **The use of unopposed and random practices** where players have to make decisions will be excellent to challenge technical development as well as decision making
- **Multi directional practices** will be beneficial to support the player's decision making development. Use and play games with 1,2,3,4 targets or goals
- **Be patient and demo.** Players will still need to have all learning needs catered for. Using tools and methods to cater for **kinesthetic** (performing tasks)/**auditory** (clear and concise information)/**visual** (demonstrations of tasks) learners.
- **Progressive and avoiding boredom.** More time can be spent explaining **how, when's and why's** of a task to your group, but it is still important to allow the players the time to practice the tasks.
- **Vary the practice type** and use the influence of different sports. I.e. use a warm up of Handball or a basketball related practice.
- **Use conditioned games** to develop players all round game. Use conditions that don't limit the decisions players can make but promote development such as "can you pass the ball in all directions"
- **Group management** is important to be fully effective as a coach. Challenge the more physically developed players and lesser players respectively. Players will at this age are now starting to develop into young adults as well as some players being late developers within a group. Players will now be starting to test and push you as coaches in group management.
- **Know what makes you team tick!**
- **Encourage** your players to '**watch**' the game of soccer and develop a more all-round understanding of the game

Practice Guidelines and Content:

- **Outcomes we want to achieve** need to be set out so that we can inform the players prior to the session happening, to give clear learning objectives
- **The structure of the session** should be varied week to week. Try to start with a scrimmage some weeks and a group-lead structured warm-up other weeks. It is vital that players are becoming accustomed to **dynamic stretching** and increasing the flexibility in their muscles to reduce the chance of injury
- **Maintenance of technique** is essential. Players need to continue to develop technique in practice.

- **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 targets and zones to reach in different areas of the field to reach. 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.
- **Challenge every player!** It is important to feed every players motivation to practice and you can do this by constant challenges to your players. Through individual technical challenges to the level of competition. players may be in an overloaded situation (in or out of favor) 1v1 2v2 2v1 3v1 etc. putting players in situations will increase their soccer knowledge
- **Physical development** will affect the player's ability to perform more challenging techniques such as longer passing. The speed in which they can perform techniques will improve as they become more accustomed to their bodies and have a sense of speed in soccer.
- **Growth spurts** in players will now start to appear. It is really important that we allow for this and that we understand it will have a **short-term** effect on their development
- **Developing tactical** awareness through exposing the players to different games where they have a team in balance and out of balance i.e. 6v6 or a 9v6
- **Goal setting** for players is an inspiration to practice. They need physical targets to achieve i.e. scoring a goal, number of consecutive passes.
- **Small sided game practice** is still of huge benefit. Even though the game size is 11v11, to be fully effective in the support of technical development the players still need the **maximum** opportunity to practice techniques.
- **Understand the importance of a goalkeeper** as they are an essential part of a team. The goalkeepers are to develop as well as players technically and tactically as the game is more demanding on goalkeepers to be able to use their feet effectively.

Development Criteria of a U14-U18 player:

Technical	Tactical
<p>Ball Mastery – Players are to be able to ‘master’ ball in tight areas during a game to delay and possess the ball for the team</p> <p>Dribbling – Dribbling to exploit space behind defenders and understanding when and why to dribble and pass</p> <p>Turning – Using body to shield the ball and changing direction to change the point of attack.</p> <p>Passing – now the players should have a library of different passes now we can emphasize precise passing like through-balls and passes to penetrate and exploit spaces.</p> <p>Receiving – Players can control the ball comfortably under high pressure and delay the defenders. Also try to develop receiving the ball aerially and on the ground as the ball is moving at speed.</p> <p>Shooting – Attacking crosses and being able to finish and shoot with accuracy and controlled power with feet and head.</p>	<p>Attacking – Understanding creating space as a team, individual and to exploiting space Understand when and why we keep possession of the soccer ball Dictating the tempo of play Encourage creativity, movement and the inter-changing of positions in attack through overlaps, under laps and supporting runs Understanding the point of attack can be changed through all players</p> <p>Defending – Understand the concept of pressure, cover, support and balance when defending as a unit. Knowing when to deploy high pressure on a team and when to allow opposition to come forward Learning how to stay compact when defending Communication between players and organizations Learning how to defend and deny space Tackling techniques and timing</p> <p>Team – Developing defensive and attacking team tactics with and without the ball Players and coaches can develop set-pieces and understand roles in the team Learning to play in and out of balance</p>
Physical	Psychological
<p>Muscles are developing and growth spurts are evident, important that players develop flexibility Cardio vascular systems developed A variety of different physical endurance of players will be evident Players can develop strength through shielding the ball exercise as opposed to ‘push ups’</p>	<p>Players will now have a desire to compete and motivated to practice The understanding of growth differences between males and females is of high priority Allow for inconsistent performances and support players through these stages of development Reference sporting icons in the current professional game to inspire players Ensure there is the balance of competitiveness against enjoyment is correct for your team’s desires.</p>

Typical U14-U18 Training Session

- When designing a training sessions for this age it is important that they do not exceed approximately 90 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 partner and small group activities. This is also the time to introduce some dynamic stretching.

- Main Activities (Approx. 30 Minutes) - Work in small group activities. Start to work in groups of 8 to 10 players. Teaching the game in functional groups will allow players to see how the different lines (Defenders, Midfielders, Forwards) work together. Continue playing directional games to lines, targets, or zones.

- Final Game (Approx. 35 Minutes) - Every session should end with the players having the opportunity to play the game. This is why they are there! It's recommended you plan a range of scrimmage games to cater for the #s at practice. For example to promote technical refinement play 3v3 or 4v4 games on multiple fields so players get lots of touches on the ball. To help with tactical understanding also use 8v8 games or full sided versions and shorten the field if needed.

- Cool Down (Approx. 10 Minutes) - Have the players involved in a low impact game to help the muscles recover. Incorporate static stretching.

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?