



COACHES BINDER

New Fairfield Soccer Club offers these ideas about player development to youth coaches to help you to identify age-appropriate aims. For each two-year age grouping, we have proposed guidelines in the major elements of the game: technical, tactical, psychological or mental, and physical or fitness-related. We have also suggested some ideas about the practice environment and listed some resources for coaches of each age grouping.

Our purpose is to suggest a framework for the coherent introduction of soccer's techniques, tactical ideas and fitness components. These ideas and guidelines, this framework and these suggestions are directed to you coaches to help plan a helpful progression of practice plans and intentions for your season.

Please remember:

These ideas are general. Every child is different: each has her or his own physique, mentality, motivation, cultural situation, etc. Some eight year olds are athletic and have played soccer for three years and love to compete; other eight year olds are not so athletic, are just beginning soccer, and are playing because their best friends are. Kids learn and develop and grow at different rates! There are precocious kids, late bloomers, erratic learners, etc.

Patience is vital. One way to consider this outline is as a source of simple, seasonal objectives. These objectives should always be considered in relation to long-term outcomes and the players' needs - NOT the coaches' needs.

These ideas are not intended as final objectives or "end results". Player development is a long, never-ending process to be undertaken patiently by both players and coaches. Also, there are many intangible qualities which lead to success on the soccer field which are not discussed here: imagination, fantasy, tenacity, concentration and others. An abundance of any of these intangibles - persistence, fighting power, creative flair, for example - can enhance a player's technique or tactical sense or compensate for deficiencies in these.

We urge you to avoid trying to "get ahead" of the ideas in this framework, but not to avoid reviewing and consolidating. Hesitate to go ahead, but don't hesitate to go back!

It is impossible to quantify the elements of soccer which are discussed here. These guidelines are intended to express in a general, global way what it is reasonable to expose players to at each age. Some players may exceed expectations; others may struggle to reach them. For example, one nine year old may receive a ball during a scrimmage, see that s/he can play it ahead, and turn up the field, balanced and with fluid technique. Another nine year old may have no idea about what to do when the ball arrives, be tense and rather clumsy as s/he tries to control it, and be indifferent to your suggestions when you approach them.

Few players will "master" all these elements at a given age, and their performance will almost certainly be inconsistent as they grow through pre-adolescence and puberty. Some players are more "technical", some more insightful and intuitive, some more physically gifted. A coach's challenge is to help each player achieve the most enjoyment and fulfillment at each age.

There are some parts of soccer involvement which are universal and consistent. All players of any age should reflect them: respect for the game, teammates, opponents, coaches, etc.; punctuality, responsibility, sporting attitudes.

We do not discuss coaching methods here: the "how" of organizing and inspiring and transmitting knowledge is the topic of another discussion altogether.

We also do not discuss goalkeeping here. We feel that all kids should be exposed to the rudiments of goalkeeping, that everyone should be encouraged to play in the goal occasionally until they are 12 (at least in practice!), and that no one should specialize as a keeper until s/he is at least 12. Goalkeepers now must be considered "field players" who need well-rounded skills. Goalkeeping is so specialized that it calls for its own set of guidelines.

Ultimately, all players must learn how to attack and how to defend by themselves, as part of a group, and as part of a team. A reasonable aim for players at each age level, in relation to the techniques and tactical issues listed here:

- Technically - solid, stable skills, under pressure and at speed.
- Tactically - recognition and understanding of situations and decisive action or reaction in response to them.

There is an implicit challenge to all of us coaches here! We must all commit ourselves to learning as much as we can about children, technique, tactics, and physical preparation.

In considering these ideas, coaches should not lose sight of the most important element of youth soccer development: FUN!

Stages of Development for Players

NFSC has adopted a new way of thinking about player development. We don't intend to suggest anything radical in terms of substance - just a new way of thinking about the organization of youth player development. This is based on our conviction that practice activities and objectives and game forms for youth players ought to be age-appropriate.

We hope that this "new" organization will help the coaches of New Fairfield Youth Soccer to create a more coherent, accurate system of training for their players. NFSC youth development is divided into 3 stages:

- Stage One: Ages 5, 6, 7 and 8
- Stage Two: Ages 9, 10, 11 and 12
- Stage Three: Ages 13 and 14

Of course, every child is different. What is true for one ten year old may not be true for another, and there is a big difference between six year olds and eight year olds. But in this situation, we are content to speak in generalities. Here are some of our ideas about each stage:

Stage One (5-8 years)

Stage One is the introductory, exploratory stage for kids. They are meeting the ball and the game and the practice environment, literally "feeling their way" into soccer. The most important considerations for practice and games are freedom to move, positive encouragement, trial and error and fantasy.

Practices should be fun: stimulating, low-key, child-like, dynamic events. The central elements of every practice should be the natural curiosity and eagerness of the child... and the ball. The emphasis at practice: touching the ball, becoming "friends with the ball", understanding how it moves and acts.

There should be virtually no talk about tactics and no fitness work. No laps or running without a ball, calisthenics, etc. There may be goalkeepers, but no goalkeeper training!

Stage Two (9-12 years)

For Stage Two, the primary emphasis, as always, is on fun and dynamic movement. This is the time when technical development - mastery of the ball and the acquisition of skill - is vital.

Repetition of "soccer movements," small sided games, trial and error, and a patient, coherent introduction of basic tactical ideas should form the basis of practices.

Refining skills, absorbing soccer's truths and solving soccer's innumerable little problems are most important now. Still, we should not be concerned with strength training, isolated fitness work or elaborate tactical planning.

Towards the end of this stage, 11-a-side play comes in, as do heading and goalkeeper practice. It's all about repetition and patient advancement as the kids seek to become all-round "ball players".

Stage Three (13-14 years)

In Stage Three, technical progress is still most important. But now, increasingly, the players have to learn to apply their skills, under pressure and quickly. Everything is still "with the ball", but now soccer begins to become a little more abstract. There are more tactical lessons, more concentration on the organization of players on the field. Strength and agility training as well as isolated fitness work must be incorporated.

But even now, the critical elements are fun, dynamic movements and freedom of expression. The players are investigating all the positions, the different "climates" around the field and the endless tactical options of this free-flowing game.

TRAINING GUIDELINES

The following are the guidelines that the professional trainers will follow during training sessions. However if specific training (Striker, Goalie, etc.) is needed, let the trainer know.

	U6	U8	U9	U10
Technical	Ball familiarity	Dribbling with changes of direction	Shielding the soccer ball	Front foot dribbling to commit defender
	Dribbling with both feet	Dribbling to avoid defenders	Dribbling to beat a defender	1st time passes
	Dribbling with different parts of the feet	Inside foot pass with both feet	Basic skills to beat a defender	Outside of the foot pass
	Push pass	Shooting for accuracy	Inside and outside foot pass	Finishing breakaways
	Turning the soccer ball	Beginner specific turns	Weight and accuracy of passes	Shooting on the dribble
		Receiving the ball with instep both feet	Shooting across goal	Advanced specific turns
		Ball juggling	Running with the ball in open space	Defensive heading
			1v1 defensive stance from the front	Offensive heading
			Receiving the ball into space	Poke challenge
			Ball juggling	Receiving the ball to space behind
				Ball juggling
				Give and Go's
	Physical		Linear running	Linear running
		Running backwards & sideways	Changing pace	Accelerate and decelerate under control
		Changing direction	Changing direction	Running sideways crossing feet
		Making curved runs	Acceleration	Running backwards
		Changing pace	Balance and co-ordination	Balance and co-ordination
		Balance and co-ordination		
Tactical		Direction of play forwards and sideways	Playing in different positions	Passing, moving and support play
			Rotation	Basic rotation of position
				Exploiting and recognizing 1v1 situations
Psychological		Enjoyment	Enjoyment	Responsibility taking
		Confidence building	Confidence building	Overcoming disappointment
		Imagination	Imagination	Confidence

	U11	U12	U13	U14
Technical	Advanced skills to beat a defender	Shooting a ball going across player	Driven shot	Beating defenders at full speed
	Dribbling at full speed using both feet	Driven pass 20 yards	Shooting on goal with a bent shot	Intercept passes and challenge 1st touch
	Disguised passing	Sideways laces volley	Shooting on goal with lofted shot	Aerial control into space or team mates
	Shooting a ball coming at player	Lofted pass 20 yards	Changing speed whilst running with the ball	Weight and accuracy of passes under full pressure
	Inside of the foot volley	Bent pass 20 yards	Aerial control with laces and instep	Checking in to receive a pass
	Laces volley	Turning to beat defenders	Different types of cross	Driven passes
	Running with the ball at full speed	Attacking and defending crosses with headers	Quick passing off front foot and 1-2's	Receiving the ball from distance
	Cushioning headers at angles	Role of 1st and 2nd defender	Volley for distance from front and side	1/2 volleys for control or distance
	Block tackle	Defend from behind	1/2 volley for passing or shot	3rd man runs
	Ball juggling	Receiving the ball to shoot on goal		Combination play under pressure
	Receiving the ball with laces and outside of foot	Aerial control with thighs		
	Overlapping runs	Aerial control with chest		
Physical	Jockeying	Getting-up and sprinting	Checking and sprinting	Neutral training/fast feet
	Changing pace and direction	Sprinting, decelerating and leaping	Sprint-decelerate-check	Hollow sprints (jog – sprint – jog)
	Run and leap, return to run	Running sideways toe-to-toe	Sprint-decelerate-check-sprint	High knee running
	Running, twisting and turning	Turn and sprint	Leap-sprint-leap	Dynamic stretches
	Balance and co-ordination	Sprint and turn	Running bends	Anaerobic (8-10 sec) sprints and turns
Tactical	Exploiting and recognizing 1v1 situations	Support play, angles and distances	Combination play	Switching play
	When to remain compact, when to spread-out	Spreading-out & creating space	Width in attack and depth in defense	Attacking & defending prime target areas
	Defending in 1v1 situations	Defending as a team		Pressurizing
		Matching-up on the field of play		
Psychological	Team building and co-operation	Enjoyment, stimulation and co-operation	Communication skills	Making sacrifices
	Enjoyment and enthusiasm	Beginnings of tactical awareness	Concentration and mental toughness	Mental toughness and responsibility taking
	Creativity	Understanding and responsibility taking	Tactical awareness	Tactical appreciation
		Flair and creativity	Instinctive play	

NFSC MISSION AND COACHING PHILOSOPHY

NFSC MISSION

- To provide children with an emotionally healthy and physically challenging atmosphere of good sportsmanship and athletic activity through the game of soccer.
- To provide an activity where children have the opportunity to play regardless of athletic skills or family income.
- To provide a healthy competitive atmosphere while teaching respect for others, fair play, humbleness in winning, and stature in defeat.
- To provide a rewarding and enriching experience for all those adult volunteers who make it work.
- To teach teamwork and cooperation.

NFSC COACHING PHILOSOPHY

1. Have fun playing soccer
 - Practices and games should be fun – when the game stops being fun, players tend not to play as well and both coaches and players may get frustrated and eventually leave the game.
2. Focus should be on long-term player development, not winning games
 - Coaches' ultimate focus should be on long-term player and child development and not short-term goals. Coaches should use age appropriate games and activities during practices.
 - Ideally, all players should play for equal durations during games. At the very least, each player should play at least half the duration of every game.
 - Encourage and let all players play all positions, i.e. don't just play your best player as a forward so that your team can score more goals. This will help with their overall development as soccer players.
3. Emphasize teamwork, respect and fair play
 - In addition to achieving a sense of accomplishment through mastery of skills, soccer is a great way for young players to learn good values that they can carry in other aspects of their lives:
 - Friendship and the value of being part of a team.
 - Respecting coaches, teammates, opponents, and the referee.
 - Sportsmanship and fair play.

REMEMBER THAT AS A COACH, YOU ARE A ROLE MODEL FOR THESE IMPRESSIONABLE YOUNG PLAYERS AND THEY TAKE NOTE OF YOUR BEHAVIOR AND ACTIONS.

NFSC COACHES CODE OF CONDUCT

- Always keep the best interest and well being of the children as the highest priority.
- In both victory and defeat, the behavior of the coach shall model grace, dignity and composure.
- Treat referees with respect. Coaches must adhere to the Zero Tolerance Policy
- Stress fair play and good sportsmanship whether winning or losing. During the game, you are responsible for the sportsmanship of your players. If one of your players is disrespectful, irresponsible or overly aggressive, take the player out of the game at least long enough for him/her to calm down.
- During the game, you are also responsible for the conduct of the parents of your players. It is imperative to explain acceptable player and parent behavior in a preseason meeting. Encourage them to applaud and cheer for good plays by either team. Discourage them (and you may need to be forceful and direct) from yelling at the players and the referee.
- Don't run up the score. Getting defeated by a large margin can really demoralize young soccer players, so please use your best judgment when teams are mismatched. There are ways to keep the score reasonable (e.g. move stronger players to goalie, defense or sidelines, team rule that no shots can be taken until there have been 5 consecutive passes).
- Coaches shall model inclusive behavior, actively supporting cultural diversity while opposing all types of discrimination, including but not limited to, racism and sexism, at all levels of the game.

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

All individuals responsible for a team and all spectators shall support the referee. Failure to do so will undermine the referee's authority and has the potential of creating a hostile environment for the players, the referee, and all the other participants and spectators. Consequently, NFSC has adopted and modified the following rule:

1. No one, except the players, is to speak to the referee during or after the game. Exceptions: Coaches may ask questions before the game, call for substitutions and point out emergencies during the game, or respond to the referee if addressed.
2. Absolutely no disputing calls, during or after the game, no remarks to the referee to watch certain players or attend to rough play. NO YELLING at the referee, EVER, and no criticism, sarcasm, harassment, intimidation, or feedback of any kind during or after the game.
3. Violators at NFSC games may be ejected and are subject to disciplinary action by the Disciplinary Board. NFSC will investigate and respond to incidents at NFSC games.
4. If coaches or spectators have questions regarding particular calls, rules, or a referee, or wish to give feedback regarding a referee, please contact the town soccer club Referee's Coordinator.

Procedures for Dealing with Violations of the NFSC Coaches Code of Conduct

Any reports from referees, opposing coaches, players or parents regarding violations of the NFSC Coaching Code of Conduct officially filed with the Disciplinary Board will be handled as follows:

1. The NFSC Disciplinary Board, at its discretion, may recommend that a coach be suspended from participation in league activities while the Board investigates and contemplates any action.
2. The Board will verify details of the complaint, including interviewing the person or persons who have made the complaint, as well as any witnesses who may have observed the incident.
3. The Board will send a letter to the coach involved, asking for his/her version of the incident. The coach will have 7 days to respond in writing to the Board.
4. The Board will meet within 14 days to determine if disciplinary action should be taken.
5. If the allegation is determined to be correct, the Board may recommend that the coach be subject to immediate suspension from the league for a period of time to be decided on. The Board will submit its recommendation to the NFSC Board of Directors for approval. If the suspension is approved by the Board of Directors, the coach will be notified verbally and in writing of the Boards' decision. Based on the nature and severity of the offense, and depending on whether this represents a repeat offense, disciplinary actions may range from:
 - Official warning / clarification of expected conduct
 - Partial season suspension (1-3 games)
 - Suspension for the remainder of the Fall and/or Spring season
 - One-year suspension
 - Permanent ban from coaching at NFSC

SAFETY, INJURIES, AND EMERGENCIES

Be Prepared

- Ask parents to inform you of any **medical conditions** (e.g. allergies, asthma) that their child may have and check regularly throughout the season to make sure that they have their inhalers / medication with them at practices and games
- Bring **medical waiver forms** for all your players to every practice and game
- Bring a **First Aid Kit** (provided by NFSC to all coaches) and **ice packs / ice** in an ice cooler to every practice and game
- Make sure you have a **charged cell phone** to use in case of an emergency
- Always have a **second adult** present. This allows one adult to care for injuries or bathroom breaks while the other tends to the rest of the team. It also provides for another witness in case of injury or accident. Make sure that both of you are present until the parent of the last child arrives
- Take a **CPR / First Aid course**
 - Child and Infant Course (Ages 0-12)
 - Adult Course (12 and over)

Prevention of Injuries/Safety

- Check the **field or playing area** to make sure that it is safe (e.g. no broken glass, large potholes)
- Make sure that players have **proper equipment** (shin guards, no jewelry)
- Make sure that players wear **proper fitting shoes** and the proper type of shoe for the surface
- Players **cannot be let out of your sight** without adult supervision (e.g. when they need to go to the bathroom)
- Use caution when playing in **extreme weather conditions**:
 - Avoid prolonged play in extreme heat or cold
 - Avoid scheduling practices during the hottest periods of the day and when there is intense humidity
 - Provide **ample water breaks** to keep players hydrated
 - At the first sign of **lightning**, get your players to a safe area
- Make sure that a player who was injured is **fully rehabilitated** of the injury prior to return to play, as determined by a physician (you may ask for a doctor's note)

Treating Injuries

- **Always err on the side of caution!!** If you are unsure how to deal with an emergency situation or injury (e.g. head injuries or unconsciousness), call 911 immediately and seek professional help
- It is important to remain calm and reassure the player
- Make sure that one adult is tending to the injured player while the other adult takes care of the team
- If a player is injured during a practice or game, **inform the player's parent or guardian, the referee and Division Coordinator** about the injury as soon as possible

Please refer to the NFSC Coaching Binder which contains an article by US Youth Soccer on how to treat **common soccer injuries**.

NFSC PLACEMENT FIELD EVALUATIONS

Player Placement Process

New Fairfield Youth Soccer offers two programs, an In-House program for U5, U6, U7, U8 and a more competitive travel program through the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association Northwest District for U9 through U18 with a sixteen game fall/spring schedule (eight weeks in the fall and eight weeks in the spring). The high school age groups, U16 and U18/19, play in the spring only.

While In-House teams are formed to create as evenly matched teams as possible, travel teams are formed to create teams with comparably skilled players, so that each team can develop as a group and compete against teams of like ability in the District. In addition to a player's skill level, we also take into account commitment, participation and attitude.

How does New Fairfield select players for Travel teams?

Any New Fairfield player that elects to play travel will have to try-out to be placed on an age and skill appropriate travel team. (However, we cannot guarantee a place on any team for players that do not try-out or are late registrants.)

There are three key components:

1. Coach evaluation from previous team.
2. Player field evaluations by the NFSC Director of Coaching and the Professional Trainers hired by NFSC.
3. Team formation meetings conducted as roundtable discussions with the Director of Coaching, Travel Coordinator and Coaches to review items 1 and 2 and place the players on specific teams. These placements are then reviewed again by the group usually one to two weeks later before rosters are finalized.

Each of these steps is reviewed below.

1. **Coach Evaluations:** In-House (U-8) and Travel coaches are asked to complete an evaluation for each player on their team. Each player is evaluated in the following categories:
 - Skills Attacking
 - Skills Defending
 - Tactical Decisions
 - Speed & Agility
 - Game Impact
 - Attitude
 - Percentage of Games Attended
 - Percentage of Practices Attended
 - There is also a place for comments and/or special considerations.
2. **Field Evaluations:** NFSC runs a field evaluation session in June. At our Player Placement Field Evaluations, each participant is given a number, and we then randomly place the players in 5v5 games (or modified depending on number of participants to 3v3 or 4v4). We use a small format because this greatly increases the number of touches each player makes.

The Director of Coaching and Trainers will evaluate the players in the following categories:

- Skills Attacking
- Skills Defending
- Tactical Decisions
- Speed & Agility
- Game Impact
- Attitude
- Ball Control

The numbers of each participant are then recorded and additional comments are made as necessary. (very fast, strong left foot, not disciplined, etc.)

Players interested in being goalies, are placed in the exercise above as well as evaluated separately.

3. **Team Formation Meeting:** All coaches and coordinators will review the coaches evaluations and Field Evaluations (Try-outs) data and then place the players accordingly.

Please remember that forming teams is not a science, and as many points of view are taken into consideration as possible. (That said; also remember that teams are **not** formed around friendships or school classmates.)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

1. **What should I do if I one of my players is not behaving appropriately?**

Please do not hesitate to reach out to your coordinator to help address players' behavior issues.

It is strongly recommended that coaches hold a pre-season Parents Meeting and communicate your expectations of appropriate player behavior with parents.

If there is a need to address a player behavior issue, the recommended process for addressing player behavior issues is outlined below:

- (i) Coaches should try to work out the behavior issue with the player.
- (ii) If not successful, the coach should ask for help from the player's parents.
- (iii) If still not successful, coaches should contact their coordinator for assistance. He or she may get involved..

(A sample meeting agenda for the Parents Meeting is contained in the NFSC coaching binder.)

2. What should I do if I feel that a referee is making bad calls in a game?

As coaches, please DO NOT, under any circumstances; allow your competitive spirit to overcome your good judgment when dealing with a referee. There is absolutely NO disputing a referee's calls during a game. If you have a problem with a referee, keep it to yourself until the game is over. After the game, you can contact the referee's coordinator and voice your complaint to him.

NFSC has a ZERO TOLERANCE policy regarding treatment of referees.

Referees are trying their best. However, they will sometimes make bad calls inadvertently – even professional referees make bad calls. So please treat our referees as you would want your child, or your niece or nephew, to be treated by another adult.

3. How can I deal with parents who are "overenthusiastic" and coaching from the sidelines?

It is strongly recommended that coaches hold a pre-season Parents Meeting and communicate your expectations of appropriate sideline behavior with parents. Coaches should send reminders to parents throughout the season about appropriate sideline behavior.

If there is a need to address a parent behavior issue, the recommended process for addressing parent behavior issues is outlined below:

- (i) Do not confront the parent during the game or after the game as emotions may be high in the heat of the moment.
- (ii) Arrange a time to talk to the parent later (at least 24 hours after the incident).
- (iii) If you need help addressing a particular issue, please do not hesitate to contact your coordinator.

4. Do I need to bring a Coaches Card to my team's games?

Only Travel coaches need to bring a Coaches Card to their team's games. In-House coaches are not required to have a Coaches Card.

INVOLVING THE PARENTS

It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but the young player still views their parents as the most significant people in their lives. A pre-season meeting should be held with the parents so that objectives and team policies can be addressed. Some topics that you may want to address at this meeting are:

- A means of contacting everyone without one person doing all of the calling. (Phone chains)
- Choosing a team administrator, someone to handle all of the details.
- Complete all paperwork required by your league or club.
- Discuss the laws of the game.
- Carpool needs.
- Training and game schedules. How you feel about starting and ending on time, what your attendance expectations are, what you think is a good excuse to miss training.
- What each player should bring to training: inflated ball, filled water bottle, soccer attire, shin guards cleats or sneakers.
- Most importantly, your philosophy about coaching young players. Let them know that everyone plays; that the game does not look like the older player's games; that you are there to ensure that their player is safe and has a good time, as well as learn about soccer.
- What your expectations for them is during game time. How do you want them to cheer? Do they know that they should not coach from the sidelines?
- Above all, try to enjoy yourself. If you do they probably will too.

Let the coach's coach: Leave the coaching to the coaches. This includes motivating, psyching your child for practice, after game critiquing, setting goals, requiring additional training, etc. You have entrusted the care of your player to these coaches and they need to be free to do their job. If a player has too many coaches, it is confusing for him and his performance usually declines.

1. **Support the program:** Get involved. Volunteer. Help out with fundraisers, car-pool; anything to support the program.
2. **Be you child's best fan:** Support your child unconditionally. Do not withdraw love when your child performs poorly. Your child should *never* have to perform to win your love.
3. **Support and root for all players on the team:** Foster teamwork. Your child's teammates *are not* the enemy. When they are playing better than your child, your child now has a wonderful opportunity to learn.
4. **Do not bribe or offer incentives:** Your job is *not* to motivate. Leave this to the coaching staff. Bribes will distract your child from properly concentrating in practice and game situations.
5. **Encourage your child to talk with the coaches:** If your child is having difficulties in practice or games, or can't make a practice, etc., encourage *them* to speak directly to the coaches. This "responsibility taking" is a big part of becoming a big-time player. By handling the off-field tasks, your child is claiming ownership of all aspects of the game - preparation for as well as playing the game.

6. **Understand and display appropriate game behavior:** Remember, your child's self esteem and game performance is at stake. Be supportive, cheer, and be appropriate. To perform to the best of his abilities, a player needs to focus on the parts of the game that they can control (his fitness, positioning, decision making, skill, aggressiveness, what the game is presenting them). If he starts focusing on what he can not control (the condition of the field, the referee, the weather, the opponent, even the outcome of the game at times), he will not play up to his ability. If he hears a lot of people telling him what to do, or yelling at the referee, it diverts his attention away from the task at hand.
7. **Monitor your child's stress level at home:** Keep an eye on the player to make sure that they are handling stress effectively from the various activities in his life.
8. **Monitor eating and sleeping habits:** Be sure your child is eating the proper foods and getting adequate rest.
9. **Help your child keep his priorities straight:** Help your child maintain a focus on schoolwork, relationships and the other things in life beside soccer. Also, if your child has made a commitment to soccer, help him fulfill his obligation to the team.
10. **Reality test:** If your child has come off the field when his team has lost, but he has played his best, help him to see this as a "win". Remind him that he is to focus on "process" and not "results". His fun and satisfaction should be derived from "striving to win". Conversely, he should be as satisfied from success that occurs despite inadequate preparation and performance.
11. **Keep soccer in its proper perspective:** Soccer should not be larger than life for you. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Remember your relationship will continue with your children *long after* their competitive soccer days are over. Keep *your* goals and needs separate from your child's experience.
12. **Have fun:** That is what we will be trying to do! We will try to challenge your child to reach past their "*comfort level*" and improve themselves as a player, and thus, a person. We will attempt to do this in environments that are fun, yet challenging. We look forward to this process. We hope you do to!

Recommended Coaching Best Practices

- Soccer is the players' game. The paramount concern of coaches is the holistic development, welfare, enjoyment and safety of their players.
- Always remember, it's not about winning but developing mature and well-adjusted children.
- Make it fun — if it's not fun, re-evaluate how you are teaching.
- Don't over coach — the children learn through playing.
- Provide positive reinforcement and build esteem — every practice, every game.
- Remember, attitude is learned, both positive and negative.
- Before a game, introduce yourself to the opposing coach and to the referee.
- After the game, thank the referee and ask your players to do the same.

STAGE 1 (U-5/U-6)

(U-5/U-6)

CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAYERS

- Short attention span.
- Can attend to only one problem at a time.
- May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- May or may not understand or remember: what lines mean on the field; what team they are on; what goal they are going for. We need to be patient and laugh with them as they get 'lost' on the field.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often. Give "hints", don't criticize.
- Need generous praise and to play without pressure. No extrinsic rewards (trophies, medals, etc.) should be given for winning.
- Prefer "parallel play" (Will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates. Thus, a 3 against 3 game is, in reality, a 1 against 5 game because they all want the ball at the same time.
- Very individually oriented (me, mine, my).
- Constantly in motion, but, with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly.
- Development for boys and girls are quite similar.
- Physical coordination limited. Eye-hand and eye-foot coordination is not developed. Need to explore qualities of a rolling ball.
- Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc
- Prefer large, soft balls.
- Catching or throwing skills not developed.
- Can balance on their "good" foot.

THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT

As coaches of these younger players, there are things that we know that we can expect during training and games. If we know what to expect, we will be more effective in dealing with the hundreds of situations that come up. This will help us relax, and, in turn, allow us to enjoy the unpredictable nature of working with these children even more. Here are some of the things that we can expect:

- Most players cry immediately when something is hurt. Some cry even when something is not hurt.
- No matter how loud we shout, or how much we "practice" it, they can not or will not pass the ball.
- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field in need of a toilet.
- The only player to hold a position is the goalkeeper (if you play with one). Don't even consider teaching positional play.
- Twenty seconds after the start of a game, every player will be within 5 yards of the ball.
- Several players will slap at the ball with their hands, or pick it up. Several parents will yell at them not to do that.
- A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get 99% of the player's attention. By all means, stop whatever you are doing and go watch for a couple of minutes!
- During a season, you will end up tying at least 40 - 50 shoe laces.
- They will do something that is absolutely hysterical. Make sure that you laugh!

COACHING RATIONAL

It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 5 and 6 years old, in general, do not do so by their own choice. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives.

With the above assumptions, let's look at some things that we can do to energize the U-5 and 6 players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically initiate the sign up for next year!

- Each session should be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible. Involve the ball in as many activities as possible. Basic movements such as running, skipping, hopping, etc. need to be emphasized. If these can be done while kicking, catching, rolling, or dribbling a ball... all the better!
- Training should not last for more than one hour. This is primarily due to physical fatigue and attention span considerations. Train once or twice a week. Any more than this may lead to their and your burnout.
- Have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can get into one hour. Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!
- Every player should bring his or her own size #3 ball.
- Remember, although they may have very similar birthdates, their physical and/or mental maturity may vary as much as 36 months. Activities need to accommodate these individual differences whenever possible.
- Team play and passing is an alien concept to these players. They know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they often will steal it from their own teammates. Do not get uptight if they do not pass; let them dribble to their heart's content.
- Plan for at least 4, 90 second drink breaks, especially in warmer weather. Their "cooling system" is not as efficient as in older players.

TYPICAL TRAINING SESSION

Here are some items that should be included in a U-5/U-6 training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that may or may not involve the ball. They can chase their ball as it is thrown by the coach, bringing it back with different parts of their body. Alternatively, they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball. "Soccernastics" activities are very appropriate, like: rolling the ball with the bottom of their feet, with their elbows, backwards, with the back of their neck while holding on to it; throwing it up and catching it; keeping it up with their feet while sitting.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1v1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or "Red Light - Green Light", or a game where players are trying to knock their ball through gates. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "loser sits".

PLAY THE GAME: Move on to the real game, but, make sure it is a 2v2, 3v3 or 4v4 game. Switch the game every 5 minutes or so. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. It is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their thigh and then catch it. It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

Age Group Skill Priorities

U-5, U-6

Dribble with all sides of both feet
Dribble out of trouble
Dribble past someone
Soft first touch

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 U-5/U-6 children.

Typical Characteristics of U5/U-6 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.

Some Recommended Games for U-5/U-6 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.
 - a. *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.
 - a. *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, the 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.
 - a. *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 counts 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 pinnie 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*******

STAGE 1 (U-7/U-8)

(U-7/U-8)

CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAYERS

- Attention span is a bit longer than U-5/U-6 players but still not at a "competitive" stage
- Inclined towards small group activities.
- Always in motion: scratching; blinking; jerking; rocking....
- Easily bruised psychologically. They will remember negative comments for a long time. Shout praise. Give "hints".
- They want everybody to like them.
- Developing physical confidence. (Most are able to ride a two-wheeler.)
- Starting to imitate older players or sports heroes. Want the same "gear" as them.
- Lack sense of pace. They go flat out until they drop.
- Skeletal system growing rapidly. Often results in apparent lack of coordination.
- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed. Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. Make sure that they get adequate water breaks.
- Limited understanding with personal evaluation. "If they try hard, they performed well" regardless of the actual performance. Thus, they need to be encouraged constantly, and asked "Now, can you do this?"
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play and remembering what goal they are going for... but, in the heat of battle, they will sometimes still forget. They still find it difficult to really be aware of more than one thing at a time.

THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT

7 and 8 year old players are a bit more compliant than their U-5/U-6 counterparts. They will be able to follow 2- or 3-step instructions and are starting to have a good understanding about what it means to play a "game". They are also starting to cooperate more with their teammates. In fact, they now will recognize that they even have teammates by the fact that they occasionally, and I mean occasionally, will pass the ball to a teammate, on purpose. Often, they will repeat the phrase "I can't do that!", but, will quickly run to you to show you that they can, even when they only think that they can. Some other things that you can expect to happen during a season with this age group are:

- There will be at least 200-300 falls during the season, but, now they will usually pick themselves back up.
- The puddle in front of the goal is still too tempting to resist.
- Keep a spare pump in your bag as the players usually do not realize that their ball is flat until they try to kick it, or the coach tells them that it is flat.
- Some of the girls are a lot tougher than the boys.
- They will still want to wear a pinnie, even when the color is identical to their shirt.
- It will be impossible to remember who is who's best friend as you try to make up teams.
- School conflicts will come up... please, let them go (they must face their teachers five days a week).
- They will wear their uniform to bed.

COACHING RATIONAL

Some of the players that are playing as a 7 year old have had two years of soccer experience and thus have already touched the ball a few thousand times in their lives. This, however, does not mean that these players are ready for the mental demands of tactical team soccer. True, they do have some idea of the game, but the emphasis still needs to be placed on the individual's ability to control the ball with his/her body. They are still there to have fun, and because some of the players may be brand new to the sport, it is imperative that activities are geared towards individual success and participation. Following are some more items that a coach of U-7/U-8 players should consider:

- Small sided soccer is the best option for these players. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but, it is an easier game to understand.
- Because of rapid growth spurts during this age, players will go through times when they seem to have lost control of their body. What they could easily do 2 weeks ago now seems unattainable. Be patient.
- Passing is not an important part of their game, no matter how much anybody yells at them to do otherwise, it is much more fun to dribble and shoot. Let them.
- Training once or twice a week is plenty, and should not last longer than one hour and fifteen minutes.
- Each player should bring their own size #4 ball to training. Learning how to control it should be the main objective. They need to touch it as many times as possible during fun activities that will engage them.
- Challenge them to get better by practicing on their own. There is no rule which states that they can't learn by themselves, no matter how important we think we are.
- Incidental things are important. They are forming the habits that will impact their future participation. Ask them to take care of their equipment (water bottle included), cooperate, listen, behave, and try hard. Realize, however, that they often forget and will need to be reminded often.
- Ask them to work with others to solve a particular challenge. Start them with just one partner and work from there.

TYPICAL TRAINING SESSION

Here are some items that should be included in a U-7/U-8 training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that may or may not involve the ball. They can chase their ball as it is thrown by the coach, bringing it back with different parts of their body. Alternatively, they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball. "Soccernastics" activities are very appropriate, like: dribbling the ball with the bottom of their feet, with their elbows, backwards, with the back of their neck while holding on to it; keeping the ball up with their thighs; keeping it up with their feet while sitting.

INDIVIDUAL OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1v1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or a game where players are trying to work with a partner or small group to obtain a goal. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait in lines. Play games of "inclusion" (where everyone plays), instead of games where the "loser sits". Be creative. These players like "crazy" games with a lot of action.

PLAY THE GAME: Small sided soccer can be used to heighten intensity and create some good competition. Play 1v1 up to 5v5. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Perhaps play to emphasize a particular skill (can only dribble the ball over a goal line in order to get a point). Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. Switch teams often, give everyone a chance to win. Also, it is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their head, then thigh and then catch it. Can one player kick a ball to a partner and then back without it hitting the ground? It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return

Age Group Skill Priorities

U-7/U-8

Dribble with all sides of both feet
Dribble out of trouble
Dribble past someone
Shielding
Soft first touch
Introduce proper shooting technique
Introduce passing

Although U-7/U-8 children may begin to be far more physically and maturation ally advanced than U-5/U-6 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. U-7/U-8 players tend to work best when in pairs and we should allow them to work in pairs (coach selected) often. Similar to the U-5/U-6 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 U-7/U-8 Players

- *tend to play well in pairs* – unlike 5 & 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 a 7 or 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 U-5/U-6 players* – still have active imaginations by adult standards, but some of the silliness that 5 & 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.

Some Recommended Games for U-7/U-8 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.
 - a. *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, 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.
 - a. *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. 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.
 - a. *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.
 - b. *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.
 - a. *Version 2:* Coach can stop yelling "get outta here" after a while and see if players recognize when balls go out and are attentive.
 - b. *Version 3:* Coach can vary service of ball. Sometimes play it to one player, sometimes toss the ball up in the air.
 - c. *Version 4:* Have the first two or three players from each group come out each time a new ball is played and play 2v2 or 3v3.

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. **2v1 keep away**---In a grid 10x15 yards, three players play 2v1 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. **1v1 to End lines**---In a space that is wider than long (15 x 20 yards) each player defends one end line and attacks the other. Players score by dribbling the ball in control over the opposing player's end line.
 - a. *Version 2:* You can make this 2v2, 3v3 or 4v4

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

STAGE 2 (U-9, 10, 11, 12)

(U-9/U-10)

CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAYERS

- Gross and small motor skills becoming more refined and reliable. " Boys and girls begin to develop separately.
- Ability to stay on task is lengthened. They have the ability to sequence thought and actions.
- Greater diversity in playing ability and physical maturity.
- Skills are emerging. Becoming more predictable and recognizable.
- Some children begin moving from concrete thinking to abstract thinking.
- Able to pace themselves, to plan ahead.
- Increased self-responsibility. They remember to bring their own equipment.
- Starting to recognize basic tactical concepts, but not exactly sure why certain decisions are better.
- Repetition of technique is very important, but it must be dynamic, not static.
- Continued positive reinforcement needed.
- Explanations must be brief, concise, and mention "why".
- Becoming more "serious". Openly, intensively competitive, without intention of fouling.
- Still mostly intrinsically motivated. " Peer pressure starting to be a factor.
- Adult outside of the family may take on added significance.
- Prefer identification with a team. Like to have good uniforms, equipment, balls.
- More inclined towards wanting to play instead of being told to play. Will initiate play more.

THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT

Some coaches say that the 9 and 10 year-old players are beginning to "turn the corner" and starting to look like real soccer players. However, games are still frantically paced and unpredictable for the most part. These players are starting to find out how much fun it is to play the game skillfully, but they will still stop and laugh if the referee gets hit in the backside with the ball during a game. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They start to understand off sides, but still forget themselves when the goal is in front of them.
- They will really beat up on each other during practice... especially boy's teams.
- During a game, the parents will scream out "HAND BALL" or "COME ON REF, CALL IT BOTH WAYS" at least fifteen times.
- They might cry after the game if they lose, but will forget it if you ask them if you want to go out for burgers and fries.
- You might actually catch them practicing on their own without you telling them to do so.
- Their parents are telling them to do one thing during the game, you are telling them another thing, but what they end up doing might be what their friend is telling them to do.
- You will see a pass that is deliberate. You might even see a "back pass".
- You will see your first \$100 pair of cleats during practice. They will call the other team bad names... really bad names.

COACHING RATIONAL

Some of the players that are playing as U-9/U-10's are seasoned veterans of the youth soccer scene. Some of them may have already been involved in traveling to play in tournaments. As a result, some of them might be very nervous about the whole process. It is our job to keep things in perspective for these young, developing players. True, some of them are becoming quite skillful and are seeing how fun it is to play the game when they can really control the ball. However, many of them are still learning the ropes. Even the more experienced players need to have the game be fun!!!

Emphasis is still placed on having players learn how to control the ball with his/her body, but now, they need to find themselves in more game-like situations. Training is more dynamic and starting to have players make simple, basic decisions such as "Which way is there more space?" or "Who should I pass to?" Following are some more items that a coach of U-9/U-10 players should consider:

- Use small sided games as the main teaching vehicle. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but the full 11-a-side game is still too complicated for them to understand.
- How we group players during training takes on even added significance because of the wide margins of ability levels. We need to mix players up often.
- Stretching is becoming more important, along with a good warm-up. Since the game is faster, make sure that they also have good shin guards. Safety and preventive measures take on added significance.
- Training twice a week is plenty. Sessions need not go longer than one hour, fifteen minutes.
- They should all come with their own size #4 ball. In fact, they still need to be encouraged to play with it by themselves.
- Put them into competitive environments as much as possible. This will not only keep them focused, but, it will allow the game itself to teach them. It also will keep things fun for them, and allow you to deal with issues such as 'winning' and 'loosing' which is now a very big concern for them.
- Now it is possible to teach them positional play with the expectation that they will get it some of the time. However, it is absolutely necessary that you do not allow players to specialize in any one position. They need to learn basic principles of the game, first. Having them play all of the positions is best for their individual development. Remember, our first responsibility is to develop players and let them have fun.
- Whenever possible, allow them to solve their own puzzles. Don't immediately give them solutions on how they can play better.

TYPICAL TRAINING SESSION

Here are some items that should be included in a U-9/U-10 training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that involve the ball. Since there can be one theme to the session, hopefully, the warm-up will lead into the theme of the day. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time after the players have broken a sweat, again, hopefully done with the ball. Again, the warm-up should get the players ready to play. It should be lively, fun, and engaging as well as instructional. There is nothing like a good, fast paced activity to grab the player's attention and make them glad that they came to practice.

INDIVIDUAL OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not necessarily a real 1v1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals or cooperate in small groups in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or a keep-away game. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "loser sits". Be creative. These players like "crazy" games with a lot of action.

PLAY THE GAME: Small sided soccer can be used to heighten intensity and create some good competition. Play 4v4 up to 8v8. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Perhaps play to emphasize a particular skill (can only dribble the ball over a goal line in order to get a point). Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. Switch teams often, give everyone a chance to win. Also, it is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their head, then thigh, then foot, and then catch it. Can one player kick a ball to a partner and then back without it hitting the ground? Can they do that with their heads? It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

Age Group Skill Priorities

U-9/U-10

Continue with dribbling with all sides of both feet

Passing with inside and outside of both feet

Shooting with both feet---using laces

Receiving the ball with all parts of body

Heading

Tactical Priorities

Basic Attacking Ideas

Basic Defending Ideas

Comprehend 1v1 concepts

Comprehend 2v1 concepts

Introduction to 2v2 concepts

Comprehend roles of 1st and 2nd defenders

Comprehend roles of 1st and 2nd attackers

As we move up the age ladder from the U-8 level to the U-9/U-10 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 U-9/U-10 Players

- *attention span lengthens from U-8*---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

Some Recommended Games for U-9/U-10 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.
 - a. *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.
 - b. *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. **1v1 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.
 - a. *Version 2:* Make the grid larger and make this a 2v2 or a 3v3 game.

5. **1v1 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. **2v2 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 10 yd X 10 yd. 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. **2v2 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 defend 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.
 - a. *Version 2:* 3v3 in a 20 X 25 yard grid. Teams should show a triangle shape in attack.
8. **4v4 End zone 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 end zone 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.
 - a. *Version 2:* Use two balls at the same time.
10. **4v4 To Four Small Goals**---In a 30 X 35 yard grid, the same rules as 3v3 but now players must show a diamond shape in attack.

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

STAGE 2 (U-11/U-12)

(U-11/U-12)

CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAYERS

- They begin to develop the abilities to sustain complex, coordinated skill sequences.
- Some of the players have reached puberty. Girls, in general, arrive earlier than boys.
- Most players are able to think abstractly and are thus able to understand some team concepts that are foundational to the game.
- They are beginning to be able to address hypothetical situations, and to solve problems systematically.
- They are spending more time with friends and less time with their parents. " They are susceptible to conformity to peer pressure.
- They are developing a conscience, morality and scale of values.
- Players tend to be highly self-critical. Instruction needs to be enabling. Show them what can be done instead of telling them what not to do.
- Although they are more serious with their play, they are still mainly involved because it is fun.
- They are openly competitive. A few may foul on purpose.
- They are looking towards their role models and heroes in order to know how to act.
- They have a more complex and developed sense of humor.

THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT

Some coaches say that the 11 and 12 year-old players have "turned the corner" and are looking like real soccer players. However, games are still frantically paced and a bit unpredictable for the most part. These players know how much fun it is to play the game skillfully. As a result, we begin to see some the players drop out who recognize the importance of skill and become discouraged with their lack of it. Some other things that we can expect when working with this aged player are:

- They will yell at their teammates when they make a mistake.
- They will openly question the referee's decisions.
- Players will encourage each other.
- They will pass the ball even when they know that they will not get it back.
- Team cooperation is emerging. They will run to a spot, away from the play, even when they know that they might not get the ball.
- They will point out inconsistencies between what you say and what you do. They are "moral watchdogs".
- The difference in skill levels between the players is very pronounced.
- Some players might be as big as you are, some might be half your size.
- Not only will some of the players come to training with expensive cleats, but some will also come with matching uniforms, sweat suits, and bag.
- Parents, during games, can be brutal. Some will yell at the referee at almost every call.
- They will get together with their friends and be able to set up and play their own game.

COACHING RATIONAL

Coaching at this age level is a challenge because many of the players view themselves as real soccer players, while others are at the point where it is not as much fun as it used to be because they feel that their lack of skill development does not enable them to have an impact on the game. They see their skillful friends able to do magical things with the ball and since they can not do these themselves, they start to drop out. Our challenges then, if the players are willing, is to keep all of the players engaged, involved, and make them feel important. (as though they are improving.) Skills still need to be the primary focus of training and players need to be put into environments where they are under pressure so that they learn how to use their skills in a variety of contexts. Here are a few other considerations as we think about working with this aged youngster:

- Our goal is to develop players in a fun, engaging environment. Winning has its place but must be balanced with the other goals of teaching them to play properly. Some decisions will need to be made that might not necessarily lead to wins (ie: having players play different positions, or asking players to try to play the ball "out of the back".)
- Smaller, skilled players can not be ignored. Although it may be tempting to "win" by playing only the bigger players in key positions, the smaller, skilled players must be put into areas of responsibility.
- Small sided games are still the preferred method of teaching the game. This makes learning fun and more efficient.
- Flexibility training is essential. Have them stretch after they have broken a sweat, and, perhaps most importantly, at the end of the workout at a "warm-down".
- Overuse injuries, burnout and high attrition rates are associated with programs that do not emphasize skill development and learning enjoyment.
- Playing 11-a-side games is now appropriate.
- Single sexed teams are appropriate.
- Train for one and one-half hours, two to three times a week. Training pace needs to replicate the demands of the game itself.
- They are ready to have a preferred position, but, it is essential for their development for them to occasionally play out of their preferred spot, in training, as well as during games.
- Training is now best if it focuses on one, perhaps two topics a session. Activities should be geared to progressing from fundamental activities that have little or no pressure from an opponent to activities that are game like in their intensity and pressure.

TYPICAL TRAINING SESSION

Here are some items that should be included in a U-12/U-13 training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual or small group activities that involve the ball. Since there can be one theme to the session, hopefully, the warm-up will lead into the theme of the day. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, after the players have broken a sweat, again, hopefully done with the ball. The warm-up should get the players ready to play. It should be lively, fun, and engaging as well as instructional. There is nothing like a good, fast-paced activity to grab the player's attention and make them glad that they came to practice.

INDIVIDUAL OR SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not necessarily a real 1v1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals or cooperate in small groups in a game environment. An example would be a kind of keep-away game, or small sided games that bring out or emphasize a specific skill or topic. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "loser sits". Be creative. These players like "crazy" games with a lot of action.

PLAY THE GAME: Small sided soccer can be used to heighten intensity and create some good competition. Play 4v4 up to 8v8. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Perhaps play to emphasize a particular skill (can only dribble the ball over a goal line in order to get a point). Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. Switch teams often, give everyone a chance to win. Also, it is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible. Finish this stage with a real game with regular rules. Players need to apply their newly learned abilities to the real game.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Challenge them with some ball trick. Can they complete a juggling pattern? Can one player kick a ball to a partner and then back without it hitting the ground? Can they do that with their heads? How many times can they do it back and forth? It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

Age Group Skill Priorities

U-11/U-12 (Continue with all U-9/U-10 foot skills)

Speed dribbling in traffic
Ability to chip the ball
Accurately play long passes
Offensive/Defensive Heading
Power/Accuracy Shooting
Tactical Priorities
Communication
Basic Support Positions
Receiving the Ball Away from Pressure
Combination Play
How and when to switch the point of attack
Pressure vs. Containing
Proper 2v2 roles
Introduction to all roles in 3v3

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 U-12 field and see players that are physically the size of adults. Yet, other U-12 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 U11/U-12 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
- Keep it fun!!!

Some Recommended Games for U-11/U-12 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.
 - a. *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 pinnies, 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 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 4v4 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 4v4 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 goal in which the goalie must protect both sides of the goal, play 8v8. 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*******

STAGE 3 (U-13, 14)

TRAINING PRIORITIES

DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUAL SKILLS, INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP TACTICS.

HIGH PRIORITY: The importance of possession:

DO NOT GIVE THE BALL AWAY!!!

Development of individual skill.

All practices must challenge the player in competition.

Understanding of combination play:

1. Support
2. Takeovers
3. Wall pass
4. Third man running
5. Overlap

Individual and small group defending.

One session in three devoted to 1v1's, 2v2's, 3v3's.

Develop an understanding of:

1. Delay
2. Tracking back
3. Depth -- role of strong side defenders.
4. Balance -- role of weak side defenders
5. Compactness
6. Communication -- who, what, when.

Functional Play:

1. Attacking roles and responsibilities
2. Defending roles and responsibilities. One in three practices devoted to defending principles of play.

Match-related practice: offense vs. defense.

Crossing: Develop a complete understanding of:

1. Crossing angle.
2. Overlaps.
3. near and far post runs.

Set Plays: Develop a complete understanding of:

1. Attacking and defending responsibilities at corner kicks and all other restarts.
2. The importance of possession from throw-ins in defensive and midfield third of field versus possession and creativity in the final third.

Age Group Skill Priorities

U-13/U-14 (Develop speed of performance of technical skills in game situations)

- Review technical skills.
- Playing the ball on the ground.
- Minimizing the number of touches.
- Receiving the ball and switching the point of attack.
- Diagonal positioning, defensive and offensive. Showing for the ball.
- Players should learn how to play in all sectors of the field.
- Circulation of the ball and players will be introduced.
- Intensity of training should increase.

At the end of the U-14 year, the player should fit the following description.

- Superior 1v1 skills. The player should have the ability and confidence to take on and beat an opponent in a 1v1 situation, as well as the poise to keep possession under strong defensive pressure.
- Quality first touch. The player should have the skill and vision to place the ball with his or her first touch in a spot so the ball can be controlled and played efficiently.
- Striking accuracy and power. The player should have superior skill when striking the ball with all surfaces of both feet.
- Mastery of small group situations. The player should be tactically creative in small group situations, 2v1, 2v2, 3v1, etc.

U-15/U-16 - Technical and tactical training for the individual player and the team.

- Review technical skills.
- Identify the best sector, defensive, midfield or forward, for each player and develop his/her expertise in that sector.
- Tactical patterns and circulation of the ball.
- Building from the back with inside or outside penetration.
- Participation in the GHS soccer program.

U-17 to U-19 - Tactical knowledge of strategies applied in different systems.

- Review technical skills.
- Strategies of 4-4-2, 3-5-2, 3-4-3, etc.
- Circulation of midfielders.
- Full game must be understood.

COMMON SOCCER INJURIES AND HOW TO TREAT THEM

Whenever a player is injured, be certain to inform the parents or guardians referee and division coordinator of the injury, even if it seems minor and the athlete is able to continue with the practice or game.

Preventing disease transmission

Place an effective barrier between you and the victim's blood when you give first aid. Examples of such barriers are: the victim's hand, a piece of plastic, clean folded cloth, rubber or latex gloves. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after providing care.

Heat cramps

- Have athlete rest in a cool place.
- Give cool water.
- Stretch and massage muscle affected.

Heat exhaustion

Player's skin will appear pale and clammy, perspiration is profuse, may experience nausea, weakness, dizziness, headache, cramps.

- Have athlete lie down in a cool place with feet elevated 8 to 12 inches.
- Give cool water.
- Loosen tight clothing.
- Remove clothing soaked with perspiration.
- Apply cool wet cloths (such as towels) or ice packs (wrapped) to the skin.
- Call 911 if player refuses water, vomits or if level of consciousness changes.

Preventing heat emergencies

- Avoid being outdoors during the hottest part of the day, if possible.
- Change the activity level according to the temperature.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Drink large amounts of fluid.
- Wear light-colored clothing, if possible.

Ankle injuries

An injury to an ankle can take the form of a sprain or a break and may have different degrees of severity. Sprains are stretched or torn tendons, ligaments, and blood vessels around joints.

FIRST AID

- Always assume the injury could be severe.
- Immobilize the player (avoid any movement that causes pain).
- Begin the ICE routine (Ice, Compression, Elevation - elevation helps slow the flow of blood, thus reducing swelling).
- Ask the player to see a physician before returning to practice.

DON'T:

- Remove athlete's shoe and sock until ice is available.
- Have the player try to "walk it off".

Knee injuries

The knee is the most complicated joint in the body, as well as the joint most frequently injured. It requires a specialist to treat knee injuries properly. Your job is to limit further injury and to get the player to hospital.

FIRST AID

- Help the player off the field.
- Apply ice to the injured area.
- Elevate the leg without moving the knee, if possible
- Take the player to the hospital immediately

DON'T:

- Move the knee to examine the injury.
- Allow the player to get up and "walk it off".
- Allow the knee to move freely.
- Allow the athlete to continue participating until he/she has seen a trained medical professional.

Dislocations

Dislocations and broken bones (fractures) are treated similarly. A dislocation is a displacement of a bone end from the joint. Dislocated joints will have pain, swelling, irregularity, or deformity over the injured area.

FIRST AID

- Leave dislocated joint in the position found.
- Immobilize joint in the exact position it was in at the time of injury.
- Apply ice and elevate to minimize swelling.
- Have the player see a doctor immediately.

DON'T:

- Attempt to relocate a dislocation or correct any deformity near a joint (movement may cause further injury).
- Assume the injury is minor.
- Assume there is no broken bone.

Blisters

Blisters typically appear as a raised bubble of skin with fluid beneath; the fluid may be clear or bloody. The blister may be torn with new skin exposed. Generally painful.

FIRST AID

- Apply ice to the area.
- Place doughnut shaped plaster over the outside edges of the blister and tape to prevent further friction.
- If the blister is torn, cover with a protective dressing.

DON'T:

- Treat a blister lightly; infection can result, causing serious problems.
- Puncture a blister.

PREVENTATIVE STEPS

- Properly fitting shoes and socks are essential.
- Wear two pairs of socks if friction is extremely bad.

Bleeding

In most cases, placing direct pressure over the wound can control bleeding. To reduce risk of infection, whenever possible wear latex gloves and wash hands before (and after) treating an open wound.

FIRST AID

- Apply DIRECT PRESSURE to the wound with a clean compress (use clothing if a clean compress is not available).
- If possible, elevate the wound above the level of the heart. Do not elevate if you suspect a fracture/movement or causes pain.
- Keep the player lying down.
- If bleeding is sufficient to soak through the compress, apply additional layers directly over the others.
- Stay with the patient at all times. Watch for signs of shock or fainting.
- Call for emergency help if bleeding is severe or persistent.

DON'T:

- Remove old compresses; this may cause more bleeding.
- Let dirt get into the wound.
- Panic. Call for help if you are unsure.

Nose bleeds

A bloody nose is a common occurrence following a blow to the face, or in association with high blood pressure, infection, strenuous activity or dry nasal passages. Although usually more annoying than serious, any bloody nose resulting from an injury to the face should be considered as a potential fracture. If you suspect a head, neck, or back injury, do not try to control a nosebleed; instead, keep the player from moving and stabilize the head and neck.

FIRST AID

- Place the player in a sitting position leaning slightly forward.
- Apply direct pressure by having the player pinch the nostrils with the fingers.
- Take the athlete to the doctor if bleeding persists.

DON'T:

- Allow the player to blow her/her nose for several hours.
- Stick anything up the nose to stop the bleeding.
- Lean head backwards (player may choke on blood running down the throat).

Head and neck injuries

These injuries can be the most devastating of all injuries. Permanent paralysis may result from any neck injury, so these injuries must be handled with extreme care.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS:

- Headache, dizziness.
- Unconsciousness (immediate or delayed).
- Unequal pupils.
- Tingling sensation or numbness in arms and/or legs.
- Inability to move fingers, toes, or extremities.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Athlete not alert.

FIRST AID

- Make sure the athlete is able to breathe.
- Call for paramedic or other help immediately.
- Keep the player still (stabilize head and neck as you found them).
- Maintain body temperature.
- Call parents or guardian immediately.
- Pass all important information on to doctors.

DON'T:

- Move the athlete.
- Leave the player unattended.
- Overstep the limits of your knowledge.

Broken bones

Fractures come in a variety of forms and may occur any place in the body where there is a bone. Remember, you are not a trained medical professional qualified to handle these many different situations. Your job is to recognize the injury (or possible injury) and to limit further injury.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS:

- May have heard a pop or snap, or received a direct blow to the area.
- A closed fracture will have pain, swelling, irregularity, or deformity over the injured area. An open fracture will have bone protruding.

FIRST AID:

- Leave fractured bone in the position found.
- Cover an open fracture wound with a large clean dressing; control bleeding.
- Apply ice to a closed fracture (not to an open fracture).
- Call 911 for an ambulance.

DON'T:

- Attempt to straighten injured limb or push back protruding bones.
- Allow player to move the injured area.
- Allow dirt into any injured area with protruding bones.