

YOUTH PLAYER DEVELOPMENT (UNDER 6)

SKILL PRIORITIES:

Physical:

All warm-up work should be done with fun, engaging activities with each player having their own ball.

- Body awareness, movement education
- Balance, running, jumping
- Coordination, flexibility
- Introduce the idea of how to warm-up

Technical:

Running with the ball:

- Familiarity and confidence to advance the ball, with the instep of their dominant foot

Dribbling:

- Dribble with inside and outside of their dominant foot
- Dribble past someone
- Dribble out of trouble

Receiving

- First touch, with their dominant foot

Shooting

- Shoot with the instep/toe of their dominant foot

Tactical:

- Understand the boundaries of the field
- Knowing which goal to kick at
- Understanding which direction to go

Psychological:

- Keep everything fun and enjoyable to foster a desire to play (intrinsic motivation)
- Imagination & Creativity
- Sharing, fair play, how to play
- Emotional management, parental involvement

SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE U6 AGE GROUP:

5 and 6 year olds should be involved in **FUN** activities that encourage them to explore their physical abilities, while always including a ball with which to play. **Note: Each player should have a ball at this age.**

The soccer ball should be considered a toy. Make sure these are activity-based games and there should be NO activities where players wait in lines to perform.

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, the adults and children experience is quite different. Always treat children with care, patience and give plenty of encouragement.

In order to fully understand these wonderful children and to make training sessions run as smoothly and happily as possible, it is extremely important for us to understand the following characteristics about U6 children.

TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U6 PLAYERS:

- **Focused on themselves:** Reality to them is based solely on what they see and feel
- **Little concern for team activities:** Individually-oriented.
- **Enjoy playing, not watching:** Make sure every player has a ball in practice so they are always playing. They feel no enjoyment from watching others play when they could be playing too.
- **Short attention span:** On average 15 seconds for listening, 10-15 minutes when engaged in a task. Keep activities short and simple, keep lectures to a minimum and make your directions simple, clear, concise and to the point.
- **Typically have 2 speeds:** Extremely fast and stopped. They're constantly in motion, have no sense of pace and will often run until they drop.
- **Heating and cooling systems are less efficient than adults:** Give frequent water breaks (every 8-10 minutes) or they may just run until they cannot run anymore
- **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:** Utilize their imaginations in training activities and they will love training!
- **Unable to think abstractly:** Asking them to think about spatial relations, positions or runs off the ball are unrealistic and not appropriate.
- **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.
- **Look for adult approval:** Watch how often players look to you for approval or to see if you are looking. Be encouraging when they say "Coach, look what I can do!"
- **Usually unaware of game results:** We should keep it that way as it's not important.
- **Often like to fall down just because it's 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

BEST QUALITIES OF A COACH FOR THE U6 PLAYER:

At these ages, the coach should be positive and encouraging of each child. They should have patience, good humor and a willingness to see the world through a child's eyes.

Speaking the child's language is important and accepting that a lot of the child's play will not look like soccer. Specific soccer-related information should be limited to basic ideas of how to best keep the ball from running out of bounds and which direction to play. **There should not be any discussions about positions or any other team concepts.**

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF WHAT SHOULD BE HAPPENING DURING PRACTICE WITH U6 PLAYERS:

The children should be having **FUN** with the ball. There should be periods of active playing where everyone is involved, and there should be ample opportunities for short breaks for water and for catching their breath.

At these young ages, children work hard and tire quickly. Allow them to have “active rests” where they are not running but are trying to do something specific with the ball. **30-45 minutes, total is the best option for these ages.** Most of the session should be spent with each child playing with their own ball.

Every training session should end with a scrimmage. Keep the numbers from 1v1 to 3v3 and keep as many children actively involved with a ball as possible. Let them play to goals, with no goalkeepers, so they may experience goal-scoring success.

SOME RECOMMENDED GAMES FOR U6 PLAYERS

1. Tag

Every child dribbles a soccer ball in the space defined while trying to tag other players with their hand. Players cannot leave their own ball. Have them keep count of how many people they have tagged and, if playing twice in a row, see if players can tag more people than they did in the first game.

Version 2: Players must tag other players on their knees.

2. Hospital Tag

Same as tag in that each player dribbles a soccer ball and that they try to tag each other with their hands. In this game, each time a player is tagged he/she must place their hand on the spot on their body at which they were tagged. Obviously, if tagged a third time, players have no more hands to cover those spots, so they must go to the hospital to see the doctor. The coach acts as the doctor and performs a magical task (pretend) to heal all the little soccer players so they can continue playing the game.

3. 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 now does the tagging. Otherwise, stop the game after a few minutes and have teams reverse roles.

Version 2: Coach can be the freeze monster and try to tag all the players with players unfreezing each other in same fashion.

4. Ball Tag

Similar to other tag games except players try to tag others with their soccer ball instead of their hand. Have them keep count of how many times they kick their soccer ball and tag another person. Have the tag count if their ball hits another player or that player's ball. Can have the players tag the coach for 10 or 20 points. Then can have players tag other selected players for 50 or 100 points etc. etc. **Version 2:** Rather than having players tag each other have them tag the coach by kicking their soccer ball. The coach moves around without a ball to avoid being tagged. Have players count up how many they got and can do the same variations as in the other game by affixing a lot of points to players.

5. Red Light-Green Light/Traffic Lights

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.)

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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 a ball try to avoid getting tagged by the snake. If they are tagged, they join hands with players making up the snake and 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.

9. Eagles Nest/Capture the Balls

Set up 3 or 4 "home bases" (squares) with cones roughly 2-3 yards apart. Put 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. The Coach calls time and counts up how many balls are in each home base 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 bib or an extra piece of clothing to form a movable goal with each coach serving as a post and the bib 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.

US YOUTH SOCCER U6 Game Recommendations

Game form: 3v3 is the best option for these ages, with a maximum of 4v4
GK status: Goalkeepers should not be used
Field Size: Minimum = 30 yards long X 20 yards wide to maximum = 35 yards long x 30 yards wide.
Ball size: Size 3
Goal Size: 12'x6'
Game Length: 4x8 minutes
Offside: None
Penalty Kick: None
Throw-In: None, players should kick the ball in from the sideline
Corner Kick: None, players should kick the ball in from the goal line