

YOUTH PLAYER DEVELOPMENT (UNDER 12)

SKILL PRIORITIES:

Physical:

All fitness work should be done with the ball, in fun, engaging activities either individually or in pairs.

- Agility, Balance, Coordination
- Flexibility
- Speed, Quickness
- Strength
- Endurance
- Aerobic exercise

Technical:

It is important to establish a good solid technical foundation, development of individual skills under the pressure of time, space and opponents and increase technical speed. U-12 should continue with all U-10 skill priorities.

- **Dribbling:** Encourage risk-taking, moves to beat an opponent and keeping possession. Speed dribbling, in traffic., feints & fakes with the ball
- **Shielding:** Spin turns, change of speed and change of direction.
- **Receiving:** Ground & Air balls: Use all body surfaces, on the move.
- **Shooting:** Proper striking technique, turns, cut-backs and volleys/half-volleys. Power/Accuracy Shooting.
- **Passing:** Proper technique, instep, inside and outside of the foot, short, medium and long, crossing/chips to near post and penalty spot, bending passes/shots, combination passing, wall passes
- **Heading:** Proper technique, defending (clearance)& attacking (scoring goals) heading, standing and jumping, guiding the ball, control.
- **Tackling:** Proper technique, no fear, balance and patience.

Tactical (the dawn of tactical awareness):

- Tactical priorities build on U10 priorities
- **Individual:** 1v1 situations in attack and defense. Play 1v1 frequently. Communication, basic support positions, receiving the ball away from pressure.
- **Small Group:** 2v1, 2v2, 3v1, 3v2, 3v3, 4v2, 4v3 and 4v4. Have players play a variety of positions, develop awareness, understand the basic principles of play and begin their journey to becoming a complete player. A great deal of coaching within a 4v4 game. Combination play.
- **Attacking:** Keep possession, encourage risk-taking & creativity, width, support, basic combination play and take players on in the proper areas of the field. How and when to switch the point of attack, 2v2 attacking, role of the 2nd attacker
- **Defending:** Pressure, cover, balance, immediate chase, delay, marking. Pressure versus Containing, 2v1 and 2v2 defending, role of the 2nd defender
- **Team tactics:** Do not take priority at this age. Focus should be placed on maintaining balance and playing skillful soccer. Players should play a variety of positions and the emphasis should be placed on player development, not results as a team.
- **System of Play:** Put players out on the field for the love of the game, without spending too much time coaching a system of play. Focus on teaching principles of play as opposed to systems. Ensure players enjoy the beautiful game.
- **Communication:** Verbal and visual communication for all positions, half-time analysis discussion,
- **Set Plays:** Corner kick-defending and attacking, kick-off plays,

Psychological:

- Keep it fun and enjoyable to foster a desire to play (intrinsic motivation)
- Teamwork, confidence, desire, handling distress
- Encourage decision-making, imagination & creativity
- Discipline, sportsmanship, emotional management
- Identify positional roles for players, how to learn from each game

SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE U12 AGE GROUP:

The effect of the role model is very important at this stage of development. Hero worship, identification with successful teams/players and a hunger for imaginative skills typify the mentality of this age.

This is a time of transition from self-centered to self-critical. Players of this age have a high arousal level in relation to the training of basic skills. This is the "Golden Age of Learning" and the most important age for skill development.

Demonstration is very important and the players learn best by "doing". This is also an important time to introduce and teach the basic principles of play. It is important to establish discipline from the beginning.

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, are more aware of movement off the ball and the reasons for tactical choices, problem-solving becomes systematic and they tend to learn quickly.

Children of this age typically are beginning to develop abstract awareness, so they can understand coaches when we talk about space and runs off of the ball. However, just because they understand these basic tactical concepts, does not mean we should focus on these concepts entirely. Players are still developing technically at this age, especially as they go through growth spurts and awkward phases.

It is quite common to look out at a U12 field and see players that are physically the size of adults. Yet, other U12 players appear as if they could still be in the 3rd grade. These children are all growing at different rates and undergoing physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. The average age for the beginning of pubescence in girls is 10 years old with a range of 7 to 14; for boys it is age 12 with a range of 9 to 16.

As coaches, we need to be sensitive to these changes and their social implications when coaching this age group. Some players may pick up skills quickly, where as others may struggle. However, it may be the case that this is simply the result of differences in maturation. In a year, the slower developer may surpass the player who developed earlier. For this reason we need to be patient and keep open minds about all players through these years. They are aware of their struggles more than anyone else as peer evaluation is omnipresent at these ages. When we see them struggling, it is important for us to help them and to keep the game fun.

TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U12 PLAYERS

- All children are maturing at different rates
- Players need to warm-up and stretch---muscle pulls and other nagging injuries are common
- 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!!!

BEST QUALITIES OF A COACH FOR THE U12 PLAYER:

At these ages, the coach should be enthusiastic, positive and encouraging of each child. They should be a sensitive teacher, have patience and good humor. Having the ability to demonstrate, or utilize someone who can paint a picture (Older player, Assistant Coach), knowledge of the key factors of basic skills and soccer awareness is important.

SOME RECOMMENDED GAMES FOR U12 PLAYERS:

1. Four Square Passing

Form a grid 35 x 35 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, turn as defender attacks, using feel to understand where defender is going. Fix technical shielding errors throughout this activity and make sure entire group knows how to properly shield.

Version 2: Make this competitive by breaking the group into two teams and seeing which team has more balls at the end of the time.

3. Colors-Warm Up

Half of the players are in red pennies and half in blue. Teams play together in the same space combining 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. 2 v 2 + 2 or 3 v 3 + 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. 2 v 2 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 both the inside and outside players.

6. 4 v 4 + 2 to 5 Goals

In a 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. 3 v 3 or 4 v 4 to 4 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 & Butter

Typical 4 v 4 but with an additional 4 players who stand on the 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 touches to force quicker decisions, and better body position before the ball arrives. Keep score and make the game competitive.

9. 6 v 6 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. 8 v 8 Dual-Sided Goal

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

US YOUTH SOCCER U12 GAME RECOMMENDATIONS

Game form: 8v8 is the best option for these ages
GK status: Goalkeepers should be used
Field Size: Minimum = 70 x 45 yards to maximum = 80 x 55 yards
Ball size: Size 4
Goal Size: 18'x6'
Game Length: 2x30 minutes
Offside: Yes
Penalty Kick: Yes, 10 yard mark
Throw-In: Yes
Goal Kick: Yes
Corner Kick: Yes
Practice Time: 75-90 minutes, total. Every practice should end with a scrimmage