

## **YOUTH PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM (U6-U14)**

Soccer is a learned activity-therefore the more you play, the more you learn. Currently, youth soccer seems to have a very narrow concept of learning. It tends to measure success by game results and favors over-coaching before the player's self-discovery.

Attempts to create a player development culture within youth soccer, based on strong learning principles have been hamstrung by a tacit acceptance of this point of view.

As teachers we should be more open to the needs of the player rather than the need of the team, club, parent or coach. We must be certain to make learning, rather than results, the focus of our young player's development years.

### **"THE CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE PSA PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IS THE PLAYER AND THEIR INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT"**

True player development focuses on the development of the individual player, not the development of the team. As Coaches, our primary responsibility for our youth players (U6-U14) is individual development, not team results.

The purpose of this youth player curriculum is to help standardize "best practice" soccer training and focus on player development. It's intended to focus on raising the player's **PHYSICAL, TECHNICAL, TACTICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL** skills to the highest possible level.

We're disseminating this curriculum to all our Coaches in order to lay a strong foundation, develop coaching consistency within age groups and a developmental progression across age groups.

The curriculum can stand on its own to teach all our Coaches what is best for developing players. Please understand that children vary in their development and these are strictly guidelines, which are meant to be flexible. It is important we challenge all players at a level that's commensurate with their ability.

Every aspect of play coached at one age must be reinforced at the next age. Aspects taught at U6 must be taught again at U8, U10, and U12 and so on. What was learned at a previous age group or groups must be refined at the next age group.

The information provided in this document comes, primarily, from the US Youth Soccer Coaching Manual, US Soccer's "Best Practices" guidelines as well as many State Youth Soccer Associations. The information provided is based on research and practice in child psychology and child development, physiology, child education and learning theory, as well as observation and youth soccer coaching experience.

We hope you will use this curriculum to fuel the passion and love for the 'beautiful game' and to guide you in helping ensure our youth players are provided with the best soccer development environment possible.

## PRINCIPLES OF COACHING

The principles of youth coaching are guidelines developed as a foundation to assess the appropriateness of a training session or activity. The following six principles are presented so that youth players receive a healthy and positive youth soccer experience.

1. **DEVELOPMENTALLY-APPROPRIATE:**  
This challenges the coach to examine the appropriateness of the activity. The requirements or demands of the activity should fall within the range of the players' abilities.
2. **CLEAR, CONCISE & CORRECT** instructions:  
How instructions are given is crucial when dealing with young children. Too much information overwhelms them and too little information doesn't give them enough to get started. Provide enough information to get them started and then add new challenges.
3. **SIMPLE TO COMPLEX:**  
Organize activities in a way that allows for ongoing modifications and new challenges to meet the player's interests and abilities.
4. **SAFE** and **APPROPRIATE** training area:  
The area should be free of hazardous materials and be safe from traffic or other environmental dangers. The training area should be psychologically safe. Does the child feel emotionally secure? Is the fear of failure reduced? Can the child take creative risks without fear of admonishment from the coach?
5. **DECISION-MAKING:**  
Include opportunities for the players to make decisions within the activities. These need to be present in all activities for learning to occur.
6. **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GAME:**  
The activities in a training session must reflect the demands a player faces in the game. The coach should provide the foundational movement and thinking skills that will enable the player to solve problems within the game.

## GAMES/ACTIVITY CHECKLIST, for the Coach

- Are the activities **FUN**?  
Are they enjoyable to perform and will it keep the player's interest?
- Are the activities **ORGANIZED**?  
Are the objectives clear? It doesn't need to be highly structured or without any rules, but the purpose and guidelines of the activity need to be understood
- Are the players **INVOLVED** in the activities?  
Is there maximum participation of all players, or are some more active than others?
- Is **CREATIVITY** and **DECISION-MAKING** being used by the players?  
Are their decisions to move or employ a particular skill ever changing, or are they just repeating the same movement without thinking?
- Is the **SPACE** appropriate for the age group and number of players?  
If they can effectively move without colliding into each other as well as not becoming too exhausted from trying to cover too much ground, it is probably a sufficient area. Is the space allowing for the objectives of the activity to be realized?
- Is the Coach's **FEEDBACK** appropriate?  
For younger players, feedback should be positive and frequent. Youth players, up to age nine, view effort and ability as synonymous. Coaches should try to combine feedback with the player's first name. It leads to a more personalized approach and players tend to focus on the feedback better.
- What is the **IMPLICATION FOR THE GAME** in the activities?  
Are the objectives of the activity related to the demands they will face in a game? Key building blocks should be in the physical, mental and social learning domains.

## ELIMINATE LAPS, LECTURES, LINES ELIMINATION GAMES & PUNISHMENT

- **LAPS:**  
Having players run laps, especially without a ball, is a waste of time. All practice activities should take place on the field, preferably with a ball
- **LECTURES:**  
Lectures should be left for the classroom. Children come to practice to be active and participate, not to be talked to for extended periods of time
- **LINES:**  
Having players stand in lines waiting their turn generally indicates an inappropriate activity. If players are standing and not moving, the activity will not keep their interest
- **ELIMINATION GAMES:**  
Games where the player is eliminated because they couldn't do what was asked should never be part of a training session. Not only is it damaging psychologically, but developmentally these are the players that need the experience the most
- **PUNISHMENT:**  
The use of physical activity such as laps, push-ups, sit-ups etc., as punishment for misbehavior is an inappropriate method of discipline. Players will come to believe that physical training is actually a form of discipline. Players need to understand the importance of fitness and making them run when there is a behavior problem is counter to what you want to develop. When the consequences warrant, short-term exclusion from the activity will often get a positive result

## CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE YOUTH COACHES

- **High moral and ethical standards:** Be an appropriate role-model
- **Honesty:** Be fair, no one likes it if you cheat
- **Respect of players, parents and community:** Develop strategies to develop positive relationships with all involved
- **Understanding readiness factors for participation:**
  - Maturation: When to begin, how the game is structured
  - Learning: What are children able to comprehend and how do they learn
  - Motivation: Internal desire to play and have fun
- **Communication:**
  - Appropriate verbal and non-verbal responses (body language and gestures).
  - Appropriate language (words, tone, volume, rhythm, articulation)
- **Development of an appropriate temperament for coaching children:**
  - Be sensitive to each child
  - Exhibit a calm personality
  - Show patience
  - Observe and guide, don't direct
  - Use your normal voice, not a whistle
- **Ability to motivate positively:**
  - Develop high levels of self-confidence
  - Positive coaching
  - Don't yell
- **Possess leadership qualities:**
  - Be prepared
  - Be organized
  - Demonstrate discipline: Identify appropriate and inappropriate behavior and enforce team rules
  - Learn to be critical of behavior, not a player's personality
- **Be dedicated to child development & the sport of soccer:**
  - Understand what is appropriate for different age groups and level of play
  - Let every child play, and play a lot
- **Be enthusiastic:**
  - Your enthusiasm is contagious
  - Celebrate!
- **Have a good sense of humor:**
  - Keep things light
  - Have fun
  - Smile and laugh
- **Have current knowledge of coaching youth soccer:**
  - Learn about children and how they learn
  - Learn the rules
  - Learn appropriate practices, activities and content
  - Learn appropriate tactics and strategy
  - Learn how to have fun