

## YOUTH PLAYER DEVELOPMENT (UNDER 14)

### SKILL PRIORITIES:

#### Physical:

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

- Agility, Balance, Coordination with and without the ball
- Flexibility (Dynamic flex and static stretching), Speed, Quickness
- Cardio training, endurance, play full games
- Aerobic and anaerobic exercise. Strength, power acceleration

#### Technical:

Build on the base with development of individual skills under the pressure of time, space and opponents and increase technical speed. U-14 should continue with all U-12 skill priorities.

- **Dribbling:** Encourage risk-taking, moves to beat an opponent (1v1) and keeping possession. Speed dribbling, in traffic, feints & fakes with the ball. Develop an extensive moves ability
- **Shielding:** Spin turns, change of speed and change of direction. Not easily knocked off the ball.
- **Receiving:** Quality first touch for ground & air balls. Use all body surfaces, on the move.
- **Shooting:** On the run, on the turn, from all angles and crosses. Proper striking technique, turns, cut-backs, volleys and half-volleys. Power/Accuracy Shooting. Finishing under pressure.
- **Passing:** Proper technique, instep, inside and outside of the foot, short, medium and long, chipping to pass, crossing/chips to near post, far post and penalty spot, bending passes/shots, combination passing, wall passes, take-over's. All done on the run.
- **Heading:** Proper technique, defending (clearance) & attacking (scoring goals) heading, standing and jumping, guiding the ball, control. Heading to pass, heading backwards, diving headers
- **Tackling:** Proper technique, no fear, balance and patience, slide tackles

**Tactical (the dawn of tactical awareness):** Increase tactical speed (decision making under pressure)

- **Individual:** 1v1 situations in attack and defense. Play 1v1 frequently. Basic support positions, receiving the ball away from pressure. Recovery and tracking runs
- **Small Group:** 2v1, 2v2, 3v2, 3v3, 4v2 and 4v4. Keep possession, encourage risk-taking, taking players on in the proper areas of the field. Develop awareness, understand the 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 2<sup>nd</sup> attacker. Attacking 3<sup>rd</sup> play, support play
- **Defending:** Zone defending; maintain good shape throughout all 3<sup>rd</sup>s of the field and channel opponents. Clear decision on where the "Line of confrontation" will be. Proper angle and distance of pressure, cover, balance. Immediate chase, delay, marking, and compactness. Pressure versus Containing, 2v1 and 2v2 defending, role of the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender, role of the 3<sup>rd</sup> defender
- **Team tactics:** Keep possession. Play the ball away from pressure. Focus on maintaining balance in the system of play and playing skillful soccer. Players should play a variety of positions and be able to interchange positions during the run of play. Encourage attackers to take defenders on in the final third. Emphasis can now be placed on team results.
- **System of Play:** Systems of play can now be introduced.
- **Communication:** Verbal communication for all positions, half-time/post game analysis discussion,
- **Set Plays:** Both defending and attacking set-plays (Goal kicks, corner kicks, kick-offs, throw-ins, penalty kicks and free kicks)

#### Psychological:

- The game should remain fun and enjoyable and players should have desire and passion for the game
- Encourage sportsmanship, teamwork, decision-making, imagination & creativity
- Identify positions for players, how to learn from each game, how to play the game, build confidence
- Assertiveness, tension control, handling distress, emotional management. Maintain discipline (self discipline, self regulation). Mental focusing techniques, stay focused for the entire game

## **SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE U14 AGE GROUP:**

Adult standards and formal rules become applicable. The pace of development quickens due to the acceleration of physical and mental maturation.

The demands of skill training as well as training loads should increase, thus provoking improvement in mental toughness, concentration and diligence.

Awareness of tactics, within the game, becomes an important facet of the learning process. Players tend to be self-critical and rebellious, but have a strong commitment to the team.

## **TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U14 PLAYERS**

- "Shoot up" in height when they enter puberty. This rapid growth creates an imbalance between the length of their torso and legs
- Often find it difficult to move around in a fluid manner because of the physical changes they are experiencing
- Demonstrate greatly improved strength and speed
- The basic technical principles need to be adapted to this greater swiftness
- Their ability to grasp concepts means: they can be taught more demanding tactics
- Fitness and stamina are improved, primarily through playing
- Training should occasionally be supplemented by simple circuits, jumping exercises, games and exercises to improve reaction and acceleration
- Become more aware of team play and the importance of working together to get results
- Playing in a competitive team, i.e. in a group which shares the same objectives, norms and interests, they find the "security" which they lack or consciously reject in other areas of their lives at this time.
- Psychological insecurity is stabilized merely by belonging to a team
- Can also perform more specific tasks within the team because they have a better grasp of the game
- The recognition by teammates and coaches of the importance of individuals' performance in the team's success helps to boost young players' self-confidence.
- Each player must be given tasks geared towards their particular strengths without limiting individual initiative, creativity and enjoyment of the game
- Main emphasis during games on the use of space and the careful build-up of play
- Distance themselves further from adults, looking to establish their own fixed place in the world
- Are often prone to considerable mood swings and inconsistency in their performance during this orientation phase
- Receive support from their friends and peers during this somewhat insecure process of "finding themselves."
- Players at this age must be shown how to be independent and share responsibility
- However, coaches must not issue all the orders, plan and organize everything, block out criticism. Instead, their main job is to encourage the youngsters to find their own solutions and develop their own ideas
- Each player must be allocated suitable responsibilities.

## **BEST QUALITIES OF A COACH FOR THE U14 PLAYER:**

At these ages, the coach should have a strong personality and enthusiastic. They should be a sensitive teacher, be patient but demanding and have a good sense of 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 helpful.

## **SOME RECOMMENDED GAMES FOR U14 PLAYERS:**

### **1. 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.

### **2. 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.

### **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, 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.

### **4. 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

### **5. 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.

### **6. 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.

### **7. 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.

### **8. 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.

### **9. 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.

### **10. 4 v 4 To End Zone**

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.

## **US YOUTH SOCCER U14 GAME RECOMMENDATIONS**

Game form: 11v11 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 5  
Goal Size: 18'x6'  
Game Length: 2x35 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