

## YOUTH PLAYER DEVELOPMENT (UNDER 8)

### SKILL PRIORITIES:

#### Physical:

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

- Agility, Balance, Coordination
- Movement Education, flexibility
- Eye/foot and eye/hand coordination
- Introduce the idea of a cool-down

#### Technical:

##### Running with the ball:

- Familiarity and confidence to advance the ball with the instep and both the inside and outside of their dominant foot

##### Dribbling:

- Ball lifting and juggling
- Dribble with all surfaces of their dominant foot
- Dribble out of trouble
- Dribble past someone
- Shielding the ball

##### Receiving:

- Receiving ground balls with a soft first touch of the inside and sole of the dominant foot
- Introduce the various ways to prepare the ball out of the feet, for passing

##### Passing:

- Introduce inside-of-the-foot passing
- Introduce the throw-in

##### Shooting:

- Introduce proper shooting technique, with the dominant foot
- Shoot with the inside of the dominant foot
- Toe shot/pass

#### Tactical:

- Expose players to all positions, name the positions
- 1v1 attack

#### Psychological:

- Keep it fun and enjoyable to foster a desire to play (intrinsic motivation)
- Working in pairs
- Imagination & Creativity
- Encourage decision-making
- Increase demands, how to play
- Sportsmanship, emotional management, parental involvement

### SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE U8 AGE GROUP:

Although U8 children may begin to be far more physically advanced and mature than U6 children, we must remain patient and not try to force them to develop too quickly. U8 players tend to work best when in pairs and we should allow them to work in pairs (coach selected) often. Similar to the U6 children, we need to make sure that FUN is a central theme in practice.

Dribbling still needs to be the primary focus of our efforts, though passing and shooting should be introduced at this age as well. Player development will occur most appropriately and expeditiously if all players are having fun and are enjoying themselves.

## TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U8 PLAYERS

- **Tend to play well in pairs:** Unlike 6 year-olds, these children enjoy playing in pairs. Try to set up the pairs yourself to control the games and manage the different personalities.
- **Are now able to take another's perspective:** They now have a sense of how others 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 and 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. Please-**NO LECTURES.**
- **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 frequently look for your reaction.
- **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 an 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 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 U6 players:** Still have active imaginations by adult standards, but some of the silliness that 6 year-olds allowed will not be appreciated by this group. Still use their imagination; just watch their reactions to games to read how far you can go with things.

## **SOME RECOMMENDED GAMES FOR U8 PLAYERS:**

### **1. Free Dribble**

Everyone has a ball and use the 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. *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, 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.

### **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. *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. *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. *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.

**Version 2:** Coach can stop yelling "get outta here" after a while and see if players recognize when balls go out and are attentive.

**Version 3:** Coach can vary service of ball. Sometimes play it to one player, sometimes toss the ball up in the air.

**Version 4:** Have the first two or three players from each group come out each time a new ball is played and play 2 vs. 2 or 3 vs. 3.

## 8. Clean 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. 2 v 1 Keep Away

In a grid 10x15 yards, three players play 2 vs. 1 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. 1 v 1 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.

**Version 2:** You can make this 2 vs. 2, 3 vs. 3 or 4 vs. 4.

## US YOUTH SOCCER U8 GAME RECOMMENDATIONS

Game form: 4v4 is the best option for these ages, with a maximum of 5v5

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: 4x12 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

Practice Time: 45-60 minutes, total. Every practice should end with a scrimmage