

CYS U8 Suggested Coaching Curriculum

Principals of age appropriate development¹:

- Very young players to 8 years of age love to play. Therefore, all practices should be based on fun games.
- Players must spend the maximum time possible in contact with the ball and experiment by themselves.
- Give different responsibilities to the players in order to develop a sense of team.
- Players will rotate in all positions including goal keeper to avoid early specialization.
- Basic motor skills like walking, running or jumping have to be combined with ball handling and ball control.
- Dribble with all sides of both feet, dribble out of trouble and dribble past someone.
- Soft first touch
- Introduce proper shooting technique
- Introduce passing only to the players who can dribble out of trouble²

US Youth Soccer³ recognizes player development has four key areas: tactical, technical, physical and psychosocial. At this age group focus areas, in order of importance are:

TECHNICAL: Experiment with the qualities of a rolling or spinning ball. Introduce ball lifting, juggling, block tackle, receiving ground balls with the inside and sole of the foot, shooting with the inside of the foot, toe passing and shooting and dribbling while changing direction. Introduce the push pass.

PHYSICAL: Agility, eye-foot and eye-hand coordination, balance, leaping, bounding, tumbling, catching, throwing, pulling, pushing, warm-up activities and movement education. Develop speed, coordination and basic motor skills with and without the ball. Include education on sports nutrition with players and parents (healthy snacks and drinks).

PSYCHOSOCIAL: Encourage working in pairs, sportsmanship, parental involvement, how to play, emotional management, creativity, dynamic activities, participation of all players and a safe and fun environment. There is still a short attention span unless the player has peaked (keep interest high). Like to show what they can do – encourage trying new things. Developing self-esteem – activities should foster positive feedback and attainable positive success.

TACTICAL: Very basic: Back line and forward line, 1v1 attack and choosing to dribble or pass. Introduce the names of positions. May institute games of 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2, playing with the ball with a purpose and promote problem solving.⁴

¹ US Soccer Coaching Curriculum, Dr. Javier Perez, 2011, US Soccer Federation

² 21st Century Player Development Model, Michael Singleton, 2003 MA Youth Soccer

³ US Soccer Coaching Curriculum, Dr. Javier Perez, 2011, US Soccer Federation and Outline Progression for Teaching Soccer From U6 to U19, Sam Snow – US Youth Soccer Director of Coaching Education, 2006

⁴ US YOUTH SOCCER PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL, Sam Snow, 2012

Recommended Formations:

2-1-2 (for 6 v6) : Two defenders (backs), one midfielder, two forwards

2-2 (for 5 v 5 if numbers are low) : Two defenders (backs), two forwards

By end of U8 players should be capable of:

- Dribbling skills including:
 - Dribble with all sides of both feet
 - Dribble out of trouble
 - Dribble past someone
 - Stopping and running with the ball at speed
 - Shield the ball with body from other player
- Demonstrate a soft first touch (including trapping)
- Demonstrate basics of proper shooting technique
- Demonstrate basics of proper passing with reasonable accuracy at 8-12 yards
- Very basic tactical skills such as:
 - Maintaining position but moving with play (not chasing the ball everywhere it goes)
 - Moving forward and spreading out when attacking
 - Retreating and become more compact when defending
- Basic quick, coordinated movements with and without the ball

Typical Characteristics of U8 Players⁵

- 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 personalities.
- Now able to take another's perspective – they now have a sense of how other people 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, 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.
- 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 look for your reaction frequently.
- 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.

⁵ MA Youth Soccer G Manual

- 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 beginning 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. However, children at this age are still quite silly, just in a different way.
- Still use their imaginations, but watch their reactions

Practice Suggestions:

Remember, the game is the best teacher. Every practice should end with some type of small sided game. This allows for the most contact with the ball in a game-like environment.

Week 1: Activities to help learn the basic rules

Week 2-3: Dribbling, shielding and running with the ball

Week 4-5: Dribbling and passing

Week 6-7: Dribbling, passing and shooting

Week 8: Attacking and defending in groups (2 v 2, 1 v 2)

Please Don't Include⁶:

- big tactics or set plays
- stretching – they don't need it at this age
- goal keeper beyond basic handling of a rolling ball
- running for its own sake
- heading

Special Topics (mix in as needed):

- Throw-ins - Throw it up the sideline. Don't throw toward your own goal in your end of the field
- Goal Kicks - Kick it toward one side. Don't kick it across the goal and don't kick it into the middle of the field where a loss of possession could leave us exposed to an easy shot.

Reference:

Mass Youth Soccer U8 Weekly Practice Plans

http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/coaching/practice_plans_u8.aspx

⁶ - Soccer Calling, A handbook for Youth Soccer Coaches, Dean Conway, 2005