



**Oregon Youth Soccer Association
Age Group Curriculum for Youth Player Development U6-8
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**"The younger they are, the more organized the coach must be."
Dr. Tom Fleck, USSF National Staff Instructor**

KNOW THE PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH COACHING

Decision-making is the key. Soccer is a game in which the players have to think! Let the players make some input into the session, by giving them some opportunities to make decisions within the games that you choose as a coach.

The coach makes the games and the rules simple. One should allow scheming but not cheating. Have a lot of balls around as a coach to make the play somewhat continuous for plenty of repetition.

Principles of Youth Coaching

**A COACH OF YOUTH SOCCER MUST ALWAYS BE POSITIVE!
A COACH MUST ALWAYS CHECK THAT THE PLAYING AREA IS SAFE!**

- 1. Activities need to be developmentally appropriate – fun, agility**
- 2. Give clear instructions – Brevity, Clarity, Relevance provide good pictures – little talking**
- 3. Simple to Complex progression**
- 4. Opportunities for decision making – attack/defend scheming**
- 5. Use safe and appropriate spaces (ie. 20x30 yards)**
- 6. Provide plenty of implications for the game – very wide scope with young kids**

Player Development

Curriculum

U6/U8 Fun Phase (The Turn On)

The fascination for the ball, the desire to master it and the thrill of scoring goals provides the launching pad. The joy and pleasure of the game are best nurtured by encouraging freedom of expression and organizing children's play in small groups. The activities are best nurtured by allowing freedom of expression within small group situations.

Use FUN games and activities to encourage participation

Coach

Facilitator, Friendly helper, Organizer, Stimulator, Patient, Enthusiastic, Imaginative. Should hold either;

License: State Youth Module Level 1, or
License: State Youth Module Level 2

Technique/Tactics

Learning through FUN games and age appropriate activities. Activities should be Fun

Appropriate for the Age
Promote Decision Making
Encourage Creativity
Participation of All Players

Games: Body Awareness => Maze Games => Target Games

Physical: Physical/Movement Education through Soccer
Body Awareness
Balance
Coordination – Eye-Hand and Eye-Foot
Agility – Changing Direction while in Motion

Psychological: Keep in FUN and ENJOYABLE to Foster a Desire to Play (Intrinsic Motivation).
Tend to one task at a time – Controlling the Ball is a Complex Task (Realistic Expectations).
Does not understand group or collective play – Individual Activities (All Players with a Ball).
Short attention span unless peaked – Keep Interest High. Like to show what they can do – Encourage to Try New Things
Develop self-esteem – Activities that Foster Positive Feedback and Attainable Positive Success.

The Game: U6 & U7 3 v 3 (no Goalkeepers)
U8 4 v 4 (with Goalkeepers in an 3-yard arc exclusion zone)

*** Do a Great Deal of Coaching/Teaching within 1v0, 1v1, 2v1, 2v2 & 3v3 Games ***

Philosophy of Coaching U6-U8 Players

Coaches must make it FUN for the players and not worry about a win-loss record! The primary measure of success for a coach of these young ages should be how many come back and play soccer next season!

Coaches have to consider players of this age from three perspectives; physiological, psychological and social. Children of any age can differ in their level of development in either of these categories by as much as (plus or minus) 3 years. There can be a world of difference between players starting their first season as opposed to their third! Please review the activities below and from your own personal experience, adjust accordingly to the developmental needs / techniques of the players/coaches you are working with.

Concentrate on a lot of touches on the ball for each player – each with own **size 3 or 4** ball. If a game is becoming tedious or the players are restless – declare multiple winners and move on to another activity. It is vital that a coach knows (or works out quickly) what level his/her players are at! If the games are too easy, the kids get bored and if they are too difficult, they get frustrated. Make activities sufficiently challenging to keep the players interested, or challenge the better individuals while a game is ongoing (i.e. using left foot only etc.).

Coaches need to avoid the 4 evil ‘L’s’ at all costs

1. **Laps** = their time is precious – do fun game activities with a ball!
2. **Lectures** = their attention span is short – if you speak more than 30 seconds they’re gone!
3. **Lines** = don’t have them standing waiting to take a turn kicking a ball – develop activities where they can all participate at the same time!
4. **Language** = you are now an important role model – never use inappropriate language around children (make sure other adults do not either!)

Planning your practice

Your practice must always be FUN. If you are not enjoying yourself, then you can be sure that the players are not! Use the Coaches Checklist at the front of this manual after planning your practice. Remember your practice must go from simple to complex!

A coach must always be organized and have some idea of what the team needs to work on. Therefore sit down for 5-10 minutes the night before practice and plan your session out. Please find an appropriate blank practice planning sheet to copy and use at the end of this section. Sometimes you will have to tear them up and start again! You should plan to photocopy your best plans and sit with other coaches of similar age-groups from your club about 2 weeks into the season and share information. This is a valuable resource – use it!

There is also a whole series of FUN and appropriate activities at the end of this manual to add to the game activities that you observed during the clinic. Do not let your practices get boring and staid! Always better yourself and your knowledge by attending coaching clinics, watching other coaches and doing your own research from books, video and internet resources. Make it FUN and the players will come back next season to play again. That is your ultimate goal.

For U8-10 players, we recommend a game/activities approach to teaching. Teach skills through playing fun games. We still want all players to be challenged but we need to concentrate on individual ball work as well as introducing small group cooperative situations.

By asking your players questions, you will find out what level they are at. If we put them in situations in practice where they can figure things out for themselves, then they will retain that information a lot longer! See sample plan below.

For other ideas, please see the OYSA recommended texts;

The Peak Performance: Soccer Games for Player Development, by Dr. R. Quinn

Coaching 6, 7 & 8 Year Olds, by Bobby Howe and Tony Waiters

Soccer: How to Play the Game, US Soccer Federation

Sample Practice Plan using a game/activities approach (in part from Ron Quinn's book – *buy it!*)

Suggested age-level U6-8 (all activities in following game activity section)

Practice Objectives:

- 1. To acquaint coach and team members*
- 2. To become familiar moving with a ball at their feet*
- 3. To react to coaches voice*

Warm-up Activities

- 4 minutes Body part dribble
- 4 minutes I can do something with the ball can you? Coach can introduce some fun stretching... Then get some player ideas.

Main Activities

- 4 minutes Shadow dribbling, 30-60 second periods with at least 2 periods each
- 5 minutes Everybody's it, play 3-5 times with games lasting 1 minute
- 5 minutes Water break
- 5 minutes Crossover
- 2 minutes Math dribble

At end of math dribble, leave 2 equal teams. This minimizes down-time between activities.

- 10 minutes Pac Man
- 2 minutes Water break
- 15 minutes 3v3 or 4v4 small-sided game

Warm-down Activities

- 2 minutes Zen dribble (call out math problem to get kids in pairs!)
- 1 minutes Fun Static stretching

Total practice time: 1 hour

Always end practice with positive reinforcements for their efforts

Great U6-8 Fun Practice Games

It's all in a name!

Note: The name of a game can be very important. The younger players will concentrate for longer at an activity if it is called something they can relate to and use their imagination to play at. For instance...

Last year while teaching a National course, a coach approached a group of 8 year olds and the first thing he said was 'what is your favorite TV show?' They immediately replied Rugrats! He told them that they were going to play the rugrats game (it happened to involve a soccer ball!) They didn't think they were learning the same old 'soccer skills' so they enjoyed themselves using their own imagination and creativity. Coaches should attempt to get into the psyche of their players and find out what they enjoy (even the simple visual of 'Sharks and Minnows!') Their concentration will last longer and the coach's job will be easier!

Warm Up Games

U6-U8 Players do not really need to do any static stretching, so I prefer to use a quick warm-up tag game to get kids 'juiced up' (excited) for the game of soccer. This in turn will get the kids to both get out of their parents car and tie their shoelaces quicker – I mean who wants to do laps or stand in a circle listening to the coach at this age!?

*Note: U6 have difficulty seeing imaginary lines between cones
– so lay a lot of disks for sidelines!*

Red Rover / Sharks and Minnows

All players start in a line at one end of the grid, while coach is in the middle. Coach calls 'Red rover, red rover, send everybody over' (everybody can be substituted for boys, girls or shirt colors if big numbers). The coach tries to tag players, who in turn try to reach the other side of the grid safely. If they do they turn around and wait for the coach to call again. If they are tagged then they are in the middle with the coach. Can progress to having the kids each with a ball (get them to attempt to look up while dribbling!)

Red Light Green Light

Start all kids on one side-line of a grid. The object is to be the first to the other side. When you (the coach) calls 'green light' they move as fast as they can towards the other line. When you call 'red light' they must stop keeping their ball under the control. If they still move or their ball is more than 1 yard from their feet they go back to the start line! Make it fun – if they move their face muscles (coach tries to make them laugh) they have to go back also.

Blob / Link Tag

Coach is it; all the players have a ball in a grid. If the coach tags someone or their ball (usually get the best dribbler first to allow the weaker kids to get more touches), that players ball is knocked out of the grid and then the two link arms and try and get somebody else. Game continues.

Pac-Man

One player starts with a ball in a grid (usually one of the better players). All the others start in the grid without their balls (placed just outside the grid within easy reach). On command the player with the ball has to dribble the ball under control while attempting to tag others. If he does then they also get their ball and attempt the same.

Freeze Tag

Every player starts with a ball in a grid except two taggers (in different color bibs). After 3 seconds, the taggers are free to tag anyone with a ball. If tagged, they have to freeze with their legs apart and ball by side. They can be released (or unfrozen) by another free player dribbling ball up to them and passing ball through frozen players legs. Swap taggers after 30 seconds or if they freeze everybody!

This can also be played without the ball, just as a tag game. To be unfrozen, free players crawl through the legs of the frozen players.

Hospital Tag

Lay out appropriate sized grid, with a small square in the middle (the hospital). Make 2 players taggers, who have to chase others. If tagged on shoulder for instance, player has to hold shoulder with one hand until they can run into the hospital to free themselves. Game gets amusing if player is tagged 2-3 times in open!

Everybody's it!

Every player starts with a ball in a grid. On command they can hunt each other down and if they can touch their ball against somebody else's then they score a point. This teaches them to be creative, fake to get a view of someone's ball or in turn shield their own ball from attack!

Other Simple Ideas

Can use control ball from air to thigh then dribble away quickly 5 touches. Then use air to foot. Dribble in area. On command 'switch' leave ball and find another. Continue dribbling. All players like opportunities to challenge themselves. For instance, once in a while use outside of foot and left foot – Get players used to using all surfaces of their feet.

Minefield

Two teams turn cones upside down or right way up to score in 30 seconds!

Variations of Minefield

Dribble round cone in order to pick up
Croquet – same as above only introduce knocking other persons ball away with your ball
Outside of foot (still w/knocking ball away). Can dribble around 2 at a time (schemer)

Play and Retrieve

Play individually or pair players up. Show them a couple of ways to retrieve ball then let them be creative! i.e. Throw ball away and give # of body parts to bring ball back with
of passes to hit server's feet
Coach/Server moves to a different position after he kicks ball away

Remember at these ages we do not want to say the one with the most points chooses a consequence for all the rest! Most players in this age range will lie about their score... especially little boys! A coach should be aware that if he/she plays a game with points and asks the first boy what did you get and he says 'N' (a number), the next will say 'N+1', etc.! Be careful!!

See the OYSA Coaching Manual on CD Rom for other age-appropriate activities!

Practical Session Information for Coaches of U6-U8

Please note that most coaches of these age groups are fairly inexperienced in the game. I find the best way for them to learn and to experience the frustrations of their 6-8 year olds is to bring a ball and participate in the activities that they are asking their players to do!

Please remember that although U6-8 players do not need static stretching you are working with **adults** who do, so while you are introducing yourself and explaining the clinic format make them stretch whatever they need!

WARM-UP

I usually pick 2 of the above games to show them 2 examples, for instance Sharks and Minnows (without a ball) to get them enthused and having fun, and then Red Light Green Light to get a ball involved in a simple exercise.

DRIBBLING

After some fun warm-up activities, ask the coaches to dribble in a defined rectangular area. Ninety percent (85%) of all players in the world, prefer to kick a ball with the right foot. Consequently, 85% of all young players will dribble the ball round in a counter-clockwise direction. Coaches must recognize this problem and attempt to get their players comfortable with both the left and right foot.

Get the chin off the chest!

At the youngest ages, teams usually play 3v3. There is no such thing as 3v3! In reality, the game is 1v5 because all players play with their head down concentrating on the ball! We want them to look up to be aware of what is around them. There is a simple activity to help do this, called Body Part Dribble. Have all players dribble their ball around in the set area and when the coach calls out a certain body-part, for instance 'hand' then the players stop the ball with their hand. Try this a few times then the coach does not call out but simply points to the body part on his/her own body. This will quickly get the players to look up after each gentle touch on the ball.

Find your own space!

Then instead of having to look up for the coach, just let the kids play without bumping into each other. Stop the players when a few are close to each other, then get them to stand with their arms out to the side and twist gently from the waist. If they can touch one another player, they are too close! Then guarantee them that the next time you stop them, they will all find their own space. As a coach, one must stand in an appropriate spot to see the whole field of play. He or she can wait until every player is in their own space before calling stop. This way show the coaches that they can stand in a position to see everybody and recognize certain situations in which to stop the players to make positive points.

Shielding/Turning (for 7-8 year olds)

Introduce the concept of shielding the ball using hands first (younger players will comprehend this infinitely quicker as they are more dexterous with their hands than feet). Each player has a partner with one ball between them. (The Coach should give a good picture to start so they do not go straight down and bang heads). One player tries to keep the ball away from coach. The only rules are that the ball has to remain on the ground and that you can only maneuver it with one hand at a time. If partner (coach) touches the ball with his/her hand possession changes! When coach wins ball, demonstrate that you don't have to run away, just simply place your body frame between the ball and the opponent.

Secondly, tell players not to travel – can stay in one spot and still retain possession. Third, get shielder to keep hip pointing to partner. Fourth, play shielding game using feet. Fifth, give everyone a ball in the rectangle and if coach (without ball) approaches them they are to turn away to shield. Coach can introduce inside and outside of foot turns this way.

Simple Body Fake or Trick!

All kids/players love to learn new tricks! Instructor can use their favorite trick or any Coerver move as long as they break it into very small steps. I prefer to teach tricks without the ball first!

Get all participants to stand 3 steps back from their ball to learn the foot positioning first before complicating things with the ball! Lift the left foot up, take a small diagonal step forward (to the left), bend the left knee and drop the left shoulder down. Then lift the right foot up and take a quick hop diagonally forward to the right. When the ball is involved, on the hop push the ball forward in the same direction with whichever part of the foot is comfortable, preferably the right hand side of the laces of the right shoe. Let them practice on their own for 30 seconds. Do not spend long on this exercise. Some players will understand the concept and this will begin to rub off on the players around. I have had a 3 year old do this fake at camp and remember it the next day! Only spend 3-4 minutes on this then move onto another high intensity activity.

Windows '98

Place a number of windows around an area (2 cones close together). 2 players have to dribble through the window to score a point. Only rule is not to dribble through same window *twice in a*

row! The Coach must introduce vision at this point. Head for the window that is open (i.e. no-one around it) so you don't have to stop and wait your turn! Let them play once and then can give some suggestions for the technique to use!

PASSING

U6 Players usually are not psychologically ready for passing to their teammates and are still in the mindset of parallel play – each is playing a separate game in their head. Still it is never too early to give them a concept, as some will get it and again it will begin to rub off on the others in their peer group. Most U8's who have played before are ready for the concept of passing to a team mate. The following game is ideal to introduce passing to a partner.

Windows '98

Place a number of windows around an area (2 cones close together). 2 players have to pass through the window to score a point. Only rule is not to pass through same window **twice in a row!** The Coach must introduce passing and communication at this point. Let them play once and then can give some suggestions for the technique to use!

Do not berate kids for using their toes! They will use whatever part of their foot that is comfortable for them. Simply suggest different areas of the foot and tell them why (more surface area etc.) I like to use the example of when Brazil beat England in 1997 1-0, Romario scored toe-poking the ball in the corner as it was the only part of his outstretched body that could reach the ball. Ask the coaches if you think the Brazilian coach slammed Romario against the lockers after the game for using his toes?

Advance the game for U8 players by giving double points for left foot or outside of foot passes.

3 teams (3 blue, 3 orange, 3 yellow)

Have to pass through window (gate) to score a point. How many can you score in 30 seconds. If balls collide – deduct 1 point.

Death on the Nile!

10x30 grid. 3 teams of 3 players, and 3 balls. Each team gets one minute in the middle (the river). Count # of interceptions. Other 2 teams have to play the balls across the 'river' back and forth.

Introduce calling for the ball, then passing to a teammate on same side to open 'channels'.

Within game can coach recommended technique for passing (with inside of foot and why) & receiving. One can also introduce simple deception at this point (faking the pass & knowing defensively what they are trying to read to anticipate).

FINISHING

Too many players will not shoot on goal when given the opportunity, they would rather pass it off whether they are in a better position or not! This mainly stems from the fact that they are feeling pressured and scared to miss, because of what parents, coaches or fellow players may say to them. As coaches, we must always be positive, encourage kids to shoot when the chance occurs and stamp out any negative comments from parents or players when children miss that target. Even pro's only score 10-15% of their chances!

U6 Finishing

Simply having the coach stand between 2 flags (the goal) and having kids dribble ball in and try to kick it in the goal is enough to start. Of course the goalkeeper (coach) lets most balls in! Then we can progress to other finishing games...

Crab Soccer

Divide the kids into 2 teams of 3-4 players. Set up a grid with a goal at one end. Have one team (each with a ball) stand on the opposite end line from the goal and get them to dribble around the other team (down on hands and feet like crabs with bottoms off the floor). If player scores, have them pick ball up run back to start line and try again. Switch teams after 1-2 minutes.

Get out of here

Play “Get out of here” (works for 8-12 year olds) - Two teams in a line stand at opposite corner flags. The coach stands on the half way line with all the balls. Have the kids name their teams! Play 1v1 or 2v2 in a 10 x 15 yard grid to 2 yard goals, with the first 1 or 2 from each side coming out as soon as the coach puts a ball on the field. The coach is boss of the balls! Introduce penalty for encroaching! When a goal is scored or the ball goes out of play, the coach shouts ‘Get out of here!’ and the players have to go to the back of their line. As soon as the coach yells, he can put another ball on the field for the next two players from each team to play. The game is continuous till the coach has no balls left. They will soon collect all the balls back! Encourage players to shoot as soon as they see a sight of goal!

4 goal open/close game 25 seconds (3 teams of 2-3 players)

Then introduce four small goals, one each on the mid-lines of the grid described above. Have 3 teams of 3 players. Four goal game with gates. One team is assigned to be gatekeepers, one player standing in each goal and the coach goes in the fourth. They are to act as a gate, designed to close or open the goal (step to the side or in) when directed by the coach pointing or calling name. The other players (each team with a ball) play to score on any open goal by passing through it. Then try game with only one ball on the field. Then develop to... ‘THE GAME!’

Finish with 3 fields of 2v2, with a different method of scoring on each field.

The Coach can use any number of different options! Or go straight to...

“The Game” 3v3/4v4 to goals with one ball!

Every coach has experienced a kid tugging on his/her shirt asking ‘when are we going to scrimmage?’ A coach should always try to let the kids scrimmage for a third or so of practice in the format that they will play in season.

For the younger kids this will be 3v3. The coach should be the ‘boss of the balls’ serving balls into play until they are all out of play. Each player must retrieve one ball to the coach to resume game.

Please don’t make any kid sit out. **Play games of inclusion!** If you have an odd number, play 3v4 or 4v5. Don’t be too set on even numbers – it doesn’t matter. If teams are wildly uneven fix things by having one or two players switch teams.

Excite kids with their own development. You have to be very organized!

Review objectives of soccer activities...

- 1. Get players to solve problems**
- 2. Foster cooperation and teamwork**
- 3. When does the coach control the game as opposed to the players?**
- 4. Use games that bring out an aspect of the real game**
- 5. Excitement – get kids ‘juiced up!’**
- 6. Create environments to bring ideas out. Show kids how to survive!**

Please view our website at www.oregonyouthsoccer.org for other good coaching information!

TOPIC: _____
Coach Name: _____



(Activities should be developmentally appropriate.)

<u>(WARM-UP)</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION</u>	<u>KEY COACHING POINTS</u>
<u>INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES</u>		
<u>SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES</u>		
<u>LARGE GROUP ACTIVITIES</u>		

When Should We Teach Positions?

by
Jan Smisek, US Soccer U-14 National Coaching Coordinator
with Dave Schumacher, WSYSA Coaching Director

At youth coaching clinics and licensing courses across the country, the question of when to teach positions is usually raised. The fact that questions and concerns continue to be asked, mainly by coaches of 9 or 11 year olds, suggest that it is important to address this issue. Many coaches of this age group seem to be focusing on organizing players to play in specific positions once they begin playing 6 v 6, 7 v 7 or 9 v 9. It also appears that, at this point, these coaches are abandoning the use of small-sided games, 3 v 3, 4 v 4 or 5 v 5, as a teaching tool in their practices.

Because there are more players on the field at this age, inexperienced coaches feel an overwhelming need to manufacture structure at the expense of continuing to build a solid base of individual techniques and a clear comprehension of individual and small group tactics. Many coaches fall back on their familiarity with other American team sports, where positional play and structure are a natural and fundamental part of playing the game. As a result, these coaches create practices filled with an array of contrived, unrealistic drills designed to get players to spread out in an attempt to resemble the adult game. Providing the structure of being a defender, midfielder or forward starts to become the guiding force in their approach.

This is not to say that as we begin to add more players on the field 4 v 4 to 9 v 9 we ignore that team roles start to occur and that players should be allowed to experience these various roles. It should not, however, assume high priority in coaching 9-11 year olds.

Soccer is different! Its foundation is based upon basic techniques and elementary principles required by all players. A young player's ability to perform the basic techniques of the game; passing, dribbling, receiving, shooting, heading, and tackling, is directly related to the application of simple principles of play and is critical to their development and future success. It is therefore vital that coaches continue to play small-sided games such as 3 v 3 and 4 v 4 in practices. Small-sided games increase the number of touches on the ball, do not allow players to hide or be excluded, and provide simple but realistic soccer challenges and decisions. In addition to small-sided games at practice, providing players a variety of playing experiences in games produces the appropriate environment for learning to take place.

Goalkeeping is a unique role and needs training of special techniques. However, it must not be forgotten that in today's game goalkeepers are soccer players and need exposure to the same techniques and principles as field players. Youth coaches must safeguard against limiting players to just playing in goal at these young ages, we must develop well-rounded soccer players with some ending up as goalkeepers later in life.

A major element of soccer is decision-making. Players must make decisions individually and collectively regarding possession, penetration and defending. Playing in a particular area of the field only provides one view

of the options or choices available to the player with the game. It is important for young players, as they learn the game, that they be exposed to playing in different areas (roles/positions) to gain the perspective (vision) which will help increase their recognition of situations and decision-making options. When players play in various areas of the field they develop an increased awareness of relationships to teammates, opponents, the ball and the goal. Over time, through practice and competition, players will be able to apply basic techniques and simple principles of play in different areas of the field. This is the foundation from which positional play develops.

As players get older they will naturally start to gravitate to particular areas of the field. This is usually based on personality, natural athletic qualities and the skills they have developed. Coaches must appreciate that playing a position is part of a player's overall maturation in the game. Players should be allowed to gravitate towards these roles when they demonstrate a predisposition to the role. Players by the age of 13 or 14 will start to feel more comfortable in one or two roles/functions. This feeling may even be apparent much earlier, however, be on guard about limiting players too early just because they "like to play defender". Players will continue to develop physically well into their teens and they may become more effective in other roles as they mature. Playing a position is a natural end to playing the game rather than a predetermined starting point by which the youth coach organizes practices or Saturday's line up.

Coaches must remember that they are working with 9, 10, and 11 year olds. They display distinct characteristics mentally, physically and socially. It is the ideal age for challenging technical development and it is the point at which they begin to understand the importance of cooperation in team play. They are capable of grasping basic principles of play, such as support, and their application in a small-sided environment. We need to take this into account and keep our expectations and demands of players within this context. The foundation of the game must be created in the small-sided environment. We can't expect players to see the pictures and make good decisions in larger sided games until they master them in small-sided games. Most of all, be patient. We don't teach children to read by starting with "War & Peace". In this respect, soccer is not different!

Mike Smith

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