



U-6 & U-8 Coaching Manual

Table of Contents

- 1. Welcome and Introduction**
- 2. U-6 & U-8 Players and Parents**
- 3. U-6 & U-8 What to Expect**
- 4. Coaching Rationale**
- 5. Coaching U-6 & U-8, What to Avoid**
- 6. Principals of Conduct**
- 7. Team Administration & Risk Management**
- 8. Typical Training Session**
- 9. Notes for the Absolute Beginner Coach and Coaches Resources**
- 10. Practice Ideas and Fun Games**
- 11. Coaches Training Courses and Continuing Education**
- 12. References**

Part 1: Welcome and Introduction

On behalf of the Earlham Soccer Club, I want to welcome you to our program and thank you for choosing to be a coach with our organization. Our club's philosophy is very simple, yet extremely important.

We exist to provide a fun, educational, and supervised activity for area kids who want to play soccer.

Stop what you are doing for a while and ask yourself this question: "Why am I coaching?" It's a simple exercise but do take it seriously. Take the time to actually write the answers on an index card and limit your answers to the top three reasons.

As a new soccer coach, the odds are good that you agreed to do this because someone asked you to do it, but after reading this, we hope you will understand there is more to it than that. If your top answers include "because nobody else wanted to" or "I want to coach my son or daughter because they need discipline" please seriously consider stepping down. Don't feel you are "forced" to do this or your team will be without a coach, give us a call, and we will find another coach for the team. On the other hand, if some of your reasons include "I need an after-work activity which relaxes me and allows me to be with my kids and have fun", or, "I love this game and want to pass my passion and knowledge on to a younger generations", please stick around and read on.

O.K., now that I am talking to the coaches who really want to be here and who have noble causes, I will let you in on a secret. During the upcoming season the following can and probably will happen.

- There will be cold and hot days, sunny and rainy days, windy and extremely windy days, humid and dry days.
- The kids will yell, run around uncontrollably, play with each other, not listen to you, and overall act like healthy, happy 7 and 8 year olds do.
- A parent will say something to you that will offend you, hurt you and want to make you quit.
- You will win and you will lose, there will be happy moments and sad moments.
- There will be days when the kids seem to be on another planet and you will lose confidence in yourself. At least one of these times will be on a "game day." Trust me, it's not you!

The secret is to never forget why you are here in the first place. Go over your reasons for coaching and prioritize them, write them on an index card, go to Kinko's and laminate it. Once your card is laminated, keep it in your short's pockets during practice and **never forget why you are there**. You will be a very successful and happy coach.

Part 2: U – 6 & U – 8 PLAYERS

It is the dream of every inexperienced coach to have a manual handed to him or her with all the answers to their problems. This coaching manual does have a section which includes simple drills and games for your practices, but it is intended to make you think, and understand exactly what you are getting into. We will therefore start with a list of characteristics of six to eight year olds... the wonder years.

They are

- Still self-focused and individualistic (me, mine, my) but many are willing to share.
- Attention span is not at the “competitive” stage.
- Still very honest but most will tell a “white lie” on things that are embarrassing, they cannot do, or they haven’t done. For instance if you ask them at practice, kids did you practice at home this week? They will all scream back yeeeahhhh. But if you ask them again and make eye contact to one in particular, they will tell you the truth.
- Easily bruised psychologically. They will remember negative comments for a long time! Praise often. Give “hints”, don’t criticize.
- Inclined towards small group activities.
- Always in motion: scratching; blinking; jerking; rocking. Hand-eye coordination is better, while most will still struggle with eye-foot coordination. Note that this is the exact opposite of children in Italy (for instance) where you will find few U-8 kids who can dribble a basketball yet most of them can begin to juggle a soccer ball.
- Starting to imitate older players or sports heroes. Want the same "gear" as them.
- Developing physical confidence. (Most are able to ride a two-wheeler.)

They

- Understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play and remembering what goal they are going for... but, in the heat of battle, they will sometimes still forget. They still find it difficult to really be aware of more than one thing at a time.
- Lack sense of pace. They go flat out until they drop.
- Want everybody to like them.
- Respond well to positive reinforcement
- Have limited understanding of personal evaluations. "If they try hard, they performed well" regardless of the actual performance. Thus, they need to be encouraged constantly, and asked "Now, can you do this?"

And, moreover,

- Skeletal system growing rapidly. Often results in apparent lack of coordination.

- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed. Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. make sure that they get adequate water breaks
- If you are not energetic and fun you will easily bore them.
- Respond well to positive reinforcement.

What to expect:

Six, seven and eight-year-old players are a bit more compliant than their U-6 counterparts. They will be able to follow 2 or 3 step instructions and are starting to have a good understanding about what it means to play a "game". They are also starting to cooperate more with their teammates. In fact, they now will recognize that they even have teammates by the fact that they occasionally, and I mean occasionally, will pass the ball to a teammate, on purpose. Often, they will repeat the phrase "I can't do that!", but, will quickly run to you to show you that they can, even when they only think that they can. Some other things that you can expect to happen during a season with this age group are:

- There will be at least 200-300 falls during the season, but, now they will usually pick themselves back up.
- The puddle in front of the goal is still too tempting to resist.
- Some of the girls are a lot tougher than the boys.
- They will still want to wear a pinnie even when the color is identical to their shirt.
- It will be impossible to remember who is whose best friend as you try to make up teams.

U-6 & U-8 PARENTS

It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but the U-6 & U-8 player still views their parents as the most significant people in their lives. A pre-season meeting should be held with the parents so that objectives and team policies can be addressed. Some topics that you may want to address at this meeting are:

- A means of contacting everyone without one person doing all of the calling. (Phone chains and e-mail lists are great).
- Have the team parent handle all the details like making a treat schedule for after the games. The post-game treats are almost as important as the game!
- Complete all paperwork required by your league or club.
- Discuss the laws of the game.
- Training and game schedules. How you feel about starting and ending on time, what your attendance expectations are etc.
- What each player should bring to training: inflated ball (not required), filled water bottle, soccer attire, shin guards (Cleats are not mandatory.) Also go over what they should bring to games and when they should arrive.

- Most importantly, your philosophy about coaching U-6 or U-8 players. Let them know that everyone will have equal playing time; that the game does not look like the older player's games; that you are there to ensure that their player is safe and has a good time, as well as learn about soccer, that we are here to have fun, enjoy some fresh air, and make new friends.
- What your expectations for them is during game time. How do you want them to cheer? Do they know that they should not coach from the sidelines? It is hard for many parents to understand that it is best if they do not give specific instructions (e.g., Kick it hard, Johnny!) from the sidelines; now is the time to explain this to them.
- The Earlham Soccer Club has assigned an assistant coach for all U-8 teams along with referees. U-6 teams do not have assistant coaches and the coaches act as referees. In U-8 you can accomplish a lot with a 8:1 player to coach ratio, but you can accomplish a lot MORE with an assistant. Let the assistant know that all he or she has to do is show up and help you out, or let you know in advance he or she won't be there.
- Do they know they should not be keeping track of the scores?
- Above all, try to enjoy yourself. If you do they probably will too.

Note #1: It is common at this age group to have a player who is maturing faster than the rest. These players are easily spotted as they will run faster and are more coordinated than the rest. As a coach you must be conscious of these players for a number of reasons:

1. Because they are physically able to just run circles around everyone else, they will tend to not want to practice the fundamentals and learn to pass.
2. As a coach, do not fall to the temptation of “sticking” them at forward and watch them run, score, and win games. You will develop future bad habits for the player and their teammates, as they will grow up thinking soccer is all about giving the ball to one person.
3. Don't confuse their current abilities with “special” soccer skills. Many of these “earlier maturing players” end up giving up on soccer later on, once everyone else “catches up” to them physically and they go from being a superstar to an average player.

As coaches, the best thing we can do for these kids is to move them up an age group, so they can play in a more “competitive” environment.

Note #2: It is common at this age group to have a player that is clearly slower or weaker than the rest. These players are easily spotted as they are struggling to keep up with their teammates. As a coach you must be conscious of these players for a number of reasons:

Good teachers and coaches always see potential in kids and are never stopped by the current “realities” of a child. You will have players that today are behind the rest, but these kids can be, and often are tomorrow's superstars. I am often asked why I think soccer is the greatest game on earth. The answers are many, but one of course is the fact that soccer players come in all sorts of sizes and shapes, and as a result, the “dream” is available to everyone.

Your only role with these very special kids is to make sure they fall in love with the game and keep coming back.

Note #3: As a coach, you are going to start meeting parents that are becoming very competitive and want the absolute “best” for their child. I suggest that you talk to these parents and give them the following advice:

1. Clearly explain to them that your team is a recreational team and does not cater to the environment they are asking for. Your team does not keep score, your team plays everyone, your team is fun.

2. Explain to them, that there are other special programs for kids and families that want “more” out of the soccer experience. By all means, have them contact me.

Part 3: U-8 What to Expect

This is intended to be a “cheat sheet” for beginning coaches. Experience has taught us that the following scenarios are very likely to happen. If we know what to expect, we will be more effective in dealing with the hundreds of situations that come up. This will help us relax, and, in turn, allow us to enjoy the unpredictable nature of working with these children even more. Here are some of the things that we can expect.

- Most players will try to be tough and not cry immediately when something is hurt.
- No matter how loud we shout, or how much you "practice" it, they will still have a very hard time passing the ball during a game.
- Don't even consider teaching defensive positional play, it simply not a positive thing.
- Two minutes after the start of a game, every player will be within 5-10 yards of the ball.
- They will do or say something that is the funniest thing you have ever seen or heard. Please laugh with them.
- They will do something that is absolutely hysterical. Make sure that you laugh!
- They will be very focused on what the treat is after the game but the game is becoming more important than the treats.
- Keep a spare pump in your bag as the players usually do not realize that their ball is flat until they try to kick it, or the coach tells them that it is flat.
- School conflicts will come up... please, let them go (they must face their teachers five days a week).
- They will wear their uniform to bed.

Here are a couple of “Game Day” suggestions to help keep the chaos to a (barely) controllable level.

- Parents are to sit on the opposite side of the field as the team.
- DO NOT ALLOW PARENTS OR COACHES STAND BEHIND THE GOAL!
- Kids get easily distracted during the games. You will be paying much closer attention to the game than they will be! One thing you have to deal with is keeping the “resting players” near you while they wait for their turn to go in. You should have one adult on your sideline (preferably you or

your assistant) whose main job is to keep an eye on them and keep them entertained and “into the game.” You MAY have some success asking the subs to sit while they wait, which keeps down their mobility, but you may not!

Part 4: Coaching Rationale

Players at this age are already determining if an activity is fun or boring but the parents still decide which activity their children will participate in. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited and wanting to come back to, and the activity needs to be organized and “appropriate” or the parents will pull their child from that activity. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives.

With the above assumptions, let’s look at some things that we can do to energize the U-8 players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically initiate the sign up for next year!

- Each session should be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible. Involve the ball in as many activities as possible. Basic movements such as running, skipping, hopping, etc. need to be emphasized. If these can be done while kicking, catching, rolling, or dribbling a ball... all the better!
- Training should not last for more than one hour. This is primarily due to physical fatigue and attention span considerations. We recommend one practice per week but some teams begin to train twice a week. Any more than this may lead to their and your burnout.
- Be prepared. Plan your practice session and have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can get into one hour. Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!
- You can begin to teach team play and passing. The biggest challenge will be that few can actually look up, determine if there is a free team-mate open and actually pass the ball. Passing will result more out of just kicking the ball away.
- They are ready to pick up soccer “moves” and will imitate just about everything you show them. Many of them will practice at home the “cool” things you teach them. You must demonstrate for them to grasp the concept.
- Plan for at least 4, two minute drink breaks, especially in warmer weather. Their "cooling system" is not as efficient as in older players.

Discipline

Unfortunately, discipline is something you have to think about and plan for, though it’s not that big a problem for this age group. Running laps for punishment is totally inappropriate for this age. Most kids will respond well to “redirection” most of the time. (This is one reason an assistant is helpful!) However, once in a while you have to deal with a kid who is being especially uncooperative and disruptive. If redirection fails, a good suggestion is to simply ask the kid to sit quietly and watch for a bit, just like a time-out. Not getting attention and not getting to play are usually pretty good incentives to get back with the program.

Part 5: Coaching U-6 & U-8 Players, What to Avoid

There will be times that you are going to show up at practice, after a hard day at work, a bit angry, and are welcomed at practice by a parent upset about their child playing time three weeks ago. To top it all off, only half the team shows up and you are practicing in a cold, drizzling and windy day.

What do you do? Obviously go back to part 1 of this manual and remember “*Why you are here*”, but most of all, please avoid these coaching pitfalls.

Eliminate the Three “L’s”

- **Laps**
- **Lines**
- **Lectures**

These three things must be eliminated from training at all costs.

Laps – They are easy to administer but are boring and kids hate them. They have very little value as far as soccer fitness is concerned. There are a number of exercises, which can be performed with a ball, which can address soccer fitness.

Lines – Unless the line moves quickly, kids at this age hate to sit in a line. Since most practices and activities at this age last 1 hour, you should always strive to have 100% participation in the activity.

Lectures – I don’t think we need to expand on this subject. You hated lectures when you were a kid and still do as an adult. They are no different.

Coaching Activities Checklist

Make sure that your activities include the following:

- Are the activities fun?
- Are the activities organized?
- Are all the players involved in the activities?
- Are the activities safe?

Remember This

- We learn 10% of what we read
- We learn 20% of what we hear
- We learn 30% of what we see
- We learn 80% of what we do

Let’s quit talking and let the children play.

Part 6: Principles of Conduct

Safety

1. Your first responsibility is the health and safety of all participants.
2. It is recommended that coaches become certified in basic first aid.
3. Be prepared to handle first aid situations as well as medical emergencies at all practices and games, both home and away; have and know how to use a properly supplied first aid kit; always carry emergency medical release forms and follow up all injuries with parents/guardians.
4. Know and understand the Laws of the Game.
5. Inspect player's equipment and field conditions for safety reasons.
6. Implement appropriate training programs to make sure players are fit for practice and competition.
7. Supervise and control your players so as to avoid injury situations.

Player Development

1. Develop the child's appreciation of the game
2. Keep winning and losing in proper perspective. Do not keep track of scores.
3. Be sensitive to each child's developmental needs.
4. Educate the players to the technical, tactical, physical, and psychological demands of the game for their level.
5. Implement rules and equipment modifications according to the player's age group.
6. Players need to have fun and receive positive feedback.
7. Practice should be conducted in the spirit of enjoyment and learning.
8. Provide the appropriate number of training sessions and games according to the player's stage of development.
9. Strive to help each player reach their full potential and be prepared to move to the next stage of development.

Ethics

1. Strive to maintain integrity within our sport.
2. Know and follow all rules and policies set forth by the ESC, leagues, state and national assoc.
3. Work in the spirit of cooperation with officials, administrators, coaches and spectators to provide the participants with the maximum opportunity to develop.
4. Be a positive role model.
5. Set the standard for sportsmanship with opponents, referees, administrators and spectators.
6. Keep sport in proper perspective with education.

7. Encourage moral and social responsibility.
8. Coaches should continue their own education in the sport.
9. Don't hesitate to cheer and congratulate the opponents.
10. Shake hands after each game with opposing team

Part 7: Team Administration & Risk Management

Developing a Coaching Philosophy

If this was baseball, basketball or football, most of you could envision a “style” of play or coaching method or philosophy, which you would try to instill in your team. Most U.S. coaches would have no problem envisioning their teams playing like Lombardi's Green Bay Packers, Jackson's Bulls or Lasorda's Dodgers but very few of you would think of Herrera's Inter, Zagallo's Brazil, Rinus Michels's Ajax or Sir Alf Ramsey's U.K. national team.

What I am trying to say here, is that unfortunately, most coaches choose to follow the example of “coaches' personalities” such as a Ditka, Roy Williams or Jackson and insist on applying those methods and philosophies to the game of soccer. Fortunately, most soccer coaches soon realize that in soccer they cannot call a time-out and stop the game, there are no innings to give a coach the chance of making adjustments, and there are certainly no offense and defense teams that play only when it's their time.

As a result of this, most soccer coaches soon accept the fact that during the game, they are mere spectators, and as such their job is to simply observe, take notes, identify strength and weaknesses and address those issues during practice. This is why most soccer coaches are simply unknown and nameless to most, and this is why soccer is the greatest sport on earth. Soccer belongs to the players, free and able to make their choices during a game!

Why am I writing this to you? Because hopefully, the next time that you feel the urge to go into the field and “position your players, or shouting instructions at the top of your lungs to your players, you will think of this, and hopefully you will look around and realize that this is not about us coaches, and a smile will come to your face

Ultimately, as a coach, you should develop a coaching philosophy, which should address the following:

1. Why you coach.
2. Player development
3. Fun and purpose

Pre-Season Parent-Coach Meeting

1. Discuss coaching philosophy
2. Discuss team goals
3. Discuss what is expected of parents; i.e. transportation, communication, general program support, and good sportsmanship
4. Ask for information; i.e. medical history, parent skills inventory

Equipment Needs

1. For players – shin guards, proper shoes (cleats are optional, must not have toe cleat), clothing appropriate for training and climate, water bottles, and care for equipment
2. For team/coach – cones, bibs or vests, extra balls, air pump, first aid kit, water, and an adequate playing surface

Risk Management and Coaching Liability

Acceptance of a coaching position means acceptance of an obligation of duty to the players.

To provide proper instruction for the activity

- To provide proper equipment for the activity
- To provide proper supervision for practice and games
- To take proper precautions to guard against post-injury aggravation

Duties are assumed by you, the coach

- Agree to coach – act like a reasonable coach
- Agree to treat injuries – act reasonably when treating an injury
- Agree to administer – act like a reasonable administrator

Coaches Safety Checklist

Field Conditions:

- Goal posts anchored ____
- Edges rounded on goal posts ____
- Posts welded properly ____
- Glass/foreign objects removed from field ____
- Corner markers covered ____
- Holes or cracks in field filled ____

Weather:

- Approaching rain or thunderstorms ____
- Lightning ____
- Heat: Light clothing, water ____
- Cold: Proper clothing

Equipment:

- Covered shin-guards on each player ____
- Jewelry removed
- Shoes adequate for conditions
- Ball in good shape

Team Conditions:

- Train and warm-up properly ____
- Prohibit non-acceptable activities or behaviors ____
- Place players together of similar ability ____

Medical Information:

- Know special needs of all players ____
- Always carry medical release forms ____

Schedule:

- Practice begins ____
- Practice ends ____
- Arrange supervision prior to practice ____
- Arrive early enough to police fields ____

Coaches Kit

- First Aid ____
- Player I.D. cards ____
- Parent's phone numbers ____

Coach:

- Understand the Laws of the Game ____
- Understand the role of the referee and linesman ____
- Attend coaching clinics ____
- Have balanced attitude ____

Parent:

- Communicate with parent, especially after injuries ____
- Let parent know schedule ____
- Recruit their help in supervision ____
- Discuss your philosophies ____

Part 8: Typical Training Session

Here are some items that should be included in a U-6 & U-8 training session:

WARM-UP: A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that should involve the ball. A great warm up is to simply mark off an area with some cones, place “obstacles” or cones in it and have the kids dribble around the area with the ball. As you introduce dribbling skills, have the kids perform those skills as they approach the obstacle. Example you could teach the kids an outside of the foot turn. Have the players dribble around the warm up area (using the proper technique) and as they approach a cone, they would have to perform an outside of the foot turn. This very simple warm up procedures accomplishes fitness and technique training all at the same time.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES: Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1 v. 1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. Most of the activities used for U-6 players, such as a kind of tag game, or "Red Light/Green Light", or a game where players are trying to knock their ball through gates works. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "loser sits". As the kids get better, you can alter these games to make them a little harder. Variations can be: Perform the activity without looking at the ball, make the space smaller, add limits to how many touches the players have etc.

PLAY THE GAME: Move on to the real game, but, make sure it is a 2 v. 2, 3 v. 3, or 4 v. 4 game. Switch the game every 10 minutes or so. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Use cones, if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. It is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

Coaching Hint: Don't hesitate to get parents to help. It is very hard to do this stuff solo.

WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK: Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their thigh and then catch it. It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

Coaching hints: It really is best to think about your practice session in advance and write down what you plan to do. Don't count on any activity, except the soccer game, to work for more than 10 minutes. It is also very helpful to have backup activities/games, because sometimes your ideas or plans just don't work. If something isn't fun and the kids aren't going along with it, get them into something else! Practice needs to be fun!

Part 9: Notes for the absolute beginner coach

What if you've never played soccer and are just trying to figure out the rules yourself? First off, don't panic! No matter what else is true, you can provide a fun, positive experience for the kids.

Secondly, help is available from the Earlham Soccer Club in the form of free coaches clinics, state sponsored clinics and training. Just need to ask me. To begin here are some more pointers:

You will want to acquaint yourself with the skills that the kids a little older than yours should be learning. You don't have to teach a lot of detailed skills, but you will want to at least point the kids in the right direction. Fun is more important than skills, but there is no harm in getting them going. By far the most important skill to work with these kids on is ball control and passing.

You will also want to acquaint yourself with the rules and basic tactics of the game of soccer as played by older kids. Again, this is not because you will teach these things directly, but you CAN lay a foundation.

The big question you face is how to learn these things. The ESC is just beginning to provide coaching training (more on that elsewhere in this manual), which is a really excellent resource. However, you may also find some other resources helpful for at-home study. I have listed soccer training web sites below:

<http://www.earlhamsoccer.org/>

<http://www.iowasoccer.org/>

<http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/>

<http://www.finesoccer.com/>

<http://www.vintage-mortgage.com/michael/soccercoach/>

<http://www.flashdrills.com/>

<http://www.footy4kids.co.uk/> -- excellent resource

<http://www.southernsoccerscene.com/>

http://www.uysa.org/education_tech.html

<http://www.capefearsoccer.com/>

<http://www.soccer-for-parents.com/>

<http://www.soccer-drills-home.com/>

<http://www.coachyouthsoccer.com/>

<http://www.worldofsoccer.com/>

<http://www.joesoccer.com/> -- animated drills and fun games.

<http://www.nasl.com/coach.htm>

<http://www.decatursports.com/coach.htm>

The following equipment is useful for your practices:

- Cones for marking little fields, squares, goals, etc. It's nice to have the flat "disk cones" as well as the regular triangular cones. You can use the triangular cones to mark goals and the flat cones to mark a field, for instance.
- A few extra balls. Don't let the kids count on them, but it never hurts to have them. Some "pinnies" (bibs, practice vests, etc.).

You will want to encourage good form, but don't sweat it when they can't do it. It is nice (in fact, very good) for them to be able to tell you that they shouldn't kick the ball with their toes, but they will!

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA

"Keep Your Yard Clean"

Here is a game that involves kicking and is a good example of parallel play in that it involves all players on the team at one time, but, they are all acting as individuals during the game. This allows for individual differences in skill. The game is simple, fun, and easy to adapt to account for team size and experience.

The Game

Create a 'neutral area' between the two teams where no player is allowed into. This area can be as small as one yard and as big as 10 yards wide. The width is determined by how far the players can kick the ball.

Each player starts with a ball at his / her feet. On command, each team tries to keep their side of the game free of balls by kicking their ball over to the other team's side.

After an appropriate amount of time (when the balls become too scattered, or, the players are losing focus), call the game and count which side has the most balls on their side.

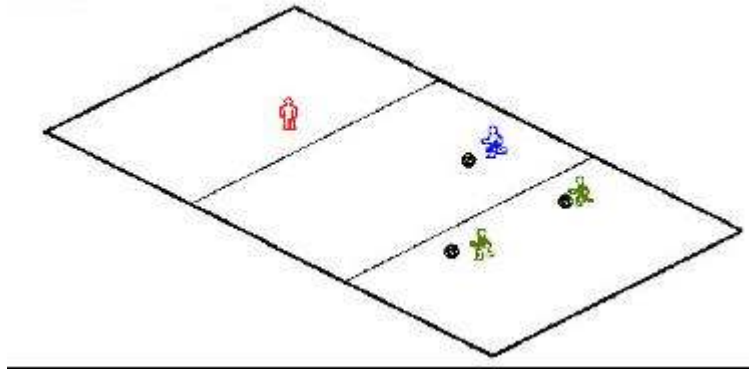
Distribute the balls evenly for another try if the players are still interested.

After players have found some success with this basic game, try these variations:

- Players can only use their left foot.
- Throw the ball back.
- Punt the ball back.
- Dribble the ball around a cone that has been set up in the middle of their "yard", then, kick the ball back.

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA

"Red Light...Green Light"



Here is a game that should be familiar to most U-6's. Again, the game is fun, simple to set up, and has direct application to the game. The skill that it is targeting is dribbling.

The Game

- Each player has a ball, except the one player that is designated as the "light".
- Lines from start to finish should be approximately 20 - 30 yds..
- Players start from the line opposite the "light". The "light" then turns away from the group shouting out "GREEN LIGHT". At this signal, the players start to dribble towards the "light".
- When the "light" turns back around, calling out "RED LIGHT", players must freeze their bodies and their ball.
- If the "light" catches players or a ball still moving, that player must take 5 steps back.
- The first player to cross the line where the "light" is standing is the winner and becomes the new "light".

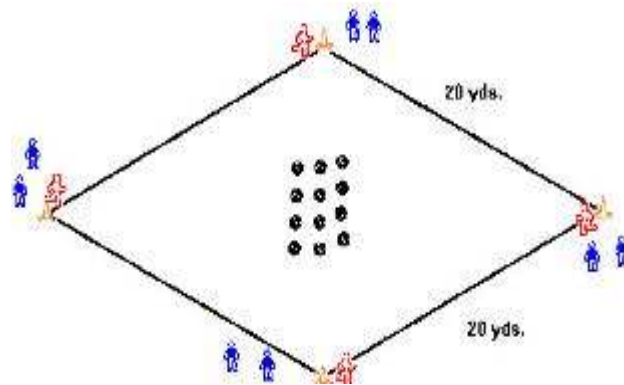
Variations

- You can start the game without using balls for younger players, then have them roll the ball with their hands, then use their feet.
- Have them perform this game with different methods, like hopping on one leg, rolling the ball backwards, in pairs while passing the ball back and forth with their hands etc.

Coaching hint: You will get a lot of "he/she cheated coach" be prepared to handle this with humor.

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA

"Steal the cheese"



The Game

- Object of the game is to get 3 balls back to your team's corner.
- You can only work at moving one ball at a time. You must dribble the ball back to the corner.
- You can "steal" a ball from an opponent's corner. But you cannot defend your ball in the corner from being stolen.
- The picture above illustrates this for a larger team than you will have. You will probably want to do this in a triangle, with pairs of kids at each corner and six balls in the middle. If there are only a few kids (3 or 4), then do it in a triangle or square with only one kid per "team".

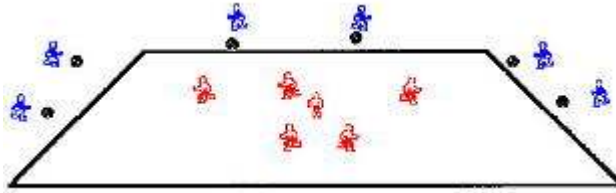
Coaching Points

- Since this is a competition, and fun, the players will not look at this session as a fitness exercise.
- Since there are only 6 balls, players must steal from other groups.
- Players need to keep their heads up and be aware of how the game is developing.

Variations

- Let younger players use their hands to carry the ball first.
- Let players steal the ball from their opponents while they are dribbling.

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA: "Foxes and Hunters"



The Game

Players on the inside are "Foxes". Players on the outside are "Hunters".

- Hunters dribble into the grid and try to dribble their ball into the Foxes so that it hits them below the knees.
- If a Fox is hit, the Fox drops down to one knee and tries to kick the ball away from the Hunters that are dribbling by.
- Once all of the Foxes are down, the teams switch roles.
- Time each team. the team that "stays alive" longest wins.

Coaching Points

- Discourage long range shooting at Foxes.
- Try feinting at the Foxes, trying to make them jump into the air, then get them when they come down.
- Work in pairs to try and corner elusive Foxes.

Variations

- The variations to this game are infinite. Think of any number of scenarios having to do with other animals or "policeman and robbers", "cowboys and Indians", "sharks and minnows" etc.
- Game can be altered in a multitude of ways, just let your imagination run wild.

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA: "Sharks and minnows"



The Game

- Dribblers (in Red) try to dribble through the three zones occupied by the blue defenders.
- Defenders must stay in their zones and try to kick any ball they intercept out of bounds.
- Dribblers go three at a time. If the dribbler ahead of you in your line gets their ball knocked out, you may start right away.
- As soon as the dribbler in front of you moves to the next zone, you can also go.

Coaching Points

- Good dribbling technique.
- Look for an opening..perhaps sending a teammate in early to act as a decoy, then, when the defense opens up, take that clue to penetrate.

Variations

- Start with only one defender in the middle zone as the shark. Anyone who gets their ball knocked out of bounds becomes a shark and joins the original shark.
- Have all the "minnows" go at once.
- Have sharks in the first and last zone and keep middle zone as a safe Island where sharks cannot go in. This can be used for rest before the next zone or it can be used to practice stopping in a zone.

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA: **”Pass Through the Tunnel:**

The Game

- Play in an area appropriate for the size group you are dealing with. Usually for U-8 35 by 35 yards.
- Divide the kids into two groups. One group has the ball the other group scatters in the area and keeps their legs apart.
- Start the game, and the players with the ball have a limited amount of time (i.e. two minutes) to dribble around the field, find a player with their legs apart and put the ball between the legs and retrieve it on the other side.
- After the time is up, switch sides. The player with the most “tunnel” points wins.

Coaching Points

- Make sure the “tunnel” players don’t situate themselves at the very corners of the grid.
- Make sure that they cannot score over and over in the same tunnel.
- This drill is designed to improve control and “touch”. Prohibit kids from “blasting” the ball through the tunnels. This could get dangerous. The players are to “gently” tap the ball with their inside or outside of their foot through the tunnel. Absolutely no toe balls.

Variations

- Subtract a tunnel point from players that either collide or their balls touch.
- Subtract a tunnel point every-time their ball goes out of bounds.
- Make them do this with their “weak” foot.
- You could pair up two kids and make it so a tunnel point is scored when a pass is completed under a tunnel. If you do not have enough players to do this, use cones for tunnels.
- Instead of tunnels, have the players without the ball stay with their legs close. A point is scored by putting the ball one side of the player and you going the opposite way to retrieve the ball behind the tunnel.

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA: "Passing by the Numbers"

The Game

- Define a playing grid. Usually 30 by 40 yards.
- Assign a number to all the players starting with 1 and continuing up through the number of players in the group.
- Give player number 1 a ball and begin to game.
- The player with the ball has to identify the player with the number higher than his/her and pass the ball to him/her, and so on. The last player in the group will pass to player no. 1 to start all over.

Coaching Points

- Resist the urge to solve the problems for them. Allow them to do this drill on their own at least for 5 min, sit back and watch the chaos.
- After a while, suggest that they all spread out from the person with the ball, and have the next player to receive the ball make a run towards the player with the ball and call out his/her number. Example: Player 1 has the ball, all the other players spread out and jog around player 1. Player 2, recognizing the fact that he/she is next, sprints towards player 1 and yells 2. After player 1 completes the pass, watch player 3 sprint towards player 2 (who now has the ball) to demand a pass (yelling three) and so on.
- This drill teaches recognition, spreading out, checking towards the ball to accept a pass, introduces the concept of sharing the ball, works on passing, receiving etc.

Variations

- You can actually use this drill for professional players by making it so difficult even they would be challenged by it. A list of variations are listed below:
1. Left foot only
 2. Work the numbers backwards
 3. Silence, nobody can talk, the only clue is the player running towards the ball
 4. One touch or two touches limit on the ball
 5. Skipping a number in between
 6. Adding two balls and have one group that goes even, one that goes odd
 7. The variations to this are limitless, just have fun with it.

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA: "Perimeter Passing Game"

The Game

- Mark out the playing area with cones. Usually a 30 by 40 grid.
- Divide the team into three groups and place one group on the outside of the grid, one player per side.
- The remaining two teams are in the middle. Make sure they are wearing different colors.
- Outside players are always with the team in possession of the ball and can be used at any time. Once an outside player has the ball, nobody can go "steal" it from them and they do have to pass it back to the same team (not necessarily the same player).
- The purpose of the game is to see which team can put together a series of passes (i.e. 4 in a row, 6,8,10 use your judgment).
- Every 5 min or so, switch an inside group with an outside group.

Coaching Points

- The team in possession of the ball always has a 2:1 numerical advantage, plus if they pass the ball outside to the neutral players, the ball is safe. You want to see if the players recognize this fact and use the neutral "supporting" players accordingly.
- Make sure that the neutral players run the lines and are not stationary. The fact that they cannot get into the game itself will be frustrating, but it will teach them to accept a supporting role and still be involved in the game.
- The longer they hold the ball the worse things get! This will soon become noticeable. This drill will improve their quickness and ability to make decisions in a hurry.

Variations

- Once again, the variations are limitless
1. Increase, decrease the size of the grid
 2. Switch feet, add limitations on touches
 3. Add a neutral player or players in the middle
 4. Add a small goal and tell them that after 5 complete passes they can shoot on goal

U-8 PRACTICE IDEA:

"Soccer"

The Game

- Simply split the team in half and play a regular game of soccer.

Coaching Points

- None are needed. Relax, sit back, watch kids being kids. Your only role here is to properly supervise the activity, which means no rough play, follow rules etc.
- This is probably the single most important game/practice session you can do. Let the kids learn from the game, without parent or coaching interference. The kids will love you for this and will keep coming back. If you feel the absolute urge to improve something, below you will find a list of variations that can be used to address specific problems.
- Do not overcomplicate the game with inbound rules and arguments over who gets the ball. Simply grab the ball and throw it back into the field of play.

Variations

- Add 2 goals to the sides. This allows for more shooting on goal, improves decision making as kids now have to determine which goal to attack (hopefully the one less guarded).
- Make the purpose of the game consecutive passes instead of scoring goals. Example you can say that a team can score a goal every time they complete 3 consecutive passes to their teammates.
- Add a three point line. This will encourage kids to actually shoot, instead of dribbling the ball all the way inside the goal.
- If you have a player that has a hard time getting involved or shy, you can try to make him/her the “super special” player. The key to super special players is that they wear a different color shirt and are always on offense. This means that if the red team has the ball, the super special player plays with the red. When the yellow team wins the ball, the super special player joins them in the attack. As they get older (u-10 and up) this player will be referred as target or neutral.

Part 11: Coaches training courses and continuing education

The Earlham Soccer Club is a member of the Iowa State Youth Soccer Association, who in turn is a member of the United States Youth Soccer Association who in turn is a member of the United States Soccer Federation who is a member of FIFA the Federation International Football Association. Sounds complicated? It really isn't.

There is only one International Soccer Federation FIFA, which in turn recognizes only one official soccer association in each Nation (United States Soccer Federation in the case of the U.S.), who in turns gives the rights for its youth program to the US Youth Soccer Federation and so forth.

Part of our dues goes directly toward receiving benefits for membership in this organization and amongst its many benefits, such as insurance, it provides with coaching training certification. At the State level, the Iowa Youth Soccer Association is able to provide a series of 2 youth modules, two coaching certificates, and one State soccer coaching license. Each course is taught in succession and goes from very simple to complex. Once you receive your State license you can be on your way to achieve the National Coaching Licenses offered by the United States Soccer Federation and on your way to coach Olympic Development Teams.

If you are interested in starting your certification process please don't hesitate to call me. Classes are as short as a couple of hours and are very affordable.

The Earlham Soccer Club and I as Director of Coaching also offer a variety of programs for both the novice and experience coach. For this and other information please contact:

Mike Madren, Director of Coaches, Earlham Soccer Club

Part 12: References and coaching resources

USSF National Youth License coaching program. United States Soccer Federation.

Soccer – Hot to Play the Game, The official playing and coaching manual of the United States Soccer Federation

“G” License Manual, Iowa Soccer Association.

Games & Activities for players U-6 through U-12, Iowa Soccer Association

US Soccer, Youth Coaching Manual