

Soccer Coaching U6

Fundamental Stage (Individual) – Me and My Ball

The primary objective is to learn all elementary movement skills by building overall motor skills. In terms of motor development, cognitive development and social development, generally there are few differences in the capabilities of the players in this age group. Individual and small group play is essential for both touches on the ball and learning at their own pace. The emphasis should be on letting the children play. Over coaching unfortunately occurs at this age group. Do not use a calisthenics approach; instead, keep it fun and enjoyable to foster a desire to play. This intrinsic motivation will grow a passion for the game that could last a lifetime.

Players in this age group are egocentric – a me, my, mine mentality. Young children do not play together; they play next to one another, meaning they do not necessarily interact as they play. This psychosocial reality is called parallel play. Each child is engaged in his or her own game and is not sharing or cooperating in a game. In soccer, this is most evident in the U-6 age group and still occurs to a lesser degree in the U-8 age group. Players in these age groups swarm around and go after the ball because it is the only toy on the field. They have not yet learned the social skill of sharing, hence why passing (sharing) the ball occurs by chance. All adults around the field when these age groups are playing must realize the children are not small adults. Why should the children suddenly display the social skill of sharing when they do not yet truly display that talent in any other setting? The child's enjoyment at this age is derived from playing in a group. Preschoolers enjoy playing in the presence of others, parallel play, even though they may not always watch or interact with them. However, at this age there is no real interest in competition or outcome. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together but still involved in individual play. Through the use of game-like activities, trial and error exposes children to the components of the game and the principles of play. The primary training activities are body awareness and maze games.

General Characteristics of the U-6 Age Group

- Catching skills not yet developed
- Constantly in motion – love to run, jump, roll and climb
- Eye-hand and/or eye-foot coordination is primitive at best – not ready for bouncing or flighted balls
- No sense of pace – go flat out
- Physical coordination is immature – can balance on dominant foot
- Controlling the ball is a complex task
- Prefer large soft balls and foam balls
- Only understand simple rules
- Individually oriented (me, my, mine) – little or no concern for team activities
- Psychologically, easily bruised – need generous praise
- Short attention span – tends to one task at a time
- Limited understanding of time and space

Components of the Game for the U-6 Age Group

Fitness: Introduce the idea of how to warm-up and movement education. Balance, walking, running, how to start and stop, jumping, hopping, rolling, skipping, changing direction, bending, twisting and reaching.

Technique: Dribbling (stop and start) and shooting. Experiment with the qualities of a rolling ball.

Psychology: Sharing, fair play, parental involvement, "how to play" and emotional management.

Tactics: Where is the field? The concept of boundary lines, at which goal to shoot and playing with the ball wherever it may go.

**Please note that the components of the game are in a priority order for this age group*

Typical U-6 Training Session

- Should not exceed 45 minutes.
- Every child should have a ball.
- Free play or a warm-up -approximately 15 minutes-
- Game-like activities, mostly body awareness and maze games. -approximately 15 minutes-
- Finish with a 3v3 game with two goals, no goalkeepers -approximately 15 minutes

Coaches should devote the end of each training session to playing 3v3 practice games. During these practice games is the best time for the coach to teach rules of the game to the players. Fun games involving small numbers can be played, especially 1v1, 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2 leading up to a final activity of 3v3. It is important to ensure each child has a ball and to focus on fun games. The benefit of the increased number of touches on the ball in those games is irreplaceable. Coaches should be well prepared and have a selection of game-like activities planned, while keeping in mind these young children have short attention spans.

Also, some helpful websites for games to play and instructional information are:

- <http://www.footy4kids.co.uk/index.htm>
- <http://www.soccerxpert.com/u6-u8-soccer-drills.aspx>
- <http://www.dprsports.com/drills.htm>
- <http://www.aysova.com/coaches.htm>
- http://www.insidesoccer.com/learn_it/coaches/drills_practices/858