

## **U8 Objectives**

### **Developmental Expectations**

U 8 is basically the next level of soccer player and as a coach; you will have children that have some soccer experience from U6 Tiny Tots to no experience at all. Developmentally, children at this age will range from having short attention spans to being able follow directives without much oversight. They have more coordination and after a year or two of soccer should be able to kick and dribble in a forward direction. As in U6 Tiny Tots you will see a variation in personalities and physical size. The U8 child will be more capable to understand some of the “Laws of Soccer” like when the ball is out of play and which direction the goal is.

As in U6 Tiny Tots, you will see during a game a little more team play but the children will still be focusing on individual handling of the ball. Other players will be there in support and if the ball is freed, the closest player will take control of the ball make a brake towards the goal. They will be able to stop and turn with the ball. Players at this age will understand the concept of passing and in practice will pass to another player but that all changes in the heat of battle during the game. You will see the defensive players passing but very seldom from the offensive players. For the offensive players, passing will be the last thing on their mind. What is most likely in their mind is “get the ball to the back of the net and I’m the one to do it.” So as in U6 Tiny Tots, the emphasis of what should be taught is ball handling and working on kicking the ball. Often what you will see is the players want to stop the ball then back up and run at the ball to kick it. As a coach, you want to break them of that behavior and work on drills that moving the ball forward and follow it to kick it.

In practice you want to introduce how to pass back and forth between two players. You should be working on developing proper mechanics of passing and receiving the ball. Dribbling, ball handling of turning, stopping the ball, and changing directions with the ball should also be focused on.

Positions of defense and offense will be more understandable to the U8 player so there should be some time spent on role of defense and offense but not on specific positions such as midfielder or striker. Specific positional roles are a bit beyond their comprehension. They often just want to know if they have to stay at one end of the field (defensive position) or can they run the full length of the field and score a goal (offensive position). Some players will want to play Goalkeeper and some will not but it

is strongly suggested that all the children play all position to get a good understanding of the game. During the game, they will still circle around the ball as with the U6 players but will be able maneuver ball better and it will be more of a game of chase the player with the ball. Tackling the ball will be seen at times in the game so some time should be spent on proper tackling technique. So the main objectives at the U8 level is ball handling, introducing passing to other players, and the defense/offense positions.

As a coach of U8, your objective with your players is again a simple one,

- have fun;**
- start to develop some basic ball handling and passing skills; and**
- start developing an understanding of the “Beautiful Game” of soccer.**

## **Practices**

As in U6, have an agenda or objective for each of your practices. Many seasoned coaches will even have objectives that they want to accomplish for their season. So it is good to know what you are going to do before you ever start practice. Children at this age are easily bored so knowing what you are going to do next in practice will avoid boredom and make practice enjoyable for both you and the children. Practice should be no less than about 1 ½ hours long and twice a week. In my experience, if you run a fast pass practice, an hour and a half will fly by quickly and all will enjoy the time.

### **Starting activity:**

Your players will not show up all at the same time. There will be some who show on time or a little early and others that come in a little late. So it is good to have a activity that the players can jump in with while you wait for all your players to arrive. Several small side games (having several games going at once with small goal) or “Around the World” ( 5 cones about 10 to 15 yards out around the goal and players shoot on goal with a goalkeeper directing which player is shooting)

### **Warm-ups:**

- when everyone is there, lead a warm up
- keep activities moving quickly.
- participate in warm up and exaggerate your motion to illustrate the movements of the exercise or stretch.
- do the same warm up and a stretches each practice.

**Drills and Activities – Avoid Lines and Lectures:** The U8 players will get bored quickly if you talk too long or if they stand in line. You are guaranteed to lose their attention and interest.

- Keep activities to about 15 - 20 minutes long. Start with individual work then move to two players with one ball, then small group play.
- Get excited about every attempt, whether a good one or not so good. Encouragement goes a long way.
- Whenever the children have a ball, make it a rule that they can not pick up the ball. The ball should be at their feet - never in their hands.
- Do fun activities that relate to the soccer game.
- Work on restarts (throw-ins, corner kicks, and goal kicks)
- Some skills that need to be focused on
- Spreading out on the soccer field and not all charging to the ball. Play “bumble bee soccer”
- Following the ball after kicking it
- Kicking a moving ball
- Marking players on restarts (throw-ins and corner kicks)
- When defending, moving the ball to the outside not the middle of the field.
- When offending, taking the ball to the middle of the field where they have the best chance to kick the ball in.

As in U6, the more touches with the ball in practice the better.

**Soccer Related Games** – it is about soccer so try to play games that are related to “game play”. You want them to begin to understand the rules and concepts of the game.

**Small-sided games** – 2v2 or 3v3 (If you have too many players, someone is not getting any “touches” so keep it small and more “touches” per player). Depending on the number of players on your team, have several small sided games going at a time and get some parents to help with the games.

**Scrimmages** – It is always good to finish practice with “game play”. Depending on the number of players on your team, try to simulate a game as close as possible: 6v6 or 7v7 and have goalkeepers. This is when you evaluate how your players are doing and what you will need to focus on next in practice. There are different opinions on if the coach should play with the players at this time, but in my opinion if you have some soccer skills, it is a good time to get on the field and teach by example. **It is not a time to show off your skills but to demonstrate good teamwork and communication with your players.**

## Parents

As the coach, you are in charge of the players and parents' behaviors. The parents will follow your example so if you are yelling and screaming, they will feel it is OK to do the same. There will also be some parents that get a little over excited and will demonstrate some very inappropriate behaviors; it is your job to keep those overly zealous parents in check. There will be moments where a Referee will not call a foul or get the call wrong and many times when the Referee will get the call right but we will think they got it wrong. **Both way, the Referee is in charge of the game and their word is LAW.** It is best practice not to argue and it is good to remember that soccer is only a game and that is all it is.

Parents can also be a great asset to you in practice and during games. Most parents are more than willing to help out in practice but you need to remember that you as the coach are in charge and you are the one who had a Risk Management Form done. So you need to have good supervision of the activities on your practice field.

## Games

This is where all the players' hard work comes together. Practices are important but one of the greatest teachers is the game itself. It is also the time, as coach, to watch your players to see what their training needs are so as the game is played your job is to analyze and evaluate your players and how they play as a team. It is good to remember that Players win games, not coaches. but a coach's job is to develop good players and good teamwork.

**Game play** – It is about having FUN and being SAFE so enjoy the game but here are some dos and don'ts:

- Avoid yelling and screaming at your players. It is better to encourage, you do not want to discourage children. We want them to learn a love for the game of soccer.
- Try to avoid running up and down the field shouting directions. One, you are not supposed to do it and second, if you are giving directions from the side lines, the players will have a difficult time trying to be involved in the game because they are being distracted by your directions. If you feel a need to give directions, do it when the player is off the field and out of play. Ultimately, what you want is players that can "think the game" not follow direction from the sideline.
- It is OK to give communication directives from the sidelines such as "mark up" on throw-ins, "man on" when an opponent is coming to the player with the ball,

“cross” when there is a open player across the field, “help back” if you are in trouble with the ball and they can pass it back to a player behind them, and other similar communication directives. You also want to encourage your players to use the same communication with each other.

-Remember the U8 is just a step up from Tiny Tots U6 so do not expect “World Cup” play. They will gather around the ball and charge to the ball when it is in play. The goalkeeper and the defensive players may be playing with the net or picking Dandylions if the ball is at the other end of the field. Think of your work with the children like planting seeds, in time they will grow into good soccer players.

-Have all the children play during the game and rotate them between defense and offense. Have all the children play goalkeeper during the season. Games are played in 8 minute quarters so put your substitutes in about 4 minutes in and try to give equal time on the field to all the players.

-Remember U6, U8, and U10 are **noncompetitive. It is about player development and learning how to play the game.** Granted the U8 players can and will keep track if they are winning but do not focus on who won or lost. Try to focus their attention on what good plays they executed (passing to another player), how well they may have tackled a ball, or their try on shooting a goal that way the focus will always be on getting better and developing skills and teamwork.

### **End of Game**

–Always finish with a group cheer for the other team and shake hands with the other team at midfield. It is also good at this time to talk with the players about what they did well in the game. You can talk about problems that occurred on the field but ALWAYS ask what the player or players could have done differently then discuss what could work better.

Remember that the most important thing is **MAKE IT FUN.**

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