Nether Soccer Coaching Manual
Introduction

The scope of coaching education in the United States is as large as the country itself. As our society is woven with the threads of many cultures, so is our soccer the product of the styles and experiences of the many diverse communities across the country. While this presents us with a set of challenges that are unique to the United States, this diversity also helps to continually breathe life into our soccer community. It is against this backdrop that U.S. Soccer approaches its responsibility for helping to prepare coaches to bring the game of soccer to our young players.

There is not just “one way” to teach soccer to players, nor is there just one style of coaching. There is a broad spectrum of styles and methods for how each of us experiences the game. Some of this comes from our backgrounds, while some of this also is the product of our own personalities. At the youth and junior levels, however, there is a set of fundamental principles that must be considered by anyone involved with soccer. In general, young soccer players require a certain amount of uninterrupted play. This allows them to experience soccer first hand. They should be allowed the opportunity to experiment, and with that, succeed and fail.

The coach’s long term goal is to prepare the player to successfully recognize and solve the challenges of the game on his or her own. It is vital that the coach approaches soccer with this in mind.

This document is designed to give youth and junior level coaches a basic set of ideas that can help open up the game of soccer to children in ways that celebrate the spontaneous qualities of soccer. It is not designed to give the coach the “secrets” of the game. There are no secrets. This is part of soccer’s beauty.

This document represents a series of recommendations that have been compiled and reviewed by U.S. Soccer’s Coaching Education staff and the Men’s and Women’s National Team staffs. It presents a compilation of what U.S. Soccer considers to be an appropriate, comprehensive and responsible approach to developing sound soccer players.
Basic Ideas to Consider
When Coaching Youth Soccer

The most fundamental skill in soccer is individual mastery of the ball and the creativity that comes with it. This should be a priority in training and games, especially in the early years. As this skill is mastered, the rest of the game becomes easier - both to teach and to learn. Practices should be built around facilitating the development of the skills necessary to move and control the ball well. As these individual skills and the creativity to make them come alive in the game are developed to a level of competence, the finer points, first of passing skill and later of team organization can be taught.

The town and club coaches who work with our youth and junior players on a daily basis play a fundamental role in the development of soccer players in this country. Towns and clubs should strive to place experienced coaches who have a clear understanding of the value of teaching technique at the youth and early junior levels. Equally important is the coach’s personality and character. Working with 6- to 14-year-old children requires patience, kindness and respect.

Coaching soccer can be confusing at times because the game changes dramatically as the players improve in both skill and physical ability. When coaching young, developing players, as well as the adolescent players, U.S. Soccer feels it is helpful to keep the following ideas at the forefront of your mind:

1) Set up situations where the players can learn by playing the game. The game is the best teacher for young players.

2) Coaches can often be more helpful to a young player’s development by organizing less, saying less and allowing the players to do more. Set up a game and let the kids play. Keep most of your comments for before and after practice and during water breaks. Comments should be kept short and simple. Be comfortable organizing a session that looks like pickup soccer.

3) Teaching and learning the game of soccer is a process: make your goals seasonal, as well as daily and weekly. Often, at the younger ages, the developmental efforts of one season are not noticeable in children until sometime in the next season.

4) Set age-appropriate goals i.e., know what the child is able to do at that age.

5) From a developmental standpoint, the young ages are the best ones for learning skills. Spend the time now encouraging this growth. By the age of 17 the capacity to pick up new motor skills begins to wane, while the ability to conceptualize team organization, tactics and strategy increases. As a coach, work with these strengths, not against them.
6) Do not expect games and practices to look like professional soccer. If you want to use high level soccer as a teaching tool, focus on the individual skill level of professional players, not their organization. Give your players opportunities to see what older, more skilled players, i.e., a high school, college player or an older brother or sister, can do with the ball. On occasion, invite some of these players to participate in your practice. Use them to model good soccer qualities. Let your players learn by experiencing the game alongside or against these better players. Older players can also be used as “neutral players.” In this case, the neutral player helps whichever team has the ball i.e., he or she never defends. Maybe that neutral player has limited touches and/or can’t score, but he or she gives the team with the ball a better chance of keeping the ball. By helping to maintain possession, the neutral player(s) helps the game maintain some rhythm, and gives the kids a clearer picture of the game’s possibilities.

7) Recognize and understand how the skills learned at each age are connected to preparing the player to move into the next phase of his or her development. Know what the next level of play is, and the general tools that your players should carry with them as they move on. Help them to be prepared.

8) Allow your players to develop these requisite skills in an environment where the main goal is to have fun with the ball.

9) The value of matches is that they provide youngsters with an opportunity to showcase their newly acquired skill and creativity. It is always nice to win, however that should not be your focus at the younger age groups (through 14 years).

10) Have a clear idea of what it is you want to accomplish at practice. Create exercises/games that replicate and repeat the movements and situations that are found in soccer and that allow the player to grow comfortable and confident with the ball at his or her feet. Encourage players to move with the ball at his or her feet and deal with boundaries, opponents, teammates and goals. Keep in mind that soccer is a pretty simple game. If you are involved in soccer for long enough, you begin to realize that all the many little games that work are really just variations on the same basic concepts. As long as the parameters that you have established in your exercises/small-sided games are true to soccer (goals for scoring and defending), creates the problems that you want the kids to solve (protecting the ball while dribbling, etc.), and allows your players to be challenged and find some success, you’re on the right track.

11) Don’t be afraid to experiment to find what works best.

12) Remember that the game is the best teacher for the players. Coaches and parents should think of themselves more as facilitators, monitors, guides or even participants, to provide a rich environment for the kids to learn from and enjoy.
Age Appropriate Recommendations for the U-6 to U-18 Age Groups

The following pages represent U.S. Soccer’s recommendations on best practices in soccer according to the player’s chronological age, from Under-6 through Under-18. It is just as important, however, to consider the players’ “soccer age” (i.e., his or her level of soccer competence), when determining themes to address in practice and matches. Remember that these recommendations are based on the assumption that the players have the ball skill necessary to move onto the next level of challenges. It is the responsibility of the coaches to continually evaluate and assess the needs of their players so that they can play soccer at the appropriate level. Parents and coaches alike should also take care to give their players a variety of playing experiences so that they are able to find some games where they are more challenged and some games where it is a little bit easier. In this case, it is the responsibility of the adults to evaluate this on a team and individual basis.

Encourage Creativity and Ball Skills Before Tactics!

The youth coach has an important role in encouraging the development of these fundamental tools. One of the goals of this coaching guide is to introduce parents/youth coaches to an approach to coaching youth players that 1) embraces the lessons that are found in the game itself, and 2) is player-centered rather than coach-centered.

What does this mean? Consider the following comments by Hans Bongers on the growth of soccer around the world in the last 30 years, and how adults/coaches have approached player-development:

Organized soccer "boomed" in the seventies. Not only did the number of people around the world who play in leagues drastically increase, also the age at which the youngest kids could start to play official games went down to 5 years and even younger. Parallel to this, many well organized coaching clinics and soccer schools, based on different educational theories were created, all hoping that a new Pele or (Johan) Cruyff would emerge from them and the brilliant collective play of the Brazilian team in the sixties and the Dutch ("total soccer") team of the early seventies could be reproduced. In the last decade many soccer associations from different countries have asked themselves how (even if!) soccer can be taught. (Hans Bongers: Somagic Street Soccer/ www.streetsoccer.hypermart.net).

By default, the well-intentioned and seemingly reasonable approach of many youth coaches is to look to adult soccer as their guide to teaching the game. What most youth coaches find helpful in
the adult game is the organization and positional responsibilities (tactics) that the adult players exhibit so well. They are concepts that adults can understand well and so, as coaches, many tend to bring an organizational or tactical approach to coaching youth. Coaches often focus on keeping the players under control and teaching what appears to be the basics of the game: organization, positions, tactics, how to prepare to win games. We choose order over apparent chaos. It is tempting to strive to have the youth games look like adult games, with kids holding their own in set positions, organized and disciplined. The magic of the Dutch players of the early seventies, or Brazil’s great players of the sixties, however, was not created from an organized practice routine. It began when they were children, in pickup games where the player and the game were the dominant factors. There were neither adults nor a set schedule of mandatory practices and games. That said, we live in a different world today. Adult supervision is often necessary to ensure proper safety. The presence of adults, however, does not have to inhibit the opportunity for children to be creative and experimental in their approach to learning soccer.

Manfred Schellscheidt, Boys U-14 National Team Head Coach, describes the scene that many of our beginner level players face in the following quote:

> Let us take a look at what typically happens to our youngsters as they are introduced to the sport of soccer. Day one for most of our players is probably the day mom and dad registers them with the local or the town recreation league. Based on the number of applicants, teams are formed, coaches assigned, and playing fields coordinated. The available fields serve all ages and are quite often adult dimensions. And so the games begin. Children that may have never previously kicked a ball are faced with the ultimate challenge - playing eleven v eleven on a field too big for them. Are we really surprised that they cannot do this? But do not worry; this is where the coach comes in. He or she is the one who is called on to fix and remedy the situation. With the help of positioning, the players are spread all over the field and told, 'This is how the big guys do it. The ones who just won the World Cup.' Since this proved to be the winning formula, we must all learn from them and imitate them. (Manfred Schellscheidt: Experimenting With The Game).

In reality, what is needed from the youth coach is quite different. Again, we need to keep in mind that most of the great soccer players today played their early soccer in unsupervised games.

> “International conferences about this topic often conclude that well-intended coaches and parents should try to withdraw from influencing young players too much, if not completely. It is suggested that if you do want to train young players the emphasis should be on ‘play and fun’ and various smaller versions of the 11-against-11 game have seen the light. One concept that pops up more and more in all these discussions is ‘Street Soccer.’ ‘The streets’ (alleys, parks, beaches ...) being the mysterious setting where brilliant players like Pele and Cruyff – and their fellow magicians in other sports – developed in a natural way.” (Hans Bongers: Somagic Street Soccer).
A primary focus for the coach at the youth level, through the U-12 age group, is to provide an environment that comes close to simulating the “pickup” games of our youth. In this setting much of the creativity and personality of kids developed naturally, without the involvement of adults. Kids need to be allowed to play freely, develop their skills and use them in a creative manner. Coaches should organize only so far as it helps to create this environment. Again, Manfred Schellscheidt comments on this idea of “street soccer” and how the coach can help to create this environment.

Beside the games, what do our training sessions look like? Are they mobile or static? Are the players free to experiment and learn from the game or are they constantly instructed? Is there room for trial and error, or are they simply told what to do and where to go? (Breathing life into soccer) ... is more about converting our training sessions into some form of street soccer in which players, with the help of the coach, experiment with the basic elements of the game in a competitive way... Learning (in this case, soccer) is about experimenting with new things and relating to them. Mastery means coming to grips with things we have experimented with, often with repetition. It is all about developing an understanding and feel for the game. The lessons for all of us will come from the game and so will the answers. In the beginning the person and the game are separate, maybe even far apart. When things get good, the game and the person become one. (Manfred Schellscheidt: Experimenting With The Game)

With this in mind, try to encourage comfort with the ball and the confidence to use this skill creatively. Encourage the dribbler at the younger ages; your team of 8 to 10 year olds should be full of them. Dribbling, at the younger ages, is the child’s attempt to gain control over the ball. Controlling the ball is the primary skill that every other skill in soccer depends upon. Although controlling the ball may seem to be a simple task, it actually takes an enormous amount of the child’s energy. Do not expect him or her to look to pass or to pass with any level of competence or awareness, until he or she has first mastered this skill. Consider these two points. Children from about age 6 to 12 have an almost limitless capacity to learn body movement and coordination (i.e., motor skills). At the same time, their intellectual capacity to understand spatial concepts like positions and group play is limited. Work to their strengths.

CONSIDER THIS: At the younger ages (6 to about 10), soccer is not a team sport. On the contrary, it is a time for children to develop their individual relationship with the ball. The fact that younger children are placed into team environments is not their fault. Do not demand that the more confident players share the ball. Encourage them to be creative and go to goal. Do the same with the rest of your players. Work to bring all your players up to that level of confidence and comfort with the ball. Coaches should avoid the impulse to “coach” their players from “play to play” in order to help them win the match. Coaches should not be telling their young players to “pass rather than dribble,” to “hold their positions” or to “never” do something (like pass or dribble in front of the goal).

Many kids who have been involved in organized soccer will often look to pass the ball or kick the
ball down field as their first option. They have been taught to “share” the ball or they have
learned that the best way to keep from making a “mistake” with the ball at their feet is to kick
it away as fast as possible. For this reason, it helps if the coach continually encourages the
players to make dribbling their first option. It may also help to make the players take at least
two touches on the ball before they can look to pass. Remember that making mistakes at these
early ages is a very important part of the player’s learning and development. Encourage risk-
taking and applaud effort.
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COACHING GUIDELINES

1. COMMUNICATION: Ensure the terminology you use is clear and precise. Let players know you are in charge.
2. POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT: Whenever possible give individuals and/or groups positive reinforcement. Refrain from using negative comments. Use praise as an incentive.
3. BE CREATIVE AND USE INITIATIVE: If the drill or game is too advanced, modify to increase the chances of success.
4. MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Be motivational and inspirational. Enthusiasm and being energetic are contagious.
5. KEEP PLAYERS ACTIVE: If the drill is static, create need of helpers or assistants to keep everyone involved.
6. EACH PLAYER IS AN INDIVIDUAL: Be aware of player differences. Aggressive or quiet, recognition of player personalities will allow you to respond to all players, and they will respond to you positively.
7. STRIVE FOR QUALITY: In all demonstrations make the desired objectives clear. If a player shows mastery of a skill, use him/her to demonstrate.
8. REINFORCE CORRECT TECHNIQUE: In all drills and games continually emphasis the use of correct techniques.
9. ENCOURAGE PLAYER MOVEMENT: At all times make players aware of importance of readiness. Emphasize weight forward on toes and bouncing instead of flat footed-ness.
10. ROTATE POSITIONS: All players should be active as servers, assistants. In game situations change positions each quarter.
11. DEVELOP PLAYER RESPECT: Continually get players to support one another. To show good sportsmanship towards all players including opponents, and respect for others attempts and effort.
12. EQUALITY AMONGST PLAYERS: Give equal attention to all players in group or games. Do not leave the less competent players behind nor slow the advanced players.
13. FUN AND ENJOYMENT: Players will respond and want to continue if things are fun. Create their enjoyment.

- REMEMBER AS A COACH YOU SHOULD BE DEDICATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALL PLAYERS WHETHER TECHNICALLY ABLED OR NEW TO THE GAME. YOUR POSITION IS VERY IMPORTANT. YOU ARE A ROLE MODEL TO THESE CHILDREN. SET EXEMPLARY STANDARDS. DEVELOPING GOOD TOUCH AND TECHNIQUE, GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP AND A GOOD ATMOSPHERE IS THE GOAL. KEEP AWAY FROM CREATING A PRESSURE TO WIN. MAINTAIN EQUALITY THROUGHOUT YOUR SESSIONS AND EMPHASIZE FUN AND DEVELOPMENT.
DTT. (Developing Touch and Technique).

- Maintain close control with both feet.
- Be agile, stay on toes.
- Use all parts of feet, inside, outside, laces, sole.
- Move to get behind balls path.
- Keep a soft contact.
- Concentrate on center of ball.
- Keep head up.
- Control ball first, don’t just kick it away.
- Change direction and speed when turning.
- Be a friend with the ball.

PASSING.

- Use inside of feet.
- Change body position so it’s comfortable.
- Stay relaxed. Don’t be like a robot.
- Look at ball when passing.
- Pass to other players, not just kick and hope.
- Move afterwards.
- Move away from players to receive ball.
- Turn body to face ball when receiving.
- Stay spread out.

SHOOTING.

- Keep toe pointing down.
- Lock ankle.
- Strike with shoelaces.
- Strike through center of ball.
- Swing leg and follow through.
- Keep relaxed except keep foot locked.
- Accuracy before power.
- Keep knee and head over ball.
- Place standing foot alongside ball, not in front or behind.
- Aim for bottom corners of goal.
- Accuracy before power.
- Follow after shooting.
- Use foot closest to the ball. I.E. left or right foot.

GAMES.

- All of the above.
- Keep moving.
- Encourage movement towards ball.
- Encourage use of width.
- Keep positions only loosely restricted.
- Take Time-out to rotate subs and positions.
- Coach, educate, and support during games.
- Explain all fouls and calls made.
- Create an understanding of the Laws of the Game.
PRACTICE TIPS

This page is designed to help coaches overcome some common practice time occurrences. There are 30 solutions listed here to some common problems. Some of these solutions contain a direct link to a sample in the practice plan manual.

NOT ENOUGH SOCCER BALLS AT PRACTICE or half the team left them at home!

1. Use “ghost” players who play without ball. They can tag a player on shoulder and replace that player. Good in individual activities and when only 1 or 2 balls missing.
2. Revise practice session to be less Individual and more small group. Good for passing and shooting type activities that work 1 ball between 2,3 or more players. Useful if half balls or more are missing.
3. If only 2 balls present: play a 3 Vs 3 style tournament, IE 2 games of small-sided being played at once. Only 1 ball, rather than play 6 Vs 6 play 3 teams of 4 NON-STOP SOCCER, where teams rotate after each goal or set time.

HAVE AN ODD NUMBER OF PLAYERS AT PRACTICE or I planned for 12 but got 9!

4. If you have an Assistant or spare parent have them work with a goalkeeper.
5. When doing pair activity make a triangle.
6. If small group activity, ie In groups of 3 players pass to a central player who turns and passes, add spare player to one group and the passes are alternated.
7. In small group activities use spare as a shadow defender with no tackling allowed (vary)
8. Scrimmage time at the end of practice and only 9 players:
   - Play 5 vs 4 and make the team with less players loaded wither stronger players
   - Play 5 vs 4 and have team of 5 attacking small goal
   - Play 5 vs 4 and team 4 with GK, team 5 without
   - Use Asst./ parent/ brother - sister to even teams
   - Play yourself
   - Play 4 vs 4 with a floating player who plays for the team in attack (good for more advanced players. )
   - Play 4 vs 4 and use a sub. Good for more active activities, longer period of play

HOW YOU CAN INCLUDE GK SPECIFIC TRAINING or my keeper needs work but so do my field players?

9. If odd number of players, remove GK and have them work with Asst or Parent.
10. In individual and group activities allow GK’s to use hand. IE Your topic is passing and receiving and your activity is give ‘n’ go’s. Allow Gk to use hands to receive and distribute, or if a defending activity allow them to dive to try and intercept passes.
11. In activities make topic goal orientated. If playing 1 vs 1 game trying to knock over opponents cone, have 1 player attack a cone and other attack a GK and goal.
12. Small and large group activities can be goal orientated also. Playing 5 vs 2 keep away, after 6 passes can attack goal
PRACTICE TIPS

HOW TO PICK TEAMS FOR SCRIMMAGES or I don’t want to use captains?

13. Use your knowledge and judgement to evenly match up individuals
14. Play offense versus defense, or as the Dutch do, play left side versus right side
15. For Random teams:
   - Choose 1 player to give everyone a number. You turn away then pick random numbers
   - Choose players by criteria like 1st letter of 1st name (or any 1st - last combo with 1st name, last name, mom - dad’s name etc)
   - Choose players by criteria of date of month born, month of year born etc

HOW TO RESTRICT DEFENDERS/OPPosition or my defenders always win the ball without the others gaining experience!

16. Have opposition play only as a shadow (good for introducing new topics as its only light pressure)
17. Have defender play as a ghost, IE no tackling only pressure to force an error or interception
18. Restrict movement of defender by playing as a crab on all 4’s (good for less experienced)
19. Ensure adequate grouping. IE less experienced might need 6 vs 1 to achieve success, more experienced maybe 3 vs 1
20. Increase the playing area especially in examples like above

HOW TO INCREASE COMPETITION FOR THE MORE ADVANCED PLAYERS ON TEAM or my good players are creaming the weaker ones and not learning!

21. In pair or group activities match players up by talent/ experience
22. If 1 exceptional player then match against an Asst/ parent/ older brother - sister for greater physical challenge
23. Reduce the space the stronger player must work in
24. Make their target smaller or further away
25. Limit their number of touches
26. Limit them to use their weaker foot only
27. Allow a less experienced player to play more intense opposition, IE rather than shadow defend can play 100%
28. In scrimmage you as coach play Against that 1 stronger player
29. 9 players for scrimmage, maybe play 3 stronger players vs 6

IN SOME ELIMINATING GAMES PLAYERS SIT OUT FOR 5 MINUTES or its my weaker players who lose first - and they need the practice!

30. In games like Knockout, players should do a skill activity that allows them back into the game. Rather than score game by eliminating players, score by number of successes in a set period of time, thus allowing players back in after they:
   - dribble to a distant cone: juggle the ball x times: do x toe taps
## 8 WEEK SCHEDULE

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PROGRAM
TEACHING PLANS.

KEY TO DIAGRAMS.

A, B, C Etc.  Player.

Playing area.

O  Ball.

X  Cone.

Movement of ball.

Movement of player.

Movement of Player with ball

Feet with ball.

Goal
WEEK 1: BASIC FOOT SKILLS

WARM - UPS: 10 - 15 MINS.

BALL GYMNASTICS:
Stationary: Roll ball with bottom of foot forwards and backwards with right then left. Repeat from side to side, and then in a circular motion. Repeat all with increased speed.

On Toes:
Tick-Tock. Pass the ball from inside of left to inside of right (See Diagram)
Hat Dance. Lightly touch ball with bottom of right foot then with left. Ball should remain still. Increase speed for both.

Movement. Tick-Tock but move ball slightly forwards each touch. Take it width of field then turn and return. Same with Hat dance. Sideways stance. Roll right foot over ball and stop with inside of left. On return use other feet.

TECHNIQUE: 10 - 15 MINS.

SQUARE ACTIVITIES. (SEE DIAGRAM)
Commands. Move ball inside square. Coach gives Commands like Stop, Go, Turn Left foot, Right foot, Insides, Tie-toe, etc.

Other Commands. Body Parts. Touch ball with that BP.
Find Spaces. As kids move their ball inside square they try to find as much space as possible. On Coaches command player with most space is winner.

2 Squares A. Add a 2nd square and have players on command move ball into new square.

2 Squares B. Split kids into 2 groups, 1 in each square, on command they leave their ball and switch squares to find a new one.

2 Squares C. Same as above but take the ball with them, avoiding bumping in the middle. (See Diagram)

Lose your Shadow. In the double square each player has ball and partner. The Shadow has to try and stay within 1 yd of 2 Square C. Partners Switch between Leader and Shadow.

WATER BREAK:

GAMES 1: 10 - 15 MINS.

SQUARE GAMES:
Pac Dudes. Kids inside square dribble around, 1 player (GHOST) outside square. On command Pac Dudes the for Musical Ghost has to kick all the balls out of the square. Winner is last one in square. Emphasize shielding and turning. Change ghosts. U7 all have go as Ghost. U8 have 2 Ghosts.

Musical Soccerballs. Place 4 cones outside square. Dribble in square, on command, players stop ball and leave it, and run to touch any one of the 4 cones. Coach removes 1 ball and When they come back into square they put there foot on ANY available ball. Player who doesn’t get a ball is out. Get that player to remove next ball. Make sure all players are moving in square, not staying by the sides. (See diagram)
WEEK 1: BASIC FOOT SKILLS

WATER BREAK:

GAMES 2: 10 - 15 MINS.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA CRABS.
Players start at end of the Island with their Soccer balls.
Coach starts as crab sitting with legs forward, and can only
move in this position. On Command TMNC, players have to
dribble ball past Crab to the other end (<Beach>.) without their
ball going into the ocean. They must stop the ball on the line.
Crab moves to kick ball into ocean. If ball goes into ocean,
then that player becomes crab. When everyone has reached
the beach, and crabs are ready, then repeat in opposite
direction. Last one still on Island is winner.
Emphasize: close control and movement from side to side to
get past the crabs. (See Diagram)

WATER BREAK: RECAP: GAME PREP: Use this time to recap on the practice and to organize for the
game.

GAME: 15 - 20 MINS.

Play 4 vs 4. Do not use GK's

SEE ADDITIONAL Dribbling Games at end of Manual for more
Variations. By adding these additional Games to this Structure,
You will have several more dribbling Practices.
WEEK 2: BASIC PASSING

WARM-UPS: 10 - 15 MINS.

TEAM GAMES.

Zig Zag. Have 3 teams of 4. Set up about 5 cones per team. players in turn zig zag through cones using foot and surface coach has stated. When all have been 1st team sitting down in straight line are the winners.

Pass and Stop. In pairs players are 3yds apart. Player 1(X) passes and player 2(X1) stops ball. Player 2 runs backwards and player 1 runs forwards to pass ball again. Repeat for length of field then return with player roles switched.

Golf. Set up a series of cones 2 yds apart around field. Players have to pass ball through the course with the least amount of touches possible.

WATER BREAK:

TECHNIQUE: 10 - 15 MINS.

VARIOUS.

1. In pairs approx. 5 yds apart players pass back and forth. GIVE GOOD DEMO OF TECHNIQUE. Emphasize stopping ball 1st.

2. In 3’s approx. 5 yds apart with 2 balls. A passes to B. B stops ball and passes back, then Turns to face C, who passes in. Repeat and rotate player B.

3. Numbers. In pairs, 1 ball, 4 cones in cross shape. A is by bottom cone and passes to B in center of cross. When he passes shouts a #1,2,3,4. B stops passes back and then runs to touch that cone. When A shouts 1 players change position after passes.

4. 3 squares. Have 2 pairs in each square, with 1 ball per pair. Players move around inside their square, on command pass to their partner. Repeat. Emphasize movement and looking up.

GAMES 1: 10 - 15 MINS.

BRITISH BULLDOGS.

Set up Island like TMNC (Week 1). Have players start at one end with all the balls lined up along the two sides. Coach starts as BB. On command players have to run to other end of Island, dodging balls that BB is passing in. If hit below knee they become a BB. Reset all the balls and repeat till everyone hit. Winner starts as BB for next game.

WATER BREAK:

GAMES 2: 10 - 15 MINS.

Elvis Presley.

Divide into pairs and place approx. 5 - 10 yds from each other. Player A has ball. Player B must call A’s name before A passes. A passes. B stops and passes back when A calls his name. After passing B turns and runs to cone approx. 15 yds away. On return they repeat. Repeat 3 times and on final return players do Elvis shake, to show they are finished. New game A and B swap roles.

Passing Circle. Set up 2 circles. Player A is in center and other
WEEK 2: BASIC PASSING

players have to pass to one another. Player A has to try and intercept. All players have a go as A. How many passes can be made without A touching ball.

WATER BREAK: RECAP: GAME PREP: Use this time to recap practice and to prepare for practice.

GAME: 15 - 20 MINS.

*Play 4 vs. 4. Do not use GK’s*
WEEK 3: CONTROL AND TURNING

WARM UPS: 10 - 15 MINS.

PASSING GAMES.

Wall game. Set up 2 or 3 teams. Player A is 5 - 10 yds from group. A is the Wall. Each player passes to the Wall. When it comes back he stops it, and then goes to end of line. All players pass to wall, then player B becomes wall. All players have turn as wall. When B, C, and D have turn as Wall team is finished and sit down in line.

Recap. BALL GYMNASTICS.

WATER BREAK:

TECHNIQUE: 20 - 25 MINS.

Choice of set ups.

1. roll
2. Cut ( inside and outside )
3. Cryuff
4. Barnes
5. Scissors.

Roll: Roll backwards with sole of shoe.
Cut: Cut across body with inside. Then with outside.
Cryuff: Put standing leg alongside ball. Look to shoot, then turn foot inwards and drag ball back behind standing foot with inside of other foot.
Barnes: Step over ball with outside of one foot ( LUNGE ), then push ball forwards with outside of other foot.
Scissors: As with Step 1, but cut ball back with inside of other foot.

Turning: Allow approx. 5 mins of freedom. In half field get them moving with the ball trying new tricks, moves, or coervers.

(SEE MOVES APPENDIX FOR DIAGRAMMED MOVES)

GAMES 1: 15- 20 MINS.

1 V. 1’S.

Set up. Square with 1 pair per side, 1 ball per pair. A and B face each other about 1 yd. apart. A has ball and B is shadow. B is not allowed to steal ball. A must try and stop ball by 1 of the cones while ‘losing’ B. Start without ball to get the idea of body movement.

Emphasize upper body movement, change of direction and speed.
Keep away. Set up. 3 squares, 2 pairs per square, 1 ball per pair. Player A has to try and keep ball away from B. And C away from D. When player looses ball, or when coach gives command, whichever is first, players switch roles.

WATER BREAK: RECAP: GAME PREP: If Spare time, recap Coerver moves.

Use this time to recap practice, and to organize for the game.

GAME: 4 * 10 MIN. QTRS.
WEEK 4: PASSING GAMES

WARM UP: 10 - 15 MINS. VARIOUS.
Recap. Coerver moves. Allow players freedom to try and practice moves. assist and re-demonstrate where necessary.
Tag. Area of half the field, players in pairs, 1 ball per pair, playing shadow ball. On coaches command the Shadow has 3 seconds to get away. Player has to pass ball at his shadow. Scoring for U8 is through legs, for U7 within 1 yd or a hit. Switch and repeat. Keep running score.

TECHNIQUE: 20 - 25 MINS. JUGGLING.
Start with feet. Hold ball in hands. Drop ball onto laces and try to catch. Repeat with other foot. Then kick, let it bounce, and kick again. Increase number of kicks. Advanced players shouldn’t let bounce.
Emphasize: Be relaxed. Don’t throw ball. Focus on Ball. Bend knee to strike. keep ankle solid ( don’t flick ). Controlled kicks. 
Thigh. repeat above procedures. Use thigh not knee. 
Head. Repeat above procedures. Keep head back, eyes open and looking at ball, and neck tight. 
Tony Head. Now try combinations of the above. Try to meet Tony Head. TOE - KNEE - HEAD.

GAMES 1: 15 - 20 MINS. NETBALL.
Set up. 3 vs. 3 in each half of field.
Objective. Players have to get ball to an end zone, by passing it with their hands.
Rules. Players cannot be tackled. Players cannot move when they have ball in hands. Must roll ball to other players to move ball forwards. ( U8’s can also Basketball pass ). To score a player must receive ball standing in end zone.
Star Game. Rotation Clockwise. Emphasize, passing to players, moving to ball to receive.
Set up. In groups of 4 have 2 players at points and 2 in center, and 2 balls. Players A and B at opposite points of start with a ball each, and a center player faces each one of them. On the coaches command of left or right, the ball is passed to the facing center player (1). The center player turns as A and B run to the next point (2), and then passes them the ball (3).They continue passing around in the direction the coach shouted and try to catch the other team. Then switch player roles and repeat.
Emphasize: Turning body and ball, accurate passes, and movement.

note: B and D do the same

WATER BREAK: RECAP: GAME PREP: If spare time repeat a previous weeks game.
Recap practice and organize for game.

GAME: 4 * 10 MIN. QTRS.
Set conditions for first 3 quarters.
1 and 3: 3 passes = goal
2: Try to beat defender with move. 4:
WEEK 5: SHOOTING TECHNIQUE AND GAMES

WARM UP: 10 MINS.
2 GROUPS.
Coerver: Half the group practice coerver moves in half field.
Juggling: Other half practice juggling. Change after 5 - 7 mins.

TECHNIQUE: 10 - 15 MINS.
SHOOTING.
Striking with laces.
1. Circle around coach. players sit in crab position. Try to kick back into coaches hands. 2. This time players are standing and drop ball onto their foot. Same objective. 3. Same but in pairs approx. 5 yds apart. 4. Now drop ball and try and get through partners legs. 5. Ball on ground. Partner approx. 7 - 10yds away. try to get through legs. 6. Set up. Goal of 2 cones approx. 12ft. Players either side of goal approx. Emphasize: Strike middle of ball, strike with center of foot, keep ankle solid, flex from hip and knee, focus on ball only, be relaxed.

GAMES 1: 20 MINS.
PASS AND SHOOT.
Set up. 2 lines of players facing goal on half way line, in line with goal posts. Coach approx. 7 yds from players. Goal divided into 3. Numbers game.
Players pass to coach who passes to side and/or forwards. Player runs on and shoots to goal. U7 can dribble. have to shoot before arc and aim for corners. 10 points for corners, 5 points for center.

NUMBERS.
Set up. 4 groups of players. Each group is numbered 1 thru 3. Coach on center spot with all balls. Play. Coach calls # and groups A play D, and B play C, in each half. Player whose # is called tries to score, without going into arc. Progression. Call 2 or 3 #’s. (SEE DIAGRAM.)

GAMES 2: 10 - 15 MINS.
SHOOT AND SAVE.
Set up. Bring goal to half way line (GET ASSISTANCE.). GK in each goal, and players in line outside left post. Balls in both goals.
Play. Player takes ball and dribbles towards goal (1) opposite and shoots. Then goes to end of other line (2). The GK now becomes a Forward, takes ball, dribbles (3) and shoots. 1st player in the line replaces the GK (4). Shoot and save.
Players in line can assist collecting balls. Repeat rotation at other end.

WATER BREAK: RECAP: GAME PREP: Use this time to recap, and organize for game.

GAME: 4 * 10 MIN. QTRS.

WARM UP: 5 - 10 MINS.
2 GROUPS.
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WEEK 6: DEFENDING AND GOALKEEPING

Coerver: Half the group practice coerver moves in half field.
Juggling: Other half practice juggling. Change after 5 - 7 mins.

TECHNIQUE AND GAME: 25 MINS. DEFENDING.
1 v 1. In squares have 2 pairs working. Defender has to try and win ball. When does, swap roles.
Progression. In squares. 2 pairs. 1 player from each pair at opposite sides of square. 2 balls. Pairs alternate turns. A passes to B, who controls. A follows pass and is defender. tries to force out of square or win possession. A and B swap roles after each turn.

GAME.
Set up. Divide field into 4 qtrs. using cones. Coach on center spot. 1 defender on goal line in each segment. other players in 4 groups on half way line.
Play. Attackers take ball to defenders. Defenders job to force ball back to half way line. Attacker has to stop ball on goal line.
Attacker becomes defender.
Progression. Only half 2 sections and play 2 vs. 2.
Emphasize: Don’t back away, don’t rush in, stay goal side, chase back if beaten, timing, jockeying, staying low, forcing wide.

TECHNIQUE AND GAME: 25 MINS. GOALKEEPING.
Prep. With no ball, players on half way line facing 1 goal. On command, run forwards, backwards, left and right. Always face same goal. Emphasize on sideways running, bring feet together And then apart.
Pairs. Approx. 5 - 7 yds apart with 1 ball. Each player in goal of approx. 12ft. Players serve to one another.
1. Rolling to feet.
2. Throwing to chest.
3. Rolling to side (close)
4. On knees. Roll further to corners.
5. Variety of above.
Emphasize: Not stepping back, on toes, get body behind ball, hold to chest, scooping to collect ball, keeping legs together.

GAME.
Repeat any shooting game that uses GK repetitively. Or add GK to a shooting drill.

WATER BREAK: RECAP: GAME PREP:
use this time to recap practice, and to organize for game.

GAME: 4 * 10 MIN. QTRS.
Set Conditions in 1st and 3rd qtrs.
1st. Select a passing condition. i.e. 3 passes = goal.
3rd. Select a control condition. i.e. limit 3 touches.
WEEK 7: TEAM WORK

WARM UP: 10 - 15 MINS.

TEAM GAMES.
Set up, 2 teams of 6 or 3 teams of 4. 6 cones in line approx. 5yds apart.
1. Passing. Wall Game. (see week 3 W-up.)
2. Tunnel ball. 1st player rolls ball through everyone’s legs. End person picks ball up runs to front and repeats. repeat through team. Sit down in line when finished.
3. Over under. 1st passes over head, next under legs. repeat as above.
4. Dribbling. dribble through cones. Repeat as above.
Emphasize: Team work, co-ordination.

WALL PASS.
Set up. Same as Shoot and save (week 5) but use full field, and coach is in center circle. Balls in goals.
Play. Similar as shoot and save but player is served ball by GK. Dribbles forwards and passes to coach. Coach wall passes back, and player runs on dribbles and shoots. GK serves his line, goes to end of line and is replaced in goal by the 1st shooter.
Progression. Use player for the wall pass. Don’t dribble on return pass.

GAME 1: 10 - 15 MINS.
ENGLAND VS. AMERICA.
Set up. Half field. Divide into 2 groups. Put cones on corners. Teams set up on half way on opposite sides facing opposite goals. Players on each team given #’s 1 thru 6.
Play. Coach calls a # and serves ball into field. The players with that # run around corner cone, and goal and enter field to try and score against other team’s player.
Progression. Call 2, 3 or more #’s at once. Introduce teamwork. Set conditions. i.e. have to make a pass. etc.

GAME 2: 10 - 15 MINS. PLAYERS CHOICE.
Recap the major skills developed over the weeks. Allow players to choose favorite game or games.

WATER BREAK: GAME PREP:
Organize for game.

GAME: 4 * 10 MIN QTRS.
Allow free play. Encourage team work.
WEEK 8: SEASON FINALE

This is a fun end of season finale. Play a series of 4 * 20 min games, with 5 min water breaks between game, or some of the players favorite games. A final game of Parents Vs. Players can be played. This can be followed by presentations of participation certificates to all players.
ADDITIONAL Dribbling Games

Game: Follow the orange brick road
How to play: Set up a bending line of cones. At 1 end of the line place a Wicked Witch (a parent, asst coach) and have players at the other end of the cones. Each player tries to dribble down the windy orange brick road, zig-zagging through the cones. At the end of the road when they meet the Wicked Witch they have to shoot the ball past her to melt her.

Game: What’s the time Mr Wolf
How to play: Coach starts as the big bad wolf. Each little pig has a brick house (a cone) The Pigs shout “What’s the time Mr Wolf” and the wolf shouts back a time. Each player advances the ball the number the wolf shouts out. Pigs ask again and repeat. When the Wolf shouts “Dinnertime”, the pigs have to dribble their soccer balls back to their house and the wolf chases and tries to kick their ball away. Let each player have a go as the wolf.
Teaching points: Use soft touches to keep away from Wolf, and then dribble at speed and stop ball with feet only.
Progressions: Put cones in the way as trees that players avoid. Use multiple wolfs, or place wolf close to houses so pigs have to get past.

Game: Pac Dudes
Players in side square with their ball. Dribbling around trying not to bump each other who lose control of ball. Coach starts on outside of square and is a Ghost. On command Pac Dudes, the ghost has to try and knock everybody’s ball out of the square.

Game: Knockout
Each player with a ball inside a square. On command “knockout” players are allowed to try and kick other players balls out, but must keep their own ball inside square.

Game: Traffic Lights
How to play: Players start on one end of (Soccer city) grid with their soccer balls (car). Coach is the traffic light (or traffic cop). Coach shouts various colors of traffic lights and players try to drive their soccer cars to Soccer town at the other end of grid. On command “red light” players need to stop their car with the sole of the foot and not move. If they move they return to soccer city and start again. Play to see who reaches Soccer town first.
Teaching Points: Dribbling and control movement.
Progressions: Add “yellow light” and make players do a stationary tic-toc or hat dance. Add additional commands: reverse where players go backwards, go home players turn and head back home, left, right etc.

Multiple Square Games:
A: Using 4 adjacent squares. All players start in one square with ball. Coach calls a square number and players move their ball to that square and keep dribbling inside new square until coach calls another number.
B: Split players into all 4 squares. Call 2 square numbers and those players have to switch squares.
C: Have players from 1 square on command try to go and steal balls.
MOVES APPENDIX

STEP OVER

1. Stand in passing position (left foot alongside ball, right behind it)
2. Right foot steps over ball and to the outside of the left.
3. Swivel on the right foot and swing the left foot around the outside of the right.
4. Knock the ball back (180) where you just came from and follow.

CRYUFF TURN

1. Set-up in a passing position for a right foot pass.
2. Right foot fakes a pass but circles around and in front of the ball (pointing at other toe at 90 degree angle)
3. Using inside of the right foot push the ball back through gap
4. and spin to the left to follow ball

VEE

1. With the ball and body turned to the left
2. drag the ball back with the sole of the right foot
3. and then use the inside of right foot to move in the opposite direction. As you roll ball back, turn hips and left foot
4. to allow a forwards push pass and follow

BARNES

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ADDITIONAL DRIBBLING GAMES

From the other players and get them back to their square. Give each square a set time and see who can steal the most balls.

Game: Relay races.
Set up multiple teams of 3 or 4 players. For each team set up a short course of cones that players have to dribble through. Players then dribble back, give ball to next person who repeats the course. When all players in a team have completed they sit in a straight line with their hands on their heads.

Game: Downhill Skiing
Set up multiple gates in a grid. Each gate should be about 2-3 ft wide. Players are skiing (dribbling their ball) inside the grid but not going through the gates until the coach shouts “Let's go Skiing” then players try to ski through as many different gates as possible in the time coach allows.

Game: Shark Attack
Set up 3 Islands. Divide players onto the 3 Islands. Each player with a ball. Coach starts as the shark in the middle of the ocean. The shark holds a cone on his/her head, or hands to designate a shark fin, so everyone knows they are the shark. When Coach shouts “shark attack” the players have to swim (dribble) their balls to either of the other 2 islands. The shark attempts to kick soccer balls away. Any soccer balls kicked away, then that player also becomes a shark. Play until 1 person left, who becomes the new shark for the next game.

Teaching points: Players have to respond to the defenders movements and keep possession of the ball. A lot less static and more game like than the above relay races.
ADDITIONAL PASSING GAMES

Game: Soccer Bowling
Set up several cones as pins. Arrange players in a circle around the pins and have each player attempt 2 passes to knock as many pins down as possible.

Game: Soccer Golf
Set up a golf course similar to the skiing course using gates as the holes. Have players pass their ball through the gates in the order you designate. Players count their number of passes. The lowest score wins. Teaching points: A variety of passing techniques, short, angled, long. Variation: have players design the course, or use obstacles such as trees, parents that players have to pass around.

Game: Tunnel Game
In pairs players have a ball. 1 player stands with his/her legs shoulder width apart. Player tries to pass ball through the legs. They take it in turns to try and score points. Scoring: 3 pts if it goes through without touching, 2pts if it touches a leg and still goes through, 1 pt hits leg but doesn't go through. 0pt if misses. Progression: As ball goes through legs the tunnel player, turns and runs and receives it dribbles back towards partner and passes. The partner moves to let the ball pass through legs, turns and runs to receive it. Teaching point: For the progression it gets the receiver into getting their body behind the ball.

Game: Stuck in the mud.
In a grid about 20 by 20, players are dribbling their soccer balls. Have 2 or 3 players as Swamp Monsters outside the grid with a ball each. On “go” the swamp monsters dribble their balls into the grid and attempt to hit players on the knees and below or soccer ball. If a player gets hit, or leaves the grid, they are stuck in the mud and they pick the ball up and hold it on their head, and stand with legs apart. Other players may release them by passing their ball through the stuck players legs. Rotate through the team as Swamp monsters and see who can get the most people stuck. Teaching Points: Good passing technique, passing to where a player is running, good control, turning and changing of direction technique for the players in the swamp.
MOVES APPENDIX

There are hundreds of moves, fakes and turns. Some are differentiated from others by slight variations. Some are basic and some very complex. Some are named for the movement and some named for the player who best personified the move. There is always overlap in what 1 person might call a move compared to another person. This list will arm you with an additional 4 moves. Each move is diagrammed like a dance step class and has descriptions to follow. Read through and replicate the steps to become familiar with the moves.

It is important to remember the function of a move is to beat a defender in a 1 vs 1 situation. In the target age groups U8 - U12 to beat a defender can simply mean to create enough space to make a pass, relieving pressure or maintaining possession. Too often in youth soccer, players are able to perform a move well but at the wrong time. The position of the opponent is very important. A Cryuff turn at the wrong time can and will lead the ball into the defenders possession. Ensure in your practice sessions you not only give them ample opportunities to practice with no opposition to get the mechanics down, but provide many opportunities where some passive then active opposition is provided to develop an appreciation of the opponents position in choosing a successful move.

Some key teaching points that will enable your players to better accomplish moves.

- Develop comfort with the ball by doing rollovers, toe touches, stop-go’s <<Fast footwork>>
- Develop a sense of motion in your player, bouncing, stepping to ball, relaxed body posture
- Disguise move with an upper body fake, drop of shoulder, a look or point one way, a pass or shot set-up. This movement generally creates an “attacking space” beyond and to the opposite side of the fake
- Recognize when the player is off balance and penetrate the “attacking space.”

**The “attacking space” is the space the player in possession wants to attack with the ball. This can be beyond the defender, to either side or withdrawn from the defender. If a space is beyond the defender then the player should be encouraged to penetrate that space. The addition of the fake (body movement) usually creates a larger and more obvious space to attack. A Move laterally across the defender can create better passing angles and opportunities and a cut back or other move withdrawing from the defender can relieve pressure and allow possession to be maintained.**

Basic Set-up for turn activities.

You can control the practice environment by creating 2 lines about 5 -10 yds apart. Have players start on 1 line approximately 5 - 10 yds between each with a ball. Walk through the mechanics of the move stationary 1st. Then players can walk towards other line and do move before it, repeat in opposite direction with other foot. And finally have them Dribble with more speed. **It is vital you develop 2-footed players so please provide time to practice with both feet.** For more limited space, you can set-up a square and have players work between cones to serve 4 players. Alternatively create a Hexagon with a central cone. Players can work each boundary line (6) and also the interior lines (spokes of a wheel) for another 6 players. This is easier for more proficient players.

Once mechanics and body movements are mastered you can put players back into the square game environments in your session to provide some opposition.
MOVES APPENDIX

1. Position ball on outside of left foot.
2. Step over ball with outside of the left foot, and lunge forward. (Can be more effective if the left foot circles forward and around the ball rather then stepping over)
3. Using the outside of trailing right foot
4. Play the ball away to the right
3. **Things You Can Expect**

As coaches of these younger players there are things that we know that we can expect during training and games. 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 cry immediately when something is hurt. Some cry even when something is not hurt.
- No matter how loud we shout, or how much we "practice" it, they cannot or will not pass the ball.
- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field in need of a toilet.
- The only player to hold a position is the goalkeeper (if you play with one). Don't even consider teaching positional play.
- Twenty seconds after the start of a game, every player will be within 5 yards of the ball.
- Several players will slap at the ball with their hands, or pick it up. Several parents will yell at them not to do that.
- A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get 99% of the player's attention. By all means, stop whatever you are doing and go watch for a couple of minutes!
- During a season, you will end up tying at least 40 - 50 shoelaces.
- They will do something that is absolutely hysterical. Make sure that you laugh!
Basic Info for Parents of Papoose Players

Since parents of kids at this level are most often first time participants in the game of soccer, here are some hints about how most coaches handle practices and games.

- Every player who attends practice during the week will be allowed to play at least half of the game.
- Parents must stand back from the touch-line (sideline). No one can be at the ends of the fields.
- We play two 10-minute quarters per half with a 1-minute break between quarters and a 5-minute half-time break.
- We field a maximum of 4 players and must field a minimum of 3 players.
- The field is normally 30 yards long by 20 yards wide. The goal area is about 8’ wide x 4’ high.
- There are no penalty kicks, no direct free kicks, and offsides will not be enforced.
- No slide tackling by any player. Sliding to get the ball is allowed but having contact with another player while on the ground is not.
- Basic knowledge to be learned at this age level is the shape of the field, the touchlines and the direction of play. Basic skills to be learned are warm-ups and stretching, dribbling, basic ball control, use of inside of foot, and sharing the ball.
- The major goal at this age is to allow the kids to have fun playing soccer. That means no running up of the score on a weaker team. Parents should support a coach’s decision to pull players or to move stronger players or even to remove the very strong player for a while to allow the other team to experience the fun and excitement of scoring. Coaches are allowed to enter an extra player if they are down by more than 3 goals.
- Any time a team is leading by 4 goals, any adjustments should be made to allow the other team a chance to experience success as soccer players.
6. Involving The Parents

It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but the U-6 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 listed below:

- A means of contacting everyone without one person doing all of the calling. (Phone chains.)
- Choosing a team administrator-someone to handle all of the details.
- Complete all paperwork required by your league or club.
- Discuss the laws of the game.
- Carpool needs.
- Training and game schedules. How you feel about starting and ending on time, what your attendance expectations are, what you think is a good excuse to miss training.
- What each player should bring to training: inflated ball, filled water bottle, soccer attire, and shin guards (Cleats are not mandatory.)
- Most importantly, your philosophy about coaching U-6 players. Let them know that everyone plays; 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.
- 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?
- Above all, try to enjoy yourself. If you do they probably will too.
7. Coaching Rational

It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 6- years old, in general, do not do so by their own choice. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives. With the above assumptions, lets look at some things that we can do to energize the U-6 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. Train once or twice a week. Any more than this may lead to their and your burnout.

- Have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can get into one hour. Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!

- Every player should bring his or her own size #3 ball.

- Remember, although they may have very similar in birth dates, their physical and / or mental maturity may vary as much as 36 months. Activities need to accommodate these individual differences whenever possible.

- Team play and passing is an alien concept to these players. They know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they often will steal it from their own teammates. Do not get uptight if they do not pass, let them dribble to their heart's content.

- Plan for at least four, 90-second drink breaks, especially in warmer weather. Their "cooling system" is not as efficient as in older players.
8. Typical Training Session

Here are some items that should be included in a U-6 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 may or may not involve the ball. They can chase their ball when it is thrown by the coach, bringing it back with different parts of their body. Or, they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball. "Soccernastics" activities are very appropriate, like: rolling the ball with the bottom of their feet, with their elbows, backwards, with the back of their neck while holding on to it; throwing it up and catching it; keeping it up with their feet while sitting.

**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. An example would be a kind of tag game, or "Red Light - Green Light", or a game where players are trying to knock their ball through gates. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "looser sits".

**Play The Game**

Move on to the real game, but, make sure it is a 2 v. 2, or 3 v. 3, game. Switch the game every 5 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.

**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.
U-6 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 to enter. 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 teams side. After an appropriate amount of time (when the balls become too scattered, or, the players are loosing 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.
9. Drills For Small Children

**Tip:** Keep team numbers reasonable (avoid long boring lines), for example use two goals for two different groups so lines are half as long.

**Run And Shoot**

Have the players in two lines by the center circle. Have a player from one line start moving towards the net and feed him/her a ball from beside the net. They have to dribble toward the net and shoot. Normally avoid any drills with line-ups, however this one works because the kids move quickly through the line. You should have lots of parents to help collect balls and keep kids moving through the lines.

**Cone Soccer**

Play 1v1 with one player against one player, each has a cone as a goal. This is every player; nobody stands and watches. The object is to hit the cone; there are no boundary lines, etc. This is nothing but 1v1 dribbling with a little bit of long passing/shooting, etc. They figure out very quickly that they have to beat their man and nothing else will do. After about five minutes, everybody switches to somebody they haven't played yet. This way nobody is hopelessly outmatched against the same player for very long. They hate to stop doing this until about forty minutes or so when their tongues are hanging to the ground (it's also a good conditioner). This also teaches individual initiative - nobody else is going to stop the opponent; nobody else is going to score the goal.

**Strong Sides**

The team concept is best taught with unbalanced drills (i.e., 2 v. 1, and 3 v. 2, etc.)-- this is true for players of all ages, but especially with younger players. This will make the benefit of team play obvious and it will "let the game be the teacher". Start with 2 v. 1 drills, then when the players clearly recognize the value of combining to beat one player-- either to beat and score or to maintain possession-- consider a move to 3 v. 2 (vary the amount of space the drills are carried out in-- space is almost another subject).

**Striker!**

Divide players into two teams. Station each team at a corner post of the goal, standing off, but facing the field. Place a keeper in goal facing the field. Coach/assistant stands behind the center of the goal with a supply of balls. Coach tosses a ball over the crossbar to about the penalty spot. A player from each team both sprint to the ball and attempt to control it, turn, and get a shot off. The second to the ball defends (if he then wins the ball, then he tries to shoot). When there is a score, save, or ball goes out of play, restart the same way with a different pair of players. May want to limit amount of time each
pair has to attempt to score as some kids will dribble all over the field if you let them and everyone else gets bored. Limit the area that the combatants can "fight" in to the penalty area.

**Possession**

Picture a square about 20 yards to a side. Coach is at one corner. Two teams are at each of two corners to immediate right and left of coach. Coach serves balls between the two teams first players in line from each team attempt to receive ball and turn and pass to their own team. Second player to the ball attempts to defend, prevent turn, or gain possession and turn and pass to his team. Score one point for turning and passing and successful reception. This keeps the two players in line and the second players in line who are the receivers into the game. Receivers cannot enter field but can adjust position along a line to receive pass. Coach can vary the service to handicap one player or another, serve hard, soft, air balls, or into the space beyond the two lines, etc. Coach controls time and with cones lays out the space for play (if no one can turn and pass within a few seconds, no points and the next players are up; dribble out of bounds and the same thing-- get back in line and coach serves another ball).

**Line Drills**

Although you should limit the number of line drills, the following drills are very helpful in teaching younger players important fundamental aspects of the game (all these are on a field stepped off to regulation size, preferably with a regulation goal).

Players rotate positions:

- **Simple cut back move:** 1 line. Have players start at midfield and dribble half way down sideline with coach providing minimal pressure. When coach says 'cut' the player cuts the ball toward the middle and then finishes with a shot. As season progresses, coach adds more pressure.

- **Reverse move (U6s can begin to do this; U7s ought to be able to do it):** 1 line. Players and coach stand on end line next to goal. Coach passes ball ahead. Player has to run and reverse ball, then turn and shoot (or dribble back and shoot).

- **Pass to partner:** 2 lines: one along sideline and another toward the center of the field. Same as above, but this time, when coach says pass, the player passes to the wide-open teammate. The teammate must be yelling 'pass it to me.' The play finishes with a shot. As season progresses, coach adds more pressure. Also, this is the foundation for 2 v 1 or 3 v 1. As season progresses, a defender is added and is coached on how to intercept/steal a pass.
**Shooting**

Players love to shoot and score. Almost anything that gets lots of shots in a short time is fine. With 6 or fewer, a simple line taking turns and retrieving the balls works fine. Have them stay out of the way of each other’s shots.

For more than 6, you need to keep the "standers" occupied some way. Having them serve a ball to the shooter, then move to the shooting line and the shooters retrieve ball and move to serving line.

Easiest serves are those coming from behind and slightly to the side of the shooter, also ball must be on ground and in front of shooter. The shooter should be facing sideways so he can see both the ball coming and the goal at which she will shoot. Next easiest are serves coming from the goal on the ground back to the shooter who is facing the goal; hardest serves are those coming across the field from either side.

If a larger goal is available, a parent as keeper (preferably a totally inept keeper) is lots of fun.

The youngest will be lousy servers and you will have to decide if it is "working" when you have them serve. If not simply change the activity.

One version of the setup: Line in front of goal about 15 yards out. First player in line has no ball. Second player in line pushes the ball from behind to in front of the first player so that the ball is rolling towards the goal. The first player catches up to the ball and takes a first time shot. First player retrieves ball and goes to end of line, second player moves to front of line ... (You will have to instruct them about passing the ball slowly enough that the first player can reach it, but hard enough that it does get in front of him.

One way to begin this is to have the first player facing the goal with his legs spread and the second player passes between the first player’s legs. That at least puts the ball between the player and the goal and as long as the pass is not too hard, the first player should be able to get a shot off.)

**Other Games**

1v1: Have the players find someone of comparable ability. Use two pairs. Have one pair serve as "goals" standing with their legs spread apart and the other two compete to score. Tell them the goals must be scored by shooting on the ground. After one minute, goals and players switch.

If you have an odd number of pairs, use parents as "goals".
11. Scrimmage

Encourage the team with the ball (attackers) to spread out and to move to get open. Encourage the defenders (team without ball) to get between the ball and the goal (goal-side) (or between an attacker who is "up front" and the goal).

Don't worry about the finer points of throw-ins, offside, etc. Do prohibit sliding tackles, encourage the attackers to shoot, defenders to get back as soon as they lose the ball.

Defenders are everyone on the team that doesn't have the ball. Attackers are everyone on the team that does have the ball. When no one has the ball, deciding whether you should act like a defender or an attacker is hard to determine, but the team that gets it right most often usually wins the game.

The scrimmage will most likely look like a swarm around the ball. If the coach must engage in some tactical instruction, have one player play behind the swarm to collect any balls coming to him and play the ball forward to space in front of and to the side of the swarm.

Later introduce players to the sides of the swarm to collect any balls to the side or passes from behind and then dribble forward and shoot or pass to the middle. Finally, add a player in front of the swarm to serve as a target.

Now with 4 players outside the swarm, the remaining few players are just midfielders, the others are just in good supporting positions. Encourage the swarm to pass to any teammate outside the swarm, yes a pass back is good and should be tolerated, even if it is a bit risky for K-3 s. The players outside the swarm should be rotated frequently.

It will take K's all fall to get to the point where more than a couple will play outside the swarm. Except, for those who are really not playing at all and just standing with no clue as to what is going on, encourage those to get into the swarm and get involved.

Do not relegate the only kid with a booming kick to stay back all the time. The point here is to learn and not to restrict the chances to learn in an effort to win or avoid an embarrassing loss.

Of course, there are lots of variations on all of these and you probably have your own favorite. With these guys silly games are not a bad idea. Just remember these little ones have trouble staying focused on one activity for too long, so make lots of changes. If something isn't working, change after a very short time, especially if you don't have a clear way to make it easier or more fun to do.
Teach The Parents

During the last practice of the season have a scrimmage between the parents and the players (with the coaches helping the players). This serves a couple of purposes. The kids love this game. They get a chance to show their parents what they can do and they enjoy beating their parents. *(The parents never win, the coaches make sure of that.)* Also, since many of the parents have never played soccer it shows them how difficult the game really is. The hope is that a parent may now think twice before "yelling" at a child for missing and "easy" shot in a game. Everybody seems to enjoy this scrimmage.
## Developmental Characteristics and Interests of School Age Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical (Grades K-1)</th>
<th>Social-Emotional (Grades K-1)</th>
<th>Cognitive (Grades K-1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy long periods of free play</td>
<td>Eager to receive adult praise</td>
<td>Understand language better than they speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing eye-hand coordination</td>
<td>Enjoy dramatic play</td>
<td>Are interested in present; vague concepts of past/future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy small group cooperative games</td>
<td>Eager to engage in new activities/adventures led by involved adult</td>
<td>Eager to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May require rest after high energy play</td>
<td>Eager to identify with older children</td>
<td>Ask many questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved body coordination, yet still can fall easily</td>
<td>Enjoy exploring new materials and equipment</td>
<td>Define things by their use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be easily frightened by novel or strange events</td>
<td>Developing a sense of humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prefer play in small groups</td>
<td>Communicate best within a small group of peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like responsibilities they can handle</td>
<td>May need guidance of adult when starting a new task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning to cooperate with others, but may at times display selfish behavior</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical (Grades 2-3)</th>
<th>Social-Emotional (Grades 2-3)</th>
<th>Cognitive (Grades 2-3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic about games</td>
<td>Have a strong drive toward independence</td>
<td>Like to talk; use language to express feelings/tell stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing improvement in both gross and fine motor skills</td>
<td>Develop a strong sense of loyalty to friends</td>
<td>Developing a sense of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possess a high activity level</td>
<td>Need to belong to a group</td>
<td>Enjoy collecting things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice to mast variations of movement for physical activities</td>
<td>Play with and are friends with the same-sex peers</td>
<td>Enjoy problem-solving games like treasure hunts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy games that allow for comparison of skills</td>
<td>Like to take on responsibility</td>
<td>Can plan and carry out projects with adult support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy games that allow for self-improvement</td>
<td>Live in a world of games, rituals and humor inhabited only by children</td>
<td>Becoming more self-directed in activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like to have a best friend</td>
<td>Better able to understand and appreciate differences of opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have a rigid sense of right and wrong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need help accepting peers who are different or left out of a group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical (Grades 4-6)</th>
<th>Social-Emotional (Grades 4-6)</th>
<th>Cognitive (Grades 4-6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May be careless about their clothes, room and body cleanliness</td>
<td>Enjoy small, peer-dominated group discussions</td>
<td>Ask many questions and want thoughtful answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls may have sudden growth spurt and beginning signs of puberty</td>
<td>Like to join organized groups</td>
<td>Can often understand other points of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy physical activities that master specific skills</td>
<td>Are anxious to grow up</td>
<td>Developing strong interests, hobbies and collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy competitive games</td>
<td>Are intensely loyal to their peer group</td>
<td>Enjoy rule-based games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possess a high activity level</td>
<td>Form a close one-on-one friendship</td>
<td>Are beginning to develop view about social/global issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy games that allow for comparison of skills</td>
<td>Have a growing desire to assert individuality and independence</td>
<td>Beginning to enjoy humor by telling jokes and understanding sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy games that for self-improvement</td>
<td>Can be daring and competitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be critical of peers and adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are self-conscious of their abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Developmental characteristics and interests of school-age children obtained from www.ohioafterschool.org*
The spirit of a child knows no bounds until limited by adults.

The Parent’s Guide
An Introduction to Youth Soccer

The guide is designed to assist parents new to the game of soccer in growing the spirit without limiting the child.

US Youth Soccer Coaching Committee and Coaching Education Department

©2005 US Youth Soccer Association, Inc.
US Youth Soccer provides a healthy activity through its recreational and small-sided games programs. These programs emphasize FUN and de-emphasize winning at all costs. Every child is guaranteed playing time and the game is taught in a fun and enjoyable atmosphere.

For the player with advanced skills and greater ambition highly competitive leagues are offered. This player might have his or her sights set on a college soccer scholarship or playing for the U. S. Olympic or National teams.

US Youth Soccer is the largest member of the United Stated Soccer Federation, the governing body for soccer in the United States. US Youth Soccer is a nationwide body of over 600,000 volunteers and administrators and over 300,000 dedicated coaches, most of who also are volunteers. US Youth Soccer registers over 3,000,000 youth players between the ages of 5 and 19. US Youth Soccer is made up of 55 member State Associations; one in each state and two in California, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas.

US Youth Soccer is non-profit and educational organization whose mission is to foster the physical, mental and emotional growth and development of America's youth through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition. Our job is also to make it fun and instill in young players a lifelong passion for the sport.
I just signed my child up for soccer! Now what do I do?

I don’t know anything about this game.

I know that a lot of kids play it and love it. I know they use a white ball with some designs on it and it looks like a basketball, but rolls on the ground.

**Now what do I do?**
Kids love soccer because it is FUN!
- From an early age every child loves to play with a ball. Soccer is just playing with the ball except with others and with a few simple rules. Soccer is having FUN!
- The rules at the basic level are: the ball is shared with your teammates; the ball is kept away from your opponents; everyone has to "play nice;" every child gets their time with the ball and everyone has FUN!

Basic equipment for soccer parents
- Comfortable lawn chair – comfort is important because you are going to be spending a lot of the time sitting in that chair watching youth soccer players having FUN!
- Comfortable clothing – you will be out in the sun, the rain, the heat and the cold. Dress to be comfortable so you can sit in that chair and watch youth soccer players having FUN!
- A sense of humor and joy at watching youth soccer players have FUN!

Real SOCCER... equals 2 Feet + 1 Ball - The rest is your... Imagination
How to be a Supportive Parent

Supportive Soccer Parents

• Give consistent encouragement and support to their children regardless of the degree of success, the level of skill or time on the field.

• Stress the importance of respect for coaches through discussions with their children and highlight the critical nature of contributing to the team and its success.

• Serve as role models, see the “big picture” and support all programs and all players.

• Leave coaching to coaches and do not criticize coaching strategies or team performance.

• Avoid putting pressure on children about playing time and performance.

From Sports Done Right™ The Maine Center for Sport and Coaching
Why Do Players Play?

1. To have fun
2. To be with their friends
3. To make new friends
4. To improve and learn
5. To feel good
6. To wear the stuff

“Make sure she knows that you are there because it is fun for you to watch her participate, not because you want to criticize.”
- Caroline Silby, PH.D, Author of Games Girls Play: Understanding and Guiding Young Female Athletes
Six Guidelines for Soccer Parents

“Have you ever seen a truly gifted player sitting on the bench on any team unless the game was out of reach or the player was injured or winded?” - Aicinena, 124

1. Cheer
2. Relax and Let Them Play
3. Yelling Directions = Distraction
4. Remember, They Are Your Genes
5. Have Reasonable Expectations
6. Meet with the Coaches

The greatest gift that you can give to your children throughout their sporting involvement is support. When asked what it is that they would most like from their parents in terms of support, most children suggest encouragement and acceptance of their choices. - Australian Sports Commission
Why Do Players Quit?

1. Criticism and yelling
2. No playing time
3. Over-emphasis on winning
4. Poor communication
5. Fear of making mistakes
6. Boredom
7. Not learning

“Adult spectators, coaches and league administrators are guests at the children’s games. We are guests because if no adult attended, our hosts, the children, could still have a game.”
- Douglas E. Abrams, University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law
Four Red Flags for Parents

1. **Living Out Dreams** - A parent who is continuing to live personal athletic dreams through his/her child has not released his/her child to the game.

2. **Too Involved** - If a parent tends to share in the credit when the child has done well in sport or has been victorious, the parent is too involved.

3. **Trying Too Hard** - If a parent is trying to continue to coach his child when the child probably knows more about the game than the parent does, he has not released the youth athlete.

4. **Too Serious** - A parent should realize that he is taking everything too seriously and has not released the child to the activity when the parent:
   - is nervous before his/her child’s game
   - becomes verbally critical of an official
   - has a difficult time bouncing back when the player’s team suffers a defeat
   - makes mental notes during a game so he can give his/her child advice at the conclusion of the game

from “Teaching Character through Sport: Developing a Positive Coaching Legacy” by Bruce Brown
How Do I Start?

Find out why YOUR child wants to play soccer! Ask the real questions:

- Why do YOU want to play soccer?
- What is fun about soccer for YOU?
- What do YOU like to hear from ME before, during and after YOUR GAMES?

“Everyone forgets today’s score before the end of the season, but decades later the children still remember the adults whose affection and support remained steadfast regardless of the scoreboard.”

- Abrams, 2002
Meeting Your Child’s Needs

Once you have asked the questions, LISTEN to the answer and learn...

• Shape your support to meet your child’s expressed desires; make his/her dreams come true.

• Ask yourself “What can I do to assist my child in being successful in meeting his/her goals for participation in soccer?”

92% of student-athletes believe participating in sports helps them to be a better person.

97% of student-athletes say the main reason they play sports is because it is fun and exciting.

*From “The Athletes Speak Survey 2002-2004,” a survey of pilot projects conducted by the National Center for Student Aspirations involving Maine and Massachusetts student athletes.*
Children have four basic emotional needs in organized sports:

1. To play without unhealthy pressure to win imposed by parents and coaches
2. To be treated like children, not miniature professionals
3. Adult role models whose sportsmanlike behavior helps make participation fun
4. To play without adult-imposed pressure for financial gain inspired by professional or big-time collegiate sports

- Douglas E. Abrams; Villanova Sports Journal, 2002
Being a Good Soccer Parent

• Encourage your child, regardless of his or her degree of success or level of skill.

• Ensure a balance in your student-athlete’s life, encouraging participation in multiple sports and activities while placing academics first.

• Emphasize enjoyment, development of skills and team play as the cornerstones of your child’s early sports experiences.

• Leave coaching to coaches and avoid placing too much pressure on your youngster about playing time and performance.

• Be realistic about your child’s future in sports, recognizing that only a select few earn a college scholarship, compete in the Olympics or sign a professional contract.

• Be there when your child looks to the sidelines for a positive role model.

“Athletic participation must be healthful, positive and safe for everyone involved, conducted in an environment that teaches values and ethics, strengthens the community, promotes competition without conflict and enriches the lives of the athletes.”

From Sports Done Right  TM The Maine Center for Sport and Coaching
What Can I Expect?

- Children differ greatly due to age, gender and maturity.
- Soccer is “the game for all kids” and that means there will be all types of kids playing together.
- Most volunteer-directed programs are conducted by parents and coaches who know they will be involved for only a few years while their own children are involved.
- 85% of volunteer directed youth sports are coached by parents with a child on the team.
- Women coach only 20% of the 5 to 14 year-olds on non-school-affiliated teams.
- Less than 10% of the volunteer coaches in the United States have had any type of coaching education.

“Parents love their children and want the best for them. Parents should focus on their child’s potential rather than on an assumption of superiority. Parents should help their child to become what they can be, not fail at becoming something they are incapable of becoming.”

- Aicinena, 125
You WILL Be Surprised!

- Young players cry immediately when something is hurt. Some cry even when something is not hurt.

- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field in need of a toilet (U8).

- A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get 99% of the players’ attention.

- Some players will wear their uniform to bed, to school and everywhere else.

- A player will forget to go on the field, another will forget to go off.

- Players will still stop and laugh if the referee gets hit in the backside with the ball during a game – they are not competing, they are having fun.

- If you drive some one else’s child to a game, he/she may not remember after the game to look for you to get home.

“Most children play to have fun and be with their friends. They do not play to entertain the adults, boost the adults’ egos or improve the family’s social status in the community.”
- Abrams, 2002
1. **BALL** - Each child should have his or her own age-appropriate ball and bring it to team practice.

2. **SHIN GUARDS** - An absolute requirement for games, should also be worn for all practices, the pull-on "legging" type with foam padding protecting the front of the leg from ankle to shin.

3. **SOCCER SHOES** - Recommended, but not required by most clubs. Soccer cleats for most recreational play must be rubber or molded plastic (no metal cleats), and no less than 3/8 inch in diameter. Baseball or football-type shoes with square or rectangular cleats are not legal for soccer.

4. **WATER BOTTLE** (with child’s name on it) - Fresh water should be available to your child at each practice and game.

5. **SHIRTS, SOCKS, SHORTS** - One or more of these items may be provided for each player by your local club. Be sure you are aware of your club's policies for games and practices.
What Is a “Practice?”

**Warm-up**
- Enthusiastically sets the tone for fun.
- The warm-up prepares the mind and body for upcoming activities.
- Young players need very little stretching, but it is a good habit for them to begin at an early age.
- Warm-ups encourage each player to use a ball and often incorporate games and exercises that emphasize a lot of touches and dribbling.

**Individual Activities**
- Fun-filled activities that emphasize technical development. Remember this is the discovery age. Lots of ball contacts.
- Activities are appropriate for the skills and ages of the players.
- The coach should be conducting a number of short and different activities.
- Remember, a child's attention span is limited.
What Is a “Practice”?  

“With few exceptions, parents can be invaluable allies if they really know that a coach’s first priority is the health, safety and development of their child.”

- Robert Cobb, University of Maine

Group Activities
- Group games are an extension of the individual activity.
- Groups are small to allow for the most ball contact and players are involved in the game as much as possible, so they are not standing around in lines awaiting their turn.

"The Game"
- Designed to familiarize the players with the varying aspects of the game. Kids want to play and have fun. After a brief explanation and/or demonstration quickly get the players playing.
- Small-sided games (e.g. 4 v 4) to help keep everyone involved. Activities are organized to progress into controlled scrimmages and then into an open scrimmage.
- Remember, the kids signed up to play soccer!
Teaching Sportsmanship

Here are six things you can do to show your child (and other parents) what being "a good sport" means:

• Cheer for all the children, even those on the other team. What a surprising difference it can make on the sidelines and in the stands when parents make an effort to applaud a good effort or a fine play - no matter who makes it.

• Talk to parents of the other team. They are not the enemy.

• Be a parent, not a coach and resist the urge to critique. Children dread their parents going over their performance in detail, pointing out all their mistakes. Sometimes just being there shows your children what being a good parent is all about. Leave the coaching to the coaches: this includes motivating, psyching your child for practice, post-game critiquing, setting goals, requiring additional training, etc.

“One reason kids love video games so much is that they can each pick their own level of challenge.”
- Lenny Wiersma, Center for the Advancement of Responsible Youth Sports
Teaching Sportsmanship

- Thank the officials: Find a few moments to compliment the officials for their hard work after a game (especially if your child's team loses) and you will be rewarded with the pleasure of seeing a surprised smile in return.

- Keep soccer in its proper perspective: Soccer should not be larger than life for you. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Remember, your relationship will continue with your children long after their youth soccer days are over. Keep your goals and needs separate from your child's experience.

- Have fun: That is what the children are trying to do!

“Show up for practice. Every parent is time-crunched, but try to make room in your schedule to attend at least a few of your child’s team practices as well as the big games. This sends the message that you value his hard work and appreciate the process of playing sports, not just the outcomes.”

- Hannah Storm, CBS The Early Show
Sideline Behavior

- Children want cheerleaders to applaud their success, not adults yelling instructions. Think of the soccer field as a playground and not as a sports venue.
- What’s appropriate at a sport stadium with adult athletes is NOT appropriate for young children at play.
- Focus on the process of playing and not the outcome.

“When watching a youth sports game, if you can’t carry on a normal conversation with the person next to you then you’re probably paying too much attention to the game.”
- Bigelow, Moroney, & Hall, 2001
Sideline Behavior

- Unlike the adult games, kids playing soccer do not see the other team as the enemy. The other team is full of their friends—friends from their school, their place of worship, their neighborhood. They are likely to be playing together in your backyard or in your den after the game.

- Cheer ANY and ALL success on the field. It DOES NOT matter what player OR team. They are all kids and they want you there to see them play.

“A good way to determine whether the sideline comments are helpful and supportive is to ask the children what they prefer to hear on the sideline, if anything.”

- Developing Decision Makers
Kids Don’t Care Who Wins

“Asked what embarrasses them most, every single child surveyed listed parents hollering plays or instructions from the sideline or stands.”
- Mom's Team.com

Sideline Behavior

- Don’t keep score, the kids don’t regard it as that important.
- Don’t care who wins or loses, they are having fun and that is the objective, NOT winning or losing.

Note: Winning can become more important as the child develops; for that reason, administrators seek to form balanced teams to create equal opportunities to win and lose.

“Youth sports provide an ideal avenue for early exposure to setback and allows supportive adults to offer guidance with the stakes not nearly as high as they will be sometimes later on in life.”
- Abrams

What is FUN for them is more important than what is FUN for you!
The Ride Home

- **Never reward** what you perceive as success.
- **Never punish** what you perceive as failure.
- **Don’t evaluate** your child’s performance, he or she is playing to have fun, not to earn a grade! If he or she had fun, the day was a success.

- **Meet your child’s needs** by remembering the questions you asked and the answers you got as to why your child is playing soccer.

“The youngsters are a captive audience in the back seat on the way home, but they deserve to ride in peace without being unwilling victims of their parents’ “station wagon syndrome.”

- Abrams, 2002
Good Questions on the Way Home

- Did you have fun today?
- What did you think you did well today?
- Did you learn any new moves?

*If you are greeted with the sound of silence, give off the gentle sounds of approval, be sure he/she knows you there for him/her.*

"Parents need to understand that the period following practice and competition is a crucial time for a young athlete. It’s important she be given the freedom to process it on her own."

- Silby, 2000
Dealing with the Coach

• Let the coach – do the coaching
• Ask the coaching philosophy, team rules and guidelines.
• **When to ask questions** - Don't ask questions during a game or in front of a small group that you wouldn't want asked of you.
• **Ask the coach how you can help during practice and games** – Get involved.
• **Be supportive** - Always role model positive behavior, support the program.

“What often happens in the parent-coach relationship is that the parents become critical of the “poor job” the coach is doing. They complain to their spouses and other parents, often in front of their children. This serves to undermine what authority and “expert” knowledge the coach may have had in the beginning. This results in greater challenges for the coach. In such a case, those engaging in vociferous complaints are contributors to the problems challenging the coach.”

- Aicinena, 27
Conflicting Agendas

Why are the children playing?
- to have fun
- friends are playing
- mom said so
- time away from mom and dad
- to get in shape

Why is the coach, coaching?
- their child is playing
- wants to be in charge
- wants to show the players all the skills they have learned over their career
- because they enjoy and have fun with the kids
- to give back to the game

“If your child were truly one of the best players, how would the coach benefit by not playing him/her?”
- Aicinena, 124
What about Referees?

Everyone sees the play differently.

- The main goal of the referee is to make the game safe and fun for the children.
- Being a referee is not as easy as it appears. They are another coach on the field for small sided games.
- Remember, many referees are brothers and sisters of soccer players or soccer players themselves. Others are fellow parents trying to just help youth soccer players have FUN!
- Recognize that the referee is doing his/her best. It may not be what you saw, but the goal is to let the game be played so that children can have FUN!
Let the Referee Call the Game

Referees deserve respect and support too!

- Helping the referee to call the trip or a foul only confuses children.
- Disagreeing hurts your child's respect for the referee, and may hurt the view of the referee towards your child's team.
- Criticism causes referees to quit rather than become better. Many referees quit due to being yelled at by parents.
- As you cheer for the players, cheer for the referees too.

“Parents and coaches need to remember that if officials can hear profanity and other verbal abuse directed at them when a call goes against the team, the children on the field can also hear it.”
- Abrams, 2002
Resources & Credits

US Youth Soccer
Coaching Committee

US Youth Soccer
Coaching Education Department

US Youth Soccer
Parent Education Task Force

Kentucky Youth Soccer
Parent Education Program


“Through the Eyes of Parents, Children, and a Coach: A Fourteen-Year Participant-Observer Investigation of Youth Soccer”, Steven Aicinena

“Games Girls Play”, Caroline Silby, PhD.

“Sports Done Right” ™ - The Maine Center for Sport and Coaching
www.mcsc.umaine.edu/sportsdoneright

“Developing Decision Makers”, Dr. Lynn Kidman, www.ipcltd.com

“Teaching Character through Sport: Developing a Positive Coaching Legacy” by Bruce Brown

“A Guide for Parents” – Florida Youth Soccer

“Parent Booklet” - The Australian Sports Commission

“The Cheers and Tears”, Shane Murphy, PhD.
Thank you for taking the time to read The Parent’s Guide – An Introduction to Youth Soccer. The guide is designed to assist parents new to the game of soccer in growing the spirit without limiting the child.

Now that you have completed the guide, please take a moment to go online at USYOUTHSOCCER.ORG to take a short quiz on these materials. At the successful completion of the quiz, you will be able to print a personalize Certificate of Completion.

The spirit of a child knows no bounds until limited by adults.

To promote the growth of the game in the United States by properly preparing those new to the game to encourage the young child to develop a love for the game is the mission of US Youth Soccer’s Coaching Committee and Technical Department
There are already a multitude of articles saying that winning and losing are not the correct measures of success in youth soccer, instead we should measure the development of the players. OK, perfect. The next obvious follow-up question then is, “How do we measure the development of a single player?”

If US Youth Soccer can answer this question in a way that is helpful to committed coaches and understandable to parents with limited playing experience (and paying the money to have their kids involved), they may be able to turn this overly organized youth soccer system of ours into a much more effective development program.

Cary McCormick
Arlington, VA

Indeed how do we measure player development? Too often in America a professional sport model is used in measuring youth sports success. Youth soccer is not immune to this misapplied standard. For soccer the situation is made worse by a desire of many adults to use measuring tools from other sports. In fact it is maddening to many adults that soccer is not as black and white as with some sports in judging successful play. Many team sports played in our nation are statistically driven and coach centered. Soccer is neither of those! Indeed just like the Laws of the Game our sport has many shades of grey within it. As a player centered sport some coaches become disillusioned as they learn that they are the ‘guide on the side’ and not the ‘sage on the stage’. Too many soccer coaches bring a “Pattonesque” attitude to the youth sport environment. This coach-centered perspective has been handed down to us from other sports and coaching styles of past generations.

In many sports the coach makes crucial decisions during the competition. In soccer players make the primary decisions during the match. The coach’s decisions are of secondary importance. The ego-centric personality will find coaching soccer troublesome. The other
significant group of adults at a youth soccer match is parents. They too often have their view of
the match colored by the professional model and by a view of "coaching" that is portrayed in the
media. Although it is changing, the majority of parents watching their kids play soccer have
never played the game. In fact the statistics show that most of today’s parents never played any
team sport. So their only exposure on how to measure sporting success is gleaned from the
sports media. The sports media predominately report on adult teams at the college and
professional levels. These adult measurements of team performance should not and cannot be
applied to youth sports.

The analogy can be made to a youngster’s academic development in preparation for work in
the adult business world. While the child is in primary and secondary school the corporate
world measurements of success are not applied. Those business assessments are not yet
appropriate because the school-aged student does not yet have the tools to compete in the adult
business environment. The knowledge and skills to be a competitor in business are still being
taught and learned. This holds true in soccer as well!

Soccer is an adult game designed by adults for adults to play. Adults enjoy the game so
much that we have shared it with our children. Yet adults err when we bring our adult
performance and outcome based thinking into the developing player’s world.

Alright fine you say. So how do we measure success? How do parents know if the team
coach is doing a good job of teaching soccer to the players? How does the novice coach know if
the kids are growing within the game? Well let’s use the facts, from a study by the Youth Sports
Institute, of what players want from their sports experience as a way to measure success.

“TRUTHS” about children and sports

rô Fun is pivotal - if it’s not “fun,” young people won’t play a sport
rô Skill development is a crucial aspect of fun - it is more important than winning even
among the best athletes
rô The most rewarding challenges of sports are those that lead to self-knowledge
rô Intrinsic rewards (self-knowledge that grows out of self-competition) are more important
in creating lifetime athletes than are extrinsic rewards (victory or attention from others) ¹

During childhood allow the kids to have a good time playing the game while instilling the
passion to love playing soccer on their own. Only a passion for the game can lead to success.
“Success is something players take ownership of and in time it becomes personally meaningful.
Success is a process, not a product. The process of doing one’s best is the key to success. The
determining criterion of success is whether a player gave his or her best that day. Doing one’s
best is the most important statement a player can make about the importance of an activity and
the meaning it has. With years of experience comes self-knowledge and self-awareness. So
players learn over time what it means to do your best, to give 100%.” ²

“Winning isn’t everything, but trying to is!” – Rainer Martens, sports psychologist

Association, North Palm Beach, FL. Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (SGMA).
Diamond Communications
Motives for Participation in Youth Sport

Reasons for Participating in Non-school Sports (study of 3,900 7\textsuperscript{th} to 12\textsuperscript{th} graders)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To have fun</td>
<td>1. To have fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To do something I’m good at</td>
<td>2. To stay in shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To improve my skills</td>
<td>3. To get exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. For the excitement of competition</td>
<td>4. To improve my skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To stay in shape</td>
<td>5. To do something I am good at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. For the challenge of competition</td>
<td>6. To learn new skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To get exercise</td>
<td>7. For the excitement of competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. To learn new skills</td>
<td>8. To play as part of a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. To play as part of a team</td>
<td>9. To make new friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. To go to a higher level of competition</td>
<td>10. For the challenge of competition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Truths & Motives for Participation

1. The motive to have fun and to enjoy participating in sport.
2. The motive to learn new skills and to improve on existing sports skills.
3. The motive to become physically fit and to enjoy good health
4. The motive to enjoy the challenge and excitement of sports participation and competition.
5. The motive to enjoy a team atmosphere and to be with friends.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- Remember the “truths” and talk to your children with them in mind. After a game, ask questions about “fun,” “skill improvement,” “learning experiences” and “having a good time with friends.”
- See yourself as part of the team and supportive of the coach; avoid setting up a conflict in your child’s mind between his or her parents and coaches. If you want to affect the coaching, volunteer to help.
- Develop perspective: remember what you could do at your children’s ages; don’t judge them by what you can do now. Kids will not become great players overnight.
- Develop an understanding of what your children want from sports—not all children want the same things. Determine if they want to be involved at all.


**Basic Urges of Children**

- Movement
- Success and Approval
- Peer Acceptance & Social Competence
- Cooperation & Competition
- Physical Fitness & Attractiveness
- Adventure
- Creative Satisfaction
- Rhythmic Expression

To Know

Note: winning alone is not a motive for participation by boys and girls.

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“We are asking our players to compete before they have learned how to play.”

Jay Miller, U17 Men’s National Team coach 2001

In general the benefits of youth sports for children include character building, dealing with obstacles, dealing with losing, humility in winning, dealing with competition, leadership growth opportunities, cooperative skills, social skills and so on. We employ soccer to develop well adjusted, good citizens.

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Measurements of Success in Youth Soccer

**Short-Term**

*FUN* … do the players smile and laugh? Do the players look forward to playing? The first question from the player’s family should be, “Did you have fun today?”

*Fair Play* … does a player demonstrate by words and actions a sense of sportsmanship?

*Laws of the Game* … do the players know and follow the rules of soccer?

*Health and Fitness* … are the players physically fit enough to meet the fitness demands of the game? Are they developing good nutrition and hydration habits befitting an athlete?

*Friendships* … are the players creating new friends within the team and with players from other teams?

*Skills* … are the players demonstrating a growing number of ball skills and are they gradually becoming more proficient in those skills?

**Long-Term**

*Commitment* … how do the players answer when asked at the end of a game, “Did you try your best?”

*Roles in the Team* … more important than learning a position, are the players learning about positioning? Knowing where the right back or the center forward spot is on the field is important, yet learning how to move tactically within the game is far more important. Do all of the players get exposed to playing all of the positions?

*Leadership* … are players being given the opportunity to take on leader roles and responsibilities? Are the coaches and team managers teaching leadership?

*Tactics* … are the players experimenting with new tactics in matches? The coaches must teach new tactics to the players in training sessions and then allow them to try out the tactics in a match, regardless of how that might affect the outcome!

*Retention* … do the players come back year after year?

Retention is recognized as also a short term measure of success in youth soccer and developing well adjusted citizens is another long term measure of success in youth sports. In a 2007 US Youth Soccer survey 96% of parents responded that one of the benefits they desire for youth soccer to provide to their child is fun. 97% of the parents surveyed feel the reason their child participates in youth soccer is fun.

**US Youth Soccer**
WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Talk positively with their children before and after activity
- Supply transport
- Assist with supervision
- Officiate games
- Help with administration
- Assist with the organization of special events

Statistics, won-loss-tie records, goals for/goals against, saves, number of corner kicks and so on are straightforward ways to measure what happened in a game. Those unfamiliar with soccer find the use of those measurements comforting as they help them define a sport they find confusing. Yet those measurements fail to show the complete picture of a random skill, open-ended, transitional sport with no timeouts. There is an immeasurable organized chaos factor in soccer.

How can one measure or quantify the unexpected 60 yard dribble and goal of Diego Maradona in the 1986 World Cup? What measurement of success can explain how some player somewhere in the world decades ago spontaneously did a bicycle kick in a match and that move became a part of soccer thereafter?

The bottom line is that statistics in soccer are largely meaningless. From this thought springs the reality that soccer perhaps is the cruelest of team sports. It may be the only team sport where a team could have the majority of ball possession, outshoot the other team and still lose the match. If you have played soccer long enough you have been the team that was much better than the opposition and lost. You have also been the team that was outplayed by the opposition and won. The won-loss record does not accurately show how the game was played, how the players performed or how well the coach prepared the team to play the game.

Scientific research has concluded that it takes eight-to-twelve years of training for a talented player to reach elite levels. This is called the ten-year or 10,000 hour rule, which translates to slightly more than three hours of practice daily for ten years (Ericsson, et al., 1993; Ericsson and Charness, 1994, Bloom, 1985, Salmela et al., 1998). Unfortunately, parents and coaches in many sports still approach training with an attitude best characterized as “peaking by Friday,” where a short-term approach is taken to training and performance with an over-emphasis on immediate results. We now know that a long-term commitment to practice and training is required to produce elite players in all sports.
Sports can be classified as early specialization or late specialization sports. Late specialization sports, including athletics, combative sports, cycling, racquet sports, rowing and all team sports require a generalized approach to early training. For these sports, the emphasis during the first two phases of training should be on the development of general motor and technical-tactical skills.

LATE SPECIALIZATION MODEL
1. FUNdamental Stage
2. Learning to Train
3. Training to Train
4. Training to Compete
5. Training to Win
6. Retirement/Rentainment

Stage 1 – THE FUNDAMENTAL STAGE
Age: 6-9
Objective: Learn all fundamental movement skills (build overall motor skills)

Stage 2 – THE LEARNING TO TRAIN STAGE
Age: 8-12
Objective: Learn all fundamental soccer skills (build overall sports skills)

Stage 3 – THE TRAINING TO TRAIN STAGE
Age: 11-16
Objectives: Build the aerobic base, build strength towards the end of the phase and further develop sport-specific skills (build the “engine” and consolidate soccer specific skills)

Stage 4 – THE TRAINING TO COMPETE STAGE
Age: 15-18
Objectives: optimize fitness preparation and sport, individual and position-specific skills as well as performance (optimize “engine”, skills and performance)

Stage 5 – THE TRAINING TO WIN STAGE
Age: 17 and older
Objectives: Maximize fitness preparation and sport, individual and position specific skills as well as performance (maximize “engine”, skills and performance)

Stage 6 – THE RETIREMENT / RENTENTION STAGE
Objectives: retain players for coaching, administration, officials, etc.

It is certainly the stance of US Youth Soccer to focus more on match performance than outcome; yet this is not to say that players should not strive to win. There’s nothing wrong with winning! Trying to win is desirable and praiseworthy. It means trying your best. Indeed trying to play your best (match performance) often leads to winning. But not always! Remember the

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6 Long-Term Athlete Development: Trainability in Childhood and Adolescence, Istvan Balyi, Ph.D. and Ann Hamilton, MPE; Olympic Coach, Volume 16, Number 1
outcome of the game is not a reason why kids play! Players and coaches should diligently work to improve their performance. This is the drive for excellence as opposed to success.

Success does not breed success; it breeds failure. It is failure, which breeds success. If that advice seems patently absurd, think about the careers of many famous winners:

► Babe Ruth struck out 1,333 times. In between his strikeouts he hit 714 homeruns.
► Martina Navratilova lost twenty-one of her first twenty-four matches against archrival Chris Evert. She resolved to hit more freely on the big points and beat Evert thirty-nine out of their next fifty-seven matches. No woman tennis pro has ever won as many matches or as many tournaments, including a record nine Wimbledon singles titles as Navratilova who retired from professional tennis at age 50.
► Abraham Lincoln failed twice in business and was defeated in six state and national elections before being elected president of the United States.
► Michael Jordan was cut from his junior high school basketball team, before becoming a sports icon.
► Theodor S. Geisel wrote a children’s book that was rejected by twenty-three publishers. The twenty-fourth publisher sold six million copies of it---the first “Dr. Seuss” book---and that book and its successors are still staples of every child’s library.

Consider the times when you tried to learn a new game or sport. Did you get it perfect the first day? Not likely. A former teammate once told us that he did get one sport right the first time he tried it. We asked what he meant and he said, “It was the first day of snow skiing classes. I skied all day long and I didn’t fall down once. I was so elated; I felt so good. So I skied up to the ski instructor, and I told him of my great day. You know what the ski instructor said? He told me, ‘Personally I think you had a lousy day.’ I was stunned. ‘What do you mean lousy day? I thought the objective was to stand up on these boards, not fall down.’ The ski instructor looked me straight in the eye and replied, ‘Sirs, if you’re not falling down, you’re not learning.’”

The ski instructor understood that if you can stand up on your skis all day long the first time out, you’re doing only what you already know how to do, not pushing yourself to try anything new or difficult. If you always play it safe you aren’t going to improve yourself, because when you try to do something you don’t know how to do, you’ll fall down. That’s guaranteed! Nothing is ever done perfectly the first time someone tries it – not in business, not in school and most certainly not in soccer. The point isn’t to promote failure for failure’s sake, of course. We don’t advocate for a moment that failure ought to be the objective of any endeavor. Instead, we advocate learning. We want American players to be leaders and not look for someone to blame when mistakes are made while expanding their soccer horizons. Instead ask, “What can be learned from the experience?”

Trying new ball skills or new tactics, a new set play or a new formation will cause errors during matches. Yet if the players do not feel they are allowed to try out these new talents in a match when will those talents become a part of their game? The sounds coming from the spectators at a youth match should be cheers for when a player tries something new. Parents can measure their child’s success in soccer by the improving athletic ability of their child, by the growing confidence and self-reliance of the player, by the emergence of refined ball skills, by the opportunity afforded by the coach to play in different positions on the team, by the taking on of leadership and responsibility, by the demonstration of fair play and by the smiles. The parents will know that there is a chance for success when they see the players and coaches striving for excellence!
“There are many people, particularly in sports who think that success and excellence are the same thing and they are not the same thing. Excellence is something that is lasting and dependable and largely within a person’s control. In contrast, success is perishable and is often outside our control… If you strive for excellence, you will probably be successful eventually… people who put excellence in first place have the patience to end up with success… An additional burden for the victim of the success mentality is that he is threatened by the success of others and resents real excellence. In contrast, the person fascinated by quality is excited when he sees it in others.”
Joe Paterno – Penn State football coach – 1990

Striving to improve individual, group and team performance is more important at the youth level than the outcome. Simultaneously players should play to win. Coaches should teach and develop the players as they learn how to win. Parents should support the players and coaches. Intrinsic success is by its nature more difficult to measure than extrinsic success. A trophy is more tangible to an adult than the exhilaration a child feels while playing soccer. The final measure of success for parents of their child’s soccer experience will require a good deal of patience from the adults. That measurement is the free choice of the child to stay in the game!

In soccer circles it is agreed that four groups of adults support the youth game. Parents, coaches, administrators and referees have an equal obligation to the players. That obligation is to live by the Vision you have just read!

Dr. Tom Fleck – “We must work to create an environment to develop the American player’s growth and development! In the past we have tried to train the Dutch way, the Brazilian way, etc. We can and will together create the finest players in the world if we understand the growth, development and specific characteristics of our youth. Distributing the body of information from the “Y” License is the first step.”

In matters of style, swim with the currents…
...in matters of principle, stand like a rock.

Mission Statement

US Youth Soccer is a non-profit and educational organization whose mission is to foster the physical, mental and emotional growth and development of America’s youth through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition.

US Youth Soccer