

U5 & U6 Coach Guide Fall 2024

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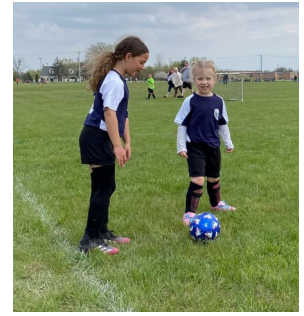
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Player Objectives



While knowing that some players only play one season in an age group and that players develop at different paces than others, this is what the hope is for an average player who plays both years in an age group. These are objectives that most players should be able to meet and some exceed.

Please keep the following objectives in mind as you coach this season:

- ~Understand: there are defensive and offensive positions. The defenders are NOT goalies. They do their best to win the ball back as soon as possible and to protect the goal.

- ~Understand and can implement: look at the ball when kicking.

- ~Understand and can implement: look up to find openings to space and/or teammates.

- ~Understand: soccer is a team sport and players need to work together to prevent goals and score them.

- ~Show: some growth in individual control and footwork and using different parts of foot.

- ~Understand: on a basic level the laws of the game (no hands, throw ins from side, goal kicks or corner kicks from end lines, kick off to restart after a goal or a time period, direction you're going.)

Laws of the Game: U5 & U6

Goal of the game: Score the ball into your goal more times than the other team scores it.

The duration of the game is 10 minute quarters with a short break between quarters and a longer break at the half.

Each team plays 4 on 4. If a team only has 4 or 5 players present, you may take a break 5 minutes into each quarter.

The timing won't be exact, but keep the time moving except when subbing. Have one person be the designated time keeper. This can be a coach on the field or it's more helpful if it is a parent sitting on one of the benches with the subs. Wait for a dead ball or a time that makes sense. After Quarter 1, play should resume from where it left off, perhaps a throw in or a kick off. The same is true of Quarter 3. At the half, whichever team did NOT have the kick off at the start of the game will have kick off.

For U5, stay going the same direction (scoring on the same goal) for the duration of the game. However, try to have your team go different ways throughout the season.

For U6, teams should switch directions you're going at the half. Player reminders are helpful!!

In soccer, players may use their feet, legs, torso, whatever part of their body is not their hands to move or stop the ball.

If a player uses their hands, it is a foul and a free kick is given to the other team.

A foul is also awarded for excessive pushing, kicking another player, tripping, and slide tackling. (Please see modifications for this age group.)

The ball is only considered "out" when it passes in its entirety over a line.

When the ball goes out of a touchline/endline, it will be put back into play by 1 of 2 types of kicks: a corner kick or a goal kick.

A corner kick is awarded to the offensive team if the defense was the last to touch the ball before it went out. The ball is placed on the closest corner somewhere inside the little wedge formed at the corner. One player kicks it in to another.

A goal kick is awarded to the defensive team if the offense was the last to touch the ball before it went out. The ball is placed somewhere on the 6. (On a full-sized field, this is 6 yards out from the endline.) One player kicks it to another. (Please see modifications for this age group.)

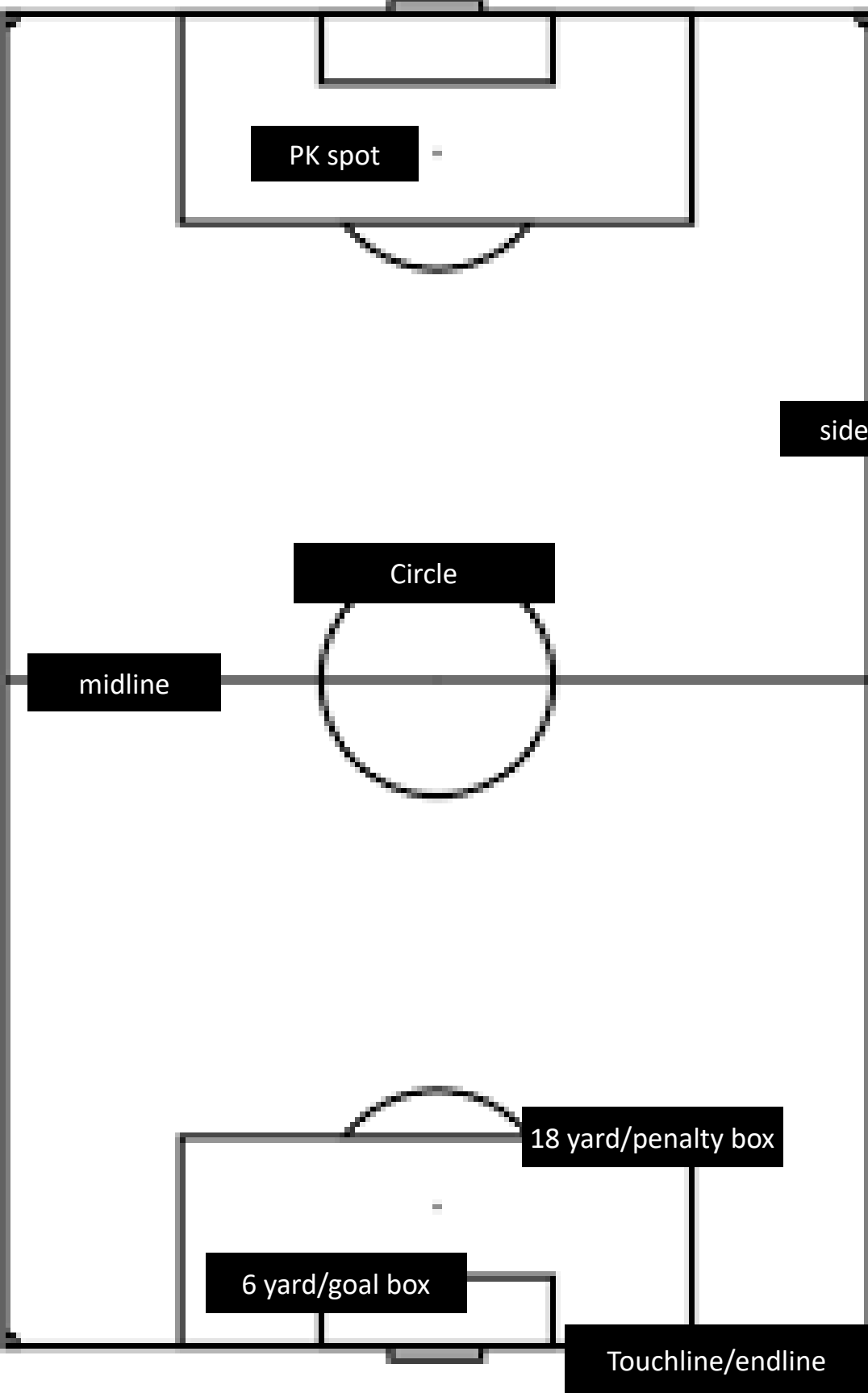
If the ball goes out on a sideline, a throw in is awarded to the team who was not the last one to touch it. The player must keep both feet on the ground behind the line, both hands on the ball, and bring the ball over their head to release it.

The ball does not need to go to the back of the goal/net to be counted. The ball must in its entirety pass over the line between the goal posts. When a team scores, the other team gets the kick off.

For any kick off, the opposing team must be on their defensive half outside the circle.

For any restart (kick off, throw in, corner kick, and goal kick) the player who kicks the ball or throws the ball cannot be the first player to touch the ball again. It does not have to be a teammate that touches it before they can touch it again.

Field Diagram



Modifications

Fouls: For this age group, kids are going to push and end up on the ground and accidentally touch the ball. It's just how it is. Don't stop the play for slight shoves or accidental kicks to the legs instead of the ball.

Do call: intentional handling of the ball or handling by a defender close to the goal; excessive shoving, hitting, or wrestling; and slide tackling or any intentional or glaring aggression resulting in someone on the ground or dangerous situation.

Corner Kicks:

While not necessarily a modification, some space should be given by defenders to where the ball is. It is advisable that they get back in a defensive position with their eyes on the ball.

Throw-Ins:

The team not making the throw does not have to go anywhere in particular on the field. It's advisable to begin helping players realize that standing by the team throwing the ball can help them win it back faster.

For the thrower, if on their first throw they break a rule, instruct and let them rethrow. If the second throw is also incorrect, allow play to resume.

Goal Kicks:

The offensive team not taking the goal kick **MUST** retreat to their half of the field on or behind the midline until the ball is kicked. Once the ball is kicked into play, they may charge. The kicking team can be wherever they would like.

During Play:

No team can have any player act as a goalie that just doesn't use their hands. It's important for players to stay engaged in the game and moving. It goes against best practice on young players learning the game. If you coach your players to run back to the goal when the other team has the ball, this is also unadvisable and should at most be one player.

DISTINCTION: It is never too early to teach the difference between a defender and an offensive player. You may have a defender. That defender should move up and back based on where the ball is. If playing with a defender, no player should play that position for more than a quarter of the game during regular season and each player should get at least one opportunity at the position.

Coaches:

It can be difficult to find a place to be on the field. You should **NEVER** be in front of a goal, no matter how far away the main play is. It's encouraged that you stand on the player side on your half somewhere unless you need to aid a player in a throw in etc.

Make sure the way you substitute allows for each player to play at least 1/2 the game (they can play more) each game unless they refuse to play that much.



Coaching the Young Player

What Do They Want?

Players at this age just want to have fun. And that's what they should have. Above everything else you do, fun should be at the top.

What Do They Need?

Players at this age should be developing their motor skills, cognitive thinking that's age appropriate, and learning how to socialize with teammates and adults who may not be a part of their every day life before this experience. Activities at practice should have a goal in teaching soccer or ball familiarity but should also build some of the above skills.

What Do Parents Want?

Parents like seeing their child have fun, build general skills, and develop as a soccer player through the season. Communicate from the start of the season what your goals for the team are, and none of those goals should be to win games. Celebrate the small wins and include families in that. Did someone who hasn't all season score? Yay! Did a player pass on purpose to another? Again, yay!



So How Do You Meet All of the Above?

Besides what's already been mentioned, the main thing is to check in on yourself throughout each practice and throughout the season. Is the majority of each practice spent on you talking or the players sitting? Is the majority of each practice spent on drills where one player does one thing with a ball while everyone else waits? If so then you should also ask yourself if you would find that fun. Always consider that the more touches players have on a ball, the more they learn and the more fun they have. The more game-like an activity/drill is, the more they learn and the more fun they have.

That doesn't mean every drill is dynamic with every player having a ball. But it does mean that you're conscious of it and provide more opportunities that are game-like verse static, stand-in-line drills.

You also ensure a positive environment by your tone and engagement. Don't be afraid with this age to let your silly, goofy side shine through. And remember that sometimes players this young take any suggestion or loud direction as yelling or that they're in trouble. Take the time to get to know your players a bit in how you can talk to them.

On game day? Don't worry too much about the warm up. I've coached teams where all we did was play tag to warm up.





Helpful Tips



Have a Plan

Having a general idea of what activities, games, and drills you will have in your practice and for how long is helpful for keeping the chaotic transitions at a minimum. You'll look like you know what you're doing even if you don't feel confident.

Plan with a Purpose

For all youth players, it is best practice to have one or two main goals or focuses for each practice. For example, it might be where and how to kick the ball on defense. Or it might be how can you find an opening.

Be Prepared to Toss the Plan

Stuff happens. Sometimes, you don't know in advance you're only going to have 3 players at practice. Or a game seems to be going well with the right amount of challenge and fun and takes up more time. Or an activity is too challenging and no one is having success, which can be frustrating. It's okay to scrap your plan and do something else that works for your team.

Give Chances for Success

Remember that the goals for your team don't necessarily include winning. So maybe for one quarter of each game you put in all your players who are not the main scorers or dominate players. They have more of a chance of scoring then. During practices, you can make uneven in number teams or play for one team to help. Allow times for all your players to find success. And celebrate small wins!

Formations

Formations? At this age? Even preschoolers can understand over the course of a season the concept that some players focus on defense and some focus on offense even though you may move around the field.

For U5, you just need to know your team. You may have to work on the concept for several weeks before any of them start to understand the concept, or you may always end up with 4 players playing bumblebee ball despite your best efforts. That's okay. It is recommended to try and have one defender (NOT goalie) and 3 offensive players.

For U6, you should have 1 defender and 3 offensive players. The level of play in U8 is a good step up, and players will be more prepared if they had an opportunity to learn positions. You could alternately have defenders and two offensive players.

Resources

Ask for help when you need it.

Ask Nick, Toni, or another coach. We can all work together to help coaches and to help all players develop as best as possible.

Use the internet!

There are so many activities, games, pointers, drills, etc. available for free online. YouTube has some great resources. One channel (also available as an app!) that some coaches have found useful is YouGotMojo. If on YouTube, visit the channel and go to their playlists and there are plenty for soccer and many are grouped by age. They break down each activity while using real players.

For a fairly low cost, anyone can get a certificate in small-sided grassroots soccer through a virtual course on learning.usoccer.com.

After completing a course, you gain access to their practice guide as well.

Get Creative

While it's important for young players to understand the difference between different roles (defense and offense) on the field and in the game, you don't necessarily have to call them that. I've heard sharks and tigers or knights and dragons to distinguish between defender and offender.

Another fun way to engage players is by including their parents. Can they pass it between parents' legs? Involving parents in practice can translate to them getting involved at home with developing soccer in their player.

Thank you so much for your willingness to coach!

