

U8 Coach Guide Fall 2024

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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 age group. These are objectives that most players should be able to meet and some exceed. If you'd like to see the U6/U7 objectives, please contact Toni or TYSC.

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

Understand: there are defensive, offensive, and midfield positions that work together in a formation (See "Formations" on "Helpful Tips") including a goalie.

Understand and implement: look at the ball when kicking, especially aerial balls.

Understand and implement: look up to find openings to space and/or teammates. Communicate with teammates and move to support the player with the ball and be in an opening/space.

Implement and develop: expansion of individual footwork and control, including more development of shooting and passing techniques. Use both feet!

Understand: multiple parts of the foot are used as well as both feet, even if not always able to implement during game play.

Understand on a basic level the of the laws of the game and also what the various lines on the field mean and what they're there for.

Understand: that the opening or space may be backwards and passing back is an option, even if this is not implemented in games.

Understand and recognize importance of: the team moves up and back together using triangles and diamonds in the shape of their formation.

Laws of the Game: U8

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 6 on 6. If a team only has 6 players present, you can play 5 on 5 or take a water break 5 minutes into each quarter.

The timing will be done by a referee, though you are free to keep time as well to have a general idea. Keep in mind that the time the ref says is what sticks. IN ALL THINGS, TREAT OUR REFS WITH RESPECT. Most of our referees are young players themselves and being discouraged and yelled at by an adult over 7-year-olds playing soccer is prohibited.

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 U8, teams 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. For U8, they cannot yet head the ball, for which a free kick is also awarded.

A foul is also awarded for pushing, kicking another player, tripping, and slide tackling, etc. at the discretion of the ref. With so many young players, some shoving is bound to happen without getting called every time, as well as incidental kicking of shins when missing the ball.

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.)

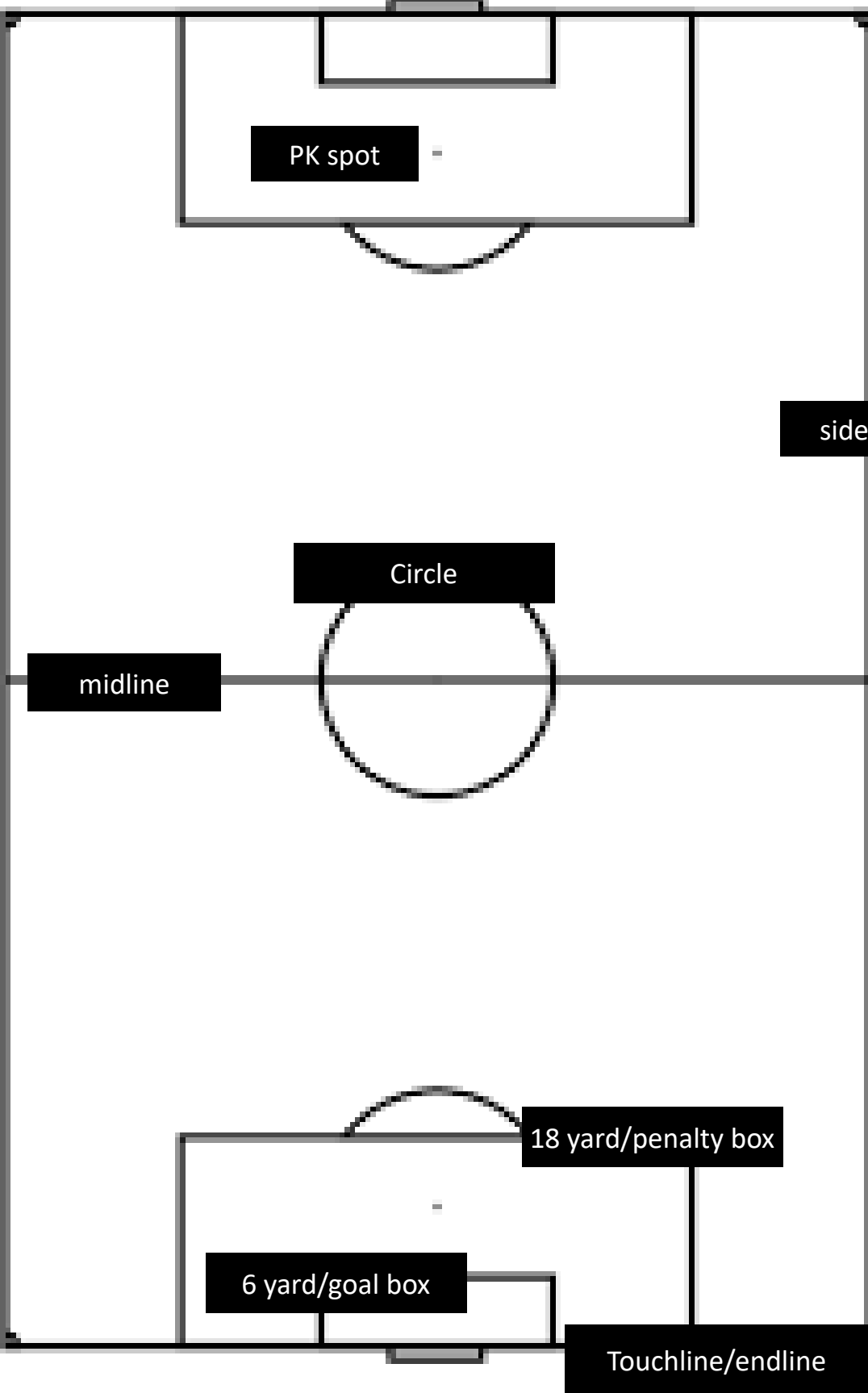
If the ball goes out on a sideline, a throw in is awarded to the team who was not the last one to touch it. The player must keep both feet on the ground behind the line, both hands on the ball, and bring the ball over their head to release it.

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 do things on accident that older players would be held accountable for. Play won't necessarily be stopped for slight shoves or accidental kicks to the legs instead of the ball.

Things which should be called by the ref are: 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. They SHOULD mark up by the other team and battle to show bravery and win the ball back first. For the thrower, if on their first throw they break a rule, instruct and let them rethrow. If the second throw is also incorrect, play should be allowed to be resumed.

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:

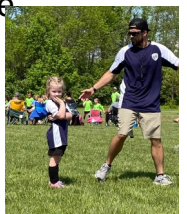
No team can have any player act as a goalie that doesn't use their hands. You already have a goalie! It's important for players to stay engaged in the game and moving. It goes against best practice on young players learning the game. If you coach your players to run back to the goal when the other team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

DISTINCTION: Your defender/s should also not be coached to just stand on the box. This sort of pigeon-holes players and does not give them a chance to be creative in making their own decisions or making critical-thinking decisions. The defenders should move up and back based on where the ball is. No player should play any position for more than a half of a game during regular season, and each player should get at an opportunity at each position throughout the season (unless they don't want to be goalie, etc.)

Coaches:

It can be difficult to remember to substitute players. If you struggle, set a timer on your phone or something. Remember to keep players on the bench engaged by asking questions, having them cheer, etc. And keep in mind that they can hear what you say about the players on the field. Everything should be positive or stay in your mind.

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 still for the most part 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 comfortability with the ball, 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 try a move with a ball to take on a defender in the game? 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. And the more they get to make decisions about what to do in practices and especially games, the more fun they have and the more they learn. 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 players this age can be very sensitive, and there begins to be a divide between girls and boys in physicality and how they take direction. Take the time to get to know your players and how you can best interact.

On game day? Don't do stand-still stretches. It's boring and does nothing to actually warm them up. Try some dynamic stretches and a warm up activity that involves lots of soccer balls and plenty of movement.





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 4 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

Your formation should include at least one of the following positions: defender, midfielder, and forward (or striker, essentially the same at this age.) Some common formations are:

2-2-1 (this means 2 defenders, 2 mids, and 1 forward); 2-1-2; 1-2-2

Some uncommon ones: 1-1-2-1 (a back and front defender); 1-3-1; 1-1-3

Part of picking a formation involves knowing your team and having patience.

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 5 players playing bumblebee ball despite your best efforts.

Regardless of the formation you choose, incorporate and discuss the importance of triangles and diamonds in soccer to offer support and pass easier around defenders. The formation 2-1-2 is an especially good one to teach midfield and triangles. The midfielder is the point of a defensive and an offensive triangle.

Resources

Ask for help when you need it.

Ask Toni, Nick, 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 on the field and in the game, you don't necessarily have to call them that. I've heard sharks, horses, and tigers or knights, alligators, and dragons to distinguish between defender, midfield, 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!

