

# Guide to the Game for U6, U7, and U8 Coaches and Parents



Young children do not and **cannot** play the game of soccer like older children, let alone adults. It then follows that we doom them to failure if we, as coaches and parents, insist that they do so. Instead we must take into account the characteristics of young children--how they learn and play--and modify the basic rules of soccer to fit them.

Our primary objectives for players this young are for maximum activity; maximum touches on the ball; an absence of focus on winning; and a focus on individual learning, fun and success.

Please do not tell them what to do and steal their opportunity to make decisions and mistakes and the chance to learn. Please do not tell them where they must be by giving them positions (places to be) and take away their freedom of movement and the control, learning and fun that comes with that freedom.

Hopefully all coaches and parents will consider all of the players of the community to be "their" kids and encourage, praise and help them all. This produces a kid-friendly environment in which children are free to compete against their own limits and expand their capabilities and by the way, have an awful lot of fun.

## CHARACTERISTICS AT U6, U7 & U8

So what are some of those characteristics that we have taken into account when we structure the game for U6, U7 and U8 children:

- Body segments grow at different rates with progress on motor development beginning with the head and moving towards the feet and from the center of the body outward. Balance and agility are immature.
- Process small bits of information at a time (long instructions are not understood) with limited or no ability to attend to more than one task at a time. Controlling the ball demands most or all of the attention, thereby leaving little or no capacity for making tactical decisions.
- Simple rules are necessary.
- Immature understanding of time and space relationships limits ability to understand even simple tactical ideas.
- Effort is generally considered to equal performance. "If I tried hard then I did well."
- Need generous praise and playing without pressure. "Did you have fun?" is the right question and "Did you win?" is the wrong question.
- Desire to be accepted and liked by everyone. Easily bruised by both peers and adults; negative comments carry great weight. Wrong means bad. Tone is very important. Show correct way once and accept result whether correct or not. Be patient and catch them doing it right and praise them.
- Like to play soccer because it is "fun". The occupation of young children is learning not winning. Need to feel successful. Children are most interested in their own achievements even though adults can focus children on the score.
- May talk about team but tend to play in isolation. They tend to play 1v7 instead of 4v4. ("What do you mean, pass the ball? It took me 5 minutes to get it.")
- Have two speeds--on and off. Generally they cannot pace themselves. They tire easily and recover quickly. Players will simply stop to recharge their batteries. That's OK. After a pause they tear off again in search of the ball.

## BASIC RULES AT U6, U7 & U8

- We play two simultaneous 3v3 games (U6) or 4v4 games (U7-8) with no keepers on adjacent fields between two teams with rosters of 9 (U6) or 10 (U7-8). Touches, activity and learning are greatly increased. (Why give one toy to 22 first-graders.)
- A coach from one team and an assistant coach from the other team run one mini-game and the other coach and assistant coach run the second game. The coach and assistant coach are on the field but stay out of the way. **Coaching is minimal to non-existent.**
- There are no referees.
- Scores are not kept. Parents and coaches do not keep scores, not even verbally, during the game. Competitive? Yes! Game result oriented? NO! Object is fun and individual development—not winning.
- Substitutions are made at any time on the fly. When a player comes out of one game **he goes back into the other game.** This constantly changes the complexion of the teams and further reduces the focus on the score.
- Teams are switched and mixed every quarter if there are no subs so players play against a different group. This increases variety and decreases focus on keeping score.
- We have **continuous play** since we eliminate corner kicks as meaningless, goal kicks as a disadvantage to the kicking team and throw-ins as time wasters. Quick transition is learned but never need be taught.
- A coach or assistant coach who is running the mini-game quickly (within a few seconds) rolls in the ball. This format increases playing time and touches on the ball by 70 to 90 percent. You need at least 4 balls per field but 5 is better. Since games are competitive but not results oriented coaches can assist in this by rolling in the balls to the advantage of a team that is being dominated. In fact, you can roll it all the way down in front of the goal. A team that is being dominated may not score but they will enjoy getting the ball to the other end.
- **Possibly most important we eliminate kick-offs after goals.** A coach or assistant coach gives a compliment after the goal and **immediately** restarts by rolling in a ball. If done quickly this substantially reduces the focus on the score. (Except the scorer may talk about it for a week.) Parents of the scoring team have less time to convince their children that the goal was incredibly important and parents of the team scored against have less time to convince their children that the goal was a disaster. (Granted, parents actually tell kids that it was OK to be scored against but these kids are no dummies. If parents are trying so hard to convince them it was no big deal, then it is big deal.)
- Parents help by fetching balls as they go out and provide a constant supply to the coach and assistant coach who are running the mini-game.
- Free kicks are all indirect but you almost never have any.
- No penalty kicks and no off-sides.
- The semi-circle goal area is 4 yards across--radius 2 yards. No standing in arc. It is unfair to the player and it reduces scoring too much. (It is already a small goal.) That means the players cannot go in the semi-circle before the ball and therefore you cannot park a kid in front of the goal (and thereby prevent him from playing). This is virtually never called. It simply gives us a way to tell kids (and coaches and parents) that you do not park a kid in goal.
- The goals are about 4 feet high and 6 feet wide.
- The U6 fields should be about 25x30 yards (minimum 15x20 yards).
- The U7-U8 fields should be about 30x35 yards (minimum 20x25 yards).