Useful Information for U6 and U8 Coaches

Coaching PK4 & Kindergarten Players

Characteristics of U-6 players

- Kindergarten children have a short attention span and can attend one problem at a time
- They will understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- They may or may not understand or remember what the lines mean on the field, what team they are on, what goal they are going for or why they are even there. Be patient and laugh with them as these things occur, and help them have fun.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often and give hints. Do not criticize or blame.
- Let them play without pressure.
- Prefer "parallel play". They will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates. (Thus a 4v4 game is, in reality, a lv7 game as they all want the ball at the same time).
- Very individually orientated (me, mine, my)
- Constantly in motion but lack sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly.
- Development for boys and girls is very similar.
- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed. Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. Make sure that they get adequate water breaks.
- Physical coordination limited. Eye - hand and eye - foot coordination is not developed. Let them investigate and explore the qualities of a rolling / bouncing ball.

Things you can expect from U-6 players

As coaches of younger players there are things that we know 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 kids even more. Here are some of the things we can expect:

- No matter how loud we shout, or how much we "practice it" they cannot or will not pass the ball effectively.
- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet and will be followed by the rest of the team (and probably the other team) who are amazingly enough, in need of the toilet at the exact same time.
- Twenty seconds after the start of the 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. Most 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.
- If the other teams coach has snacks at half time, your players will listen to his half time speech.
- During the season you will end up tying at least 50 shoelaces.

Coaching U-6 players - Philosophy

It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 6, in general, do not do so by their own choice. Consequently, 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, let's look at some of the things that we can do to energize the U-6 players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically 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, rolling, dribbling or even catching a ball .... all the better.
- Training should not last for more than one hour. This is primarily due to the physical fatigue and attention span considerations.
- Have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can get into one hour but do not try to teach too much. Focus on one main topic through all your activities. Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!
- Play "games" with cool names, animal noises and fun endings. A coach that plays a game, rather than does a drill (it can be the same activity) will have more success. Keep all the kids involved at all times.
- Every player should have and bring his or her own size 3 ball.
- Remember that although they may be similar in age, their physical and / or mental maturity may vary considerably. Activities need to accommodate these individual differences whenever possible.
- Team play and passing is somewhat of an alien concept to these players. They know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they will often take the ball from their own teammates. Do not get uptight if they do not pass, let them dribble until their heart is content.
- Plan for at least 4 water breaks, even if they are only for 90 seconds or so.

Coaching First and Second Grade Players

Characteristics of U-8 players

- Attention span is a bit longer than U-6 players but still not at a "competitive" stage
- Inclined towards small group activities.
- Always in motion: scratching; blinking; jerking; rocking ...
- Easily bruised psychologically. They will remember negative comments for a long time. Shout praise.
- They want everybody to like them.
- Developing physical confidence. (Most are able to ride a two-wheeler.)
- Starting to imitate older players or sports hero. Want the same "gear" as them.
- Lack sense of pace. They go flat out until they drop.
- Skeletal system growing rapidly. Often results in apparent lack of coordination.
- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed. Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. Make sure that they get adequate water breaks.
- Limited understanding with personal evaluation. "If they tried hard, they performed well" regardless of the actual performance. Thus, they need to be encouraged constantly, and asked "Now, can you do this?"

Things you can expect from U-8 players

First and second grade players are a bit more compliant than their U-6 counterparts. They will be able to follow 2 or 3 step instructions and are starting to have a good understanding about what it means to play a "game". They are also starting to cooperate more with their teammates. In fact, they now will recognize that they even have teammates by the fact that they occasionally, and I mean occasionally, will pass the ball to a teammate, on purpose. Some other things that you can expect to happen during a season with this age group are:

- There will be a least 200-300 falls during the season, but now they will usually pick themselves back up.
- Keep a spare pump in your bag, as the players usually do not realize that their ball is flat until they try to kick it, or the coach tells them that it is flat.
- Some of the girls will be a lot tougher than the boys.
- They will still want to wear a penny, even when the color is identical to their shirt.
- It will be impossible to remember who is whose best friend as you try to make up teams.