

U6 How to run a practice. (U6: Effort = Ability) 45 minute practice plan

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. Incorporate movement with stretching, utilizing a ball whenever possible.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

Follow warm-up with an individual activity, not necessarily a real 1 v.1 game, but some type of exercise where players act as individuals in a game environment. Examples would include: a kind of tag game, or "Red Light - Green Light", or a game where players are trying to knock their ball through gates. Maximize participation, no standing in lines. Avoid games of elimination, or games where a "loser" sits out.

PLAY THE GAME

Make it like a birthday party. Make this the greatest thing they have ever participated in. The game here should resemble 2 v. 2, 3 v. 3, or 4 v. 4. Switch games often, every few 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. Create multiple opportunities for the kids to shoot on goal.

COOL DOWN

Allow the kids to finish with a stretch and possibly a neat trick with the ball. (i.e. ball balance on nose; bounce ball off knee and catch; balance ball on foot; toss, clap, catch, then go for two!) Make sure you finish on time!

U6 REMINDERS

Incorporate a ball as often as possible.....maximize participation.....NO LAPS, NO LINES, NO LECTURES Positive feedback and encouragement.....show your enthusiasm.....avoid games of elimination.....you are a positive role model, show respect to all members of the game.....kids are not defined by age, they develop at own pace.....remember children do not all participate for the same reasons.....**Your measure of success:** *How many of your kids return to the game and sign up next year?*..... Your players will cry when they get hurt, and even when they are not hurt.....They WILL NOT pass the ball, no matter how much you yell at them to, or how much you attempt to practice it.....*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..... Ten 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. Parents will yell at them not to do that.....A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get all of the player's attention – take time to watch in awe.....During a season, you will end up tying many – many shoe laces. Throughout the course of the season the kids will do something extremely funny, take time to laugh!

U6 UNDERSTANDING WHO YOU ARE COACHING

You will find these players have a short attention span.
Your players will be able to address one "problem" at a time.
Simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated can be understood.
Players will get lost on the field losing sight of what team they are on, what goal they are attacking and may forget that the lines are there for a reason.

Children at this age are easily bruised psychologically.
Positive praise and reinforcement should be provided often, avoid criticism.
Create an environment that allows for play without pressure.
De-emphasize winning and losing, trophies eliminated.
3v3 looks more like 5v1.....children at this age will participate on a team, but really will play for themselves and the ball.
(Don't ask them to pass.)
Me, Mine, My. There is an "I" (and ME) in "team".

No sense of pace, will play until they drop.
Boys and girls developmentally are quite similar.
Hand eye coordination isn't developed. Catching or throwing skills not developed.

U6 Exercises & Activities

Body Awareness/Motor Education

1. coach toss/player retrieve

SET UP: coach stands in the middle of the group and explains clearly that they should hand the coach their ball when asked. The coach will then toss the balls away asking the players to bring them back in the following numerous ways.

1. bring the ball back any way you like (point out creativity here)
2. bring the ball back using only your knees
3. bring the ball back using only your feet
4. "Can you bring the ball back showing me a different way? Hey!, Let's try that!"

note: There is no failure in trying. Use the word TRY.

2. "I can do this w/o the ball, can you?"

SET UP: coach stands as "boss of the balls". (group the balls together off to side) There should be no boundaries here. The coach will demonstrate the following movements.

1. skipping
2. skipping backwards
3. walking and clapping between legs
4. galloping
5. hopping on one foot
6. jumping (both feet)
7. "Can you show me something w/o the ball? Let's try this!"

note: There is no failure in trying. Use the word TRY.

3. body parts

SET UP: each player has a ball and is dribbling in a defined area, rectangular in shape. Coach calls out different parts of the body, causing participants to stop the ball on the dribble with that part of the body (i.e. foot, knee, elbow, hand, etc.....have fun!)

COACHING POINTS: cooperative activity, training the use of the various surfaces of the foot.

Maze Activities

1. red light, green light

SET UP: players on an endline facing coach, soccer balls off to the side.
RED=STOP, YELLOW=SLOW, GREEN=SPEED UP

note: Players listen to the coach calling out colors. They will move from one side of the area to the other. Progress simple to complex, adding soccer balls to the activity later.

COACHING POINTS: change of speed, visual

2. red rover, red rover

SET UP: players on an endline facing coach who is in the middle, soccer balls off to the side. Coach calls out colors. Players try to make it across without getting tagged by the coach to start. If tagged, player joins the middle, coach can exit after first round.

note: Players listen to the coach calling out colors. They will move from one side of the area to the other. Progress simple to complex, adding soccer balls to the activity later.

COACHING POINTS: change of speed, change of direction, visual

3. everybody's it

SET UP: each player has a ball and is dribbling in a defined area, rectangular in shape. Coach starts the game with all participants on the dribble. Upon command, coach says: "Play!", and members try to tag as many other kids as possible in a short amount of time. 25, 30, 35 sec. are appropriate here. No one can tag a player two times in a row, and participants must keep the ball close and under control.

COACHING POINTS: cooperative activity, training the use of the various surfaces of the foot.

Target Activities

1. gatekeepers

SET UP: there should be 4 small goals w/ "gatekeepers" standing on the invisible line between the cones. Gatekeepers should not have a ball. Everyone else is positioned in the middle of the playing area w/ their ball. Players begin dribbling, and when the coach signals a gatekeeper to open their gate, all dribblers can score a point for themselves by dribbling through the gate that is open. The coach will then signal a gate to close and open another.

note: The coach needs to explain to the gatekeepers that he/she chooses, that they need to keep they need to keep their eyes on the coach to know when to move to the side, and when to stay in the middle of the cones making it closed.

COACHING POINTS: ball control, change of direction, change of speed, visual

2. gate game

SET UP: 7 or 8 gates, every player has a ball.

note: Players will attempt to get through as many gates as they can in 30, 45, 60 seconds. Always ask for scores at the end, they want to share this with you, whether they tell you the truth or not!

COACHING POINTS: ball control, change of direction, change of speed, visual

SMALL SIDED GAMES

Among the many great reasons as to why small sided games should be used in practice, here are just a couple to name a few:

- **Maximizes participation and increases opportunities to get touches on the ball (Technique).**
- **Increases opportunities among youth players to make decisions, problem solve, and doing so in a less complicated environment (Tactics).**
- **Participating in a space that is reduced in size creates more of an opportunity for the kids to be physically effective (Fitness).**
- **Creates more "teachable moments" for the coach, therefore increasing the opportunities for feedback. (Psychological).**
- **Creates more opportunities for attacking & defending (Tactics), and more opportunities to shoot/score (Technique).**

The following game is a terrific variation that can be used as a small sided option in practice:

2 Goal Game

SET UP: Organize 2 teams of equal numbers 1v1, 2v2, or 3v3 with one goal to defend and one to attack, designated by cones/flags, and one ball. Anytime a team scores between the cones, that team scores a point.

Variation: add an additional ball to the game, and play with 2 at one time. Watch the kids have FUN!

~Good Luck!!