

## U8 How to run a practice. (U8: 2 players to 1 ball) 1 hr. 15 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

You will want to create activities and opportunities in practice for the kids that involve 2 players to 1 ball. Allow them to play in activities that provide movement, motion. Possible games may include "Math Dribble", "Body Parts", & "Everybody's It". Maximize participation, no standing in lines. Avoid games of elimination, or games where a "loser" sits out.

### PLAY THE GAME

Small sided games are once again a great way to inject some competition. Play with or without boundaries. Multiple goals or more than one ball in a game is a creative way to change things up. Play can & should be utilized to emphasize a particular skill, i.e. **dribble** over an end line to score a point.

### 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!

## U8 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?*.....6, 7, and 8 year old 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.....Occasionally, and I mean occasionally, will pass the ball to a teammate, on purpose.....Often, they will repeat the phrase "I can't do that!", but, will quickly run to you to show you that they can.....There will be at least 200-300 falls during the season, but now they will usually pick themselves back up.....The puddle in front of the goal is still too tempting to resist.....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 are a lot tougher than the boys.....They will still want to wear a pinnie, even when the color is identical to their shirt.....It will be impossible to remember who is who's best friend as you try to make up teams.....School conflicts will come up-please, let them go (they must face their teachers five days a week).....They will want wear their uniform to bed.

## U8 UNDERSTANDING WHO YOU ARE COACHING

- 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. Give "hints".
- They want everybody to like them.
- Developing physical confidence. (Most are able to ride a two-wheeler.)
- Starting to imitate older players or sports heroes. 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 try hard, they performed well" regardless of the actual performance. Thus, they need to be encouraged constantly, and asked "Now, can you do this?"
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play, and remembering what goal they are going for... but, in the heat of battle, they will sometimes still forget. They still find it difficult to really be aware of more than one thing at a time.

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### U8 Exercises & Activities

#### I. Exercises & Activities

U8 – Beginners (2 players = 1 ball)

##### 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 given a number of touches.

**COACHING POINTS: weight of touch on ball, spatial awareness**

##### 2. coach toss/partners 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 partners to bring them back in the following numerous ways.

- partners bring the ball back “any way you like” (point out creativity here)
- coach tosses all of the balls away first, partners retrieve passing together, coach moves to a new space for players to find
- partners bring the ball back heading
- partners bring the ball back a different way using heads
- partners bring the ball back w/o using hands or feet
- partners bring the ball back touching the ball together (no hands)  
note: There is no failure in trying. Use the word TRY.

**COACHING POINTS: LET THEM PROBLEM SOLVE!**

##### 3. math dribble

SET UP: each player has a ball and is dribbling in a defined area, rectangular in shape. Coach calls out basic math equations, forcing the players to solve the problem and form that small group.

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

##### 4. 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.**

##### 5. 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.**

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### 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 games are terrific variations that can be used as small sided options in practice:*

- **One Goal Game**  
**SET UP:** Organize 2 teams of equal numbers, with one goal, designated by cones/flags, and one ball. Anytime a team scores between the cones, scores a point.
- **4 Goal Game**  
**SET UP:** In a defined area, lay down four sets of cones/flags, and establish the two goals each team will attack, and the two they will defend.
- **Gate Game**  
**SET UP:** In a defined area, lay down multiple sets of cones/flags, and create two equal teams to compete. Anytime a team can move a ball between a gate (via dribble or a pass) scores a point.
- **3v2+1**  
**SET UP:** Coach sets up two small goals, organizing 3v3. The game – 3v2+1 – involves the team with the ball (3) attacking the team without the ball that has 2 defenders and the last player that falls back to become the GK (2+1). When the team of 2 defenders wins the ball, they may start their attack, once they have connected on a pass to their goalkeeper, forming their team of three. In the transition, the team that turned the ball over (3), must then evolve into a team of 2 defenders with one falling back to become the new GK (2+1).

Keep the game FUN !