

San Francisco Vikings Soccer Club

U-7:

Duration of Practice:

- 45 to 60 minutes is the best option for these ages
- Majority of practice should be spent in ratios of one ball per child or one ball per two children

Practice should include a lot of playing with the ball in small numbers for short periods of time. Encourage basic skills and give each player plenty of opportunities to experience the ball at his or her own pace. Games where there are multiple goals and balls for the players to work with are encouraged. Also, games with changing direction, changing how fast they run, and dealing with balls on the ground and with bouncing balls. **No lines. No Laps. No lectures.** At this age they can remember what they were shown or what they tried at the last practice but at the same time this ability is not present on a consistent basis. Let them learn through experience. At this age they are not capable of playing anything that resembles organized soccer. So, ideas such as combination play or positions should not be introduced.

When addressing technique, consider that the kids learn much by watching and copying. A good picture of proper technique can be a powerful tool. Coaches should say things such as “see if you can make it look like this”. Then set up fun games where the objective is for the players to practice different ways to control the ball.

Best Qualities of a Coach for This Age Player:

The coach must understand the capabilities and limitations of this age and appreciate the power of learning by watching. They should also have the ability to demonstrate or to use older players to demonstrate.

Game Application:

- 3 v 3 is best option
- Goal keepers are optional but players should not be limited to playing one “position”
- 30 yds x 20 yds – 40 yds x 25 yds field size
- Size 3 ball
- Restarts with dribble in or kick in

Coaches/Parents should be positive and encouraging. Specific soccer related information should be limited to basic ideas (such as how best to keep the ball from running out of bounds too often). There should not be any discussions about positions or any other team concepts. Most of the information from coaches during these times should pertain to each player’s relationship with the ball (i.e. how to get it, keep it close, etc...).

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Progression of Practices:

- Experimenting with the ball (dribbling, juggling, anything using the ball, ideally should be an activity that is fun for the kids)
- Fun games (Sharks and minnows, Pac man, Stop and go, etc...) Remember, fun is a part of the game: if it is not fun, they won't want to learn it.
- 3 v 3 game to goal (goal on both end lines for players to shoot at)

Technical/Skill Emphasis:

- Dribble with all sides of both feet- start talking about keeping the ball close, head up
- Dribble away from defender and out of trouble
- Dribble around/past a defender
- Soft first touch
- Introduce passing technique - inside of foot, keeping ankle locked
- Introduce proper shooting technique
- Introduce shielding
- Encourage players to, on their own, juggle a ball
- Continue to allow players to experiment with the ball

Tactical Considerations:

- Basic attacking and defending principles
- No emphasis on positions
- Rules of the game should not take over the game
- Take restarts quickly

Psychological Emphasis:

- FUN! FUN! FUN!
- No emphasis on winning
- Acknowledgements and respect for coaches, teammates and officials
- Limit travel, recommend no tournaments

Physical Considerations:

- Players in this age group are naturally active – encourage this
- Soccer related activities which incorporate the element of competition will improve balance and agility

Number of Matches per Calendar Year:

Children at these ages should not be playing any organized games where the score is recorded and be playing approximately 15-20 matches over the entire year.

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Consider This:

"A child's biological age is an important factor determining age-appropriate tasks. However, the reality of Youth and Junior soccer is that, with emphasis on team play, match results, and competition, the American player is often graduating to the next level of soccer without having the proper tools. They are moving to this next phase of the game based on their biological age (their age in years), without regard for their "soccer age" (their level of soccer development). Coaches at the U-12 level for example, may voice frustration at their players' inability to "figure out" tasks and concepts, such as team possession and team defending. Consider a student in Trigonometry class who is being introduced to concepts like sine and cosine. Imagine how difficult this will be for the student to "figure out" if he/she had not been properly taught the fundamentals of math - addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The student might even understand some trigonometric concepts, but lack the basic tools to work out a correct solution. This student should not have been promoted to this next level of math. It is the same in soccer. The success of each new skill and concept is based upon skills and concepts already learned. The more comfortable a player is with the ball, the more options he/she will have to solve each soccer challenge he/she faces" - U.S. Soccer

"Between the ages of 12 to 14, children often experience a physical growth spurt that affects their balance and coordination. Oftentimes, they gain physical strength and power, but temporarily lose agility and suppleness. As soccer players, this means potentially losing some control over the ball. If the technical foundation is not strong, soccer is no longer fluid and fun for those players. It is at this point that these players may move toward sports where it is easier for them to achieve some level of success - more traditionally American sports that demand "hand-eye" coordination such as baseball, basketball, and lacrosse. It is critical, therefore, that we ensure that the players are getting the necessary technical foundation at the younger ages. This may prevent the loss of players during the middle school years who are capable and athletic, yet lack the foundation to pull them through their temporary physical awkwardness." - U.S. Soccer