



THE MODERN COACH'S PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MANUAL (Clinic through U10)

Adapted and modified with permission from the US Youth Soccer Association's
Player Development Model



INTRODUCTION

Coaching development is a life-long process that is fundamentally tied to player development. The coach is on the front line of development in a youth player's career, and the coach's continuing education is vitally important to that development. Simply put, the better the coaching, the more players will improve.

But becoming a good coach requires a deliberate and intentional approach. Gone are the days of command-and-control coaching. The Modern Coach must teach players to make smart and quick decisions on the pitch, strive to understand the psychology of players, employ innovative teaching methods to take advantage of individual learning styles, respect player psychology, and oftentimes exercise parent management techniques.

The purpose of this *Player Development Manual* is to provide a uniform philosophy and approach to teaching soccer for coaches to incorporate into their team training and game strategy in a manner that maximizes player development and places players in the best position to succeed on game day. This manual is divided into three sections: 1) a general introduction describing the roles and responsibilities of the Modern Coach expected of coaches in all age-groups/divisions; 2) an overview of the "Stages for the Ages" player development model, outlining expectations, objectives, and techniques for coaches to employ at each stage of Towson United's player age-groups; and 3) additional resources and tools for becoming effective, impactful, and successful coaches.



I. THE MODERN COACH

Modern coaching requires much more than just commanding children how to play a game. Coaches are role-models and influences in young people's lives. The players who come to the field are students, family members and friends to someone. It is the coach's responsibility to teach players how to make smart decisions in all areas of their lives. Coaches must help them develop character, discipline, self-motivation, self-worth and an excitement for life. To achieve these objectives, the coach must set these standards for the players and others around them, and then help them reach those standards by developing appropriate relationships with them based on respect, caring and character. When character development is the foundation for a program, players get the most out of their soccer experience. When that happens, coaches get the most out of players on the pitch.

The most successful coaches are not the ones who win the most games. Successful coaches utilize modern, innovative approaches to focus on player development, sportsmanship, hard work, and team cohesion. The desire to see the players learn and improve their skills is the key to effective coaching. Coaches should commit to using all of their knowledge, abilities, and resources to make each player on the team successful. The focus is to promote an atmosphere of teamwork, mutual respect, and commitment. By achieving this, the coach will be successful and oftentimes win.

The modern coach should emulate the following characteristics and actions:

- Create learning situations.
- Create age-appropriate conditions and intensity of competition.
- Cause transfer of learning from training to match.
- Encourage players to develop physically, technically and tactically.
- Develop a team framework and teach players their roles so the team has a good soccer environment.
- Explore a variety of strategic situations and have mental and tactical rehearsal for all eventualities.
- Develop infrastructural support; the club has a good soccer culture.
- Develop psychological strength and maturity of the players and team.
- Enjoy the work. Enjoy the game. Strive to win.
- Ceaselessly study the game and work to improve the craft of coaching.
- Puts players first
- Demonstrates consistent actions
- Develops character and skills
- Sets realistic goals
- Treasures the game
- Creates an enjoyable partnership with the players
- An ethical coaching philosophy
- A coaching philosophy compatible with the individual's personality
- Fair play is a top priority in the coaching philosophy
- Approach to coaching is educationally sound and appropriate for players

FORMING A COACHING PHILOSOPHY

It is important to develop a coaching philosophy when getting started in coaching. For that matter, even experienced coaches may want to re-evaluate their philosophy. The purpose of a coaching philosophy is to serve as a compass for coaches over the course of a long season – guiding coaches on their season’s journey oftentimes fraught with struggle, defeat, and disappointment. A coach’s philosophy is a practical tool: it helps coaches remain steadfast in their principles of fair play and sportsmanship rather than displaying a “win-at-all-cost” mentality. In short, a coaching philosophy guides us to do the right thing instead of what tempts us. Each coach must take time to develop his or her own coaching philosophy prior to the season.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

The development of a soccer player is a long process in which the players progress gradually from a simple to a more complex involvement in the game. This progression requires proper guidance and direction from coaches who are ethical, knowledgeable and licensed. This process cannot be rushed, but players should participate at a level that is both challenging and demanding. There is no guarantee that a player will reach his or her potential, but the opportunity must be provided.

The following are the top 10 objectives coaches should strive to focus on in the development of a soccer player:

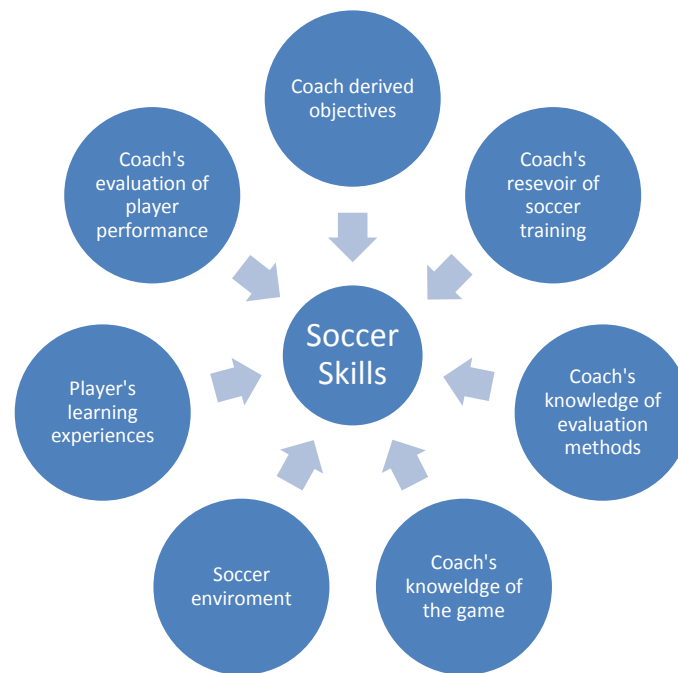
- 1) Develop the child’s appreciation of the game.
- 2) Keep winning and losing in proper perspective.
- 3) Be sensitive to each player’s development needs.
- 4) Educate the players to the technical, tactical, physical and psychological (four components of soccer) demands of the game for their level of play.
- 5) Implement rules and equipment modifications according to the players’ age group.
- 6) Allow players to experience all positions.
- 7) Players need to have fun and receive positive feedback.
- 8) Training should be conducted in the spirit of enjoyment and learning.
- 9) Provide the appropriate number of training sessions and matches according to the player’s stage of development.
- 10) Strive to help each player reach their full potential and be prepared to move to the next stage of development.

DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM FOR PLAYERS

To be achieve these objectives (especially No. 10), coaches must develop and implement a player development curriculum. At the core of player development is a sound curriculum. If a coach’s curriculum is consistent employed throughout the season, with a clear vision of what lies ahead for the players, development is maximized.

A curriculum is a plan for teaching the subject. It is an attempt to account for all the learning guided by the coach. The process of learning is made easier if both the coach and the player know what the coach is trying to achieve. This should be an explicit statement, the more precise the better. These statements are the coaching objectives within the curriculum. The player is aided knowing not only what to do, but also whether he or she has done it. The coach’s task is easier when knowing what to look for in the player’s performance.

There should be continuity throughout the year in the way training sessions are conducted. Plan all training sessions in advance and in detail. The radial below gives an overview of the factors influencing player development. Like any teacher, a soccer coach must decide what skills will be introduced during the year and in what sequence. This necessity requires season-long planning on the coach's part.



While the curriculum is the baseline for what to do in training, coaches should observe matches to understand developmental needs of each individual player. A coach must be flexible with the curriculum and be ready to adjust it based on specific needs. Evaluating the players in a game may show an immediate need of a player or of the team that may call for a deviation from the current point in the curriculum. While consulting the club director of coaching, the coach will have to use personal knowledge and judgment as the season progresses as to whether the curriculum set is best for the players on that specific team. How players perform may dictate progressing ahead or lapsing behind the schedule of the curriculum. A coach should never feel confined by a curriculum.

PLAYER-CENTERED TRAINING: A GUIDED DISCOVERY

Player-centered coaching places a high priority on the total development of the player. The “game within the child” is a concept central to youth soccer coaching: that the game of soccer is already exists within each player and the talent of a coach must reveal the game from within each player. It is often argued that effective coaching is as much an art as it is a science. Guided discovery in coaching soccer is a balance of the two. In a broad sense, this coaching style moves away from the *sage on the stage* and more toward the *guide on the side*.

With a player-centered coaching approach, players are given more ownership of their learning, thus increasing their opportunities and strengthening their abilities to retain important skills and principles. This learning also develops the players' ability to make good decisions during matches, an important element in successful performance at any level of play. It helps players to take a leadership role and ownership in enhancing the team culture.

In contrast to the traditional ways sports have been taught in the coach-centered approach, the player-centered guided discovery approach invites the player to think, go beyond the given information and then discover the correct skills. In the coach-centered approach, the coach tells the players what to do, command style, and then expects them to produce. With the command style, the coach explains a skill, demonstrates the skill and allows the players to practice the skill. The player in a command style setting oftentimes becomes paralyzed by thinking too much about what the coach wants him to do.

By contrast, the essence of guided discovery is a coach-player connection in which the sequence of information and questions leads to responses from the player. The combination of information and question by the coach elicits a correct response which is discovered by the player. Guided discovery simply means that the coach raises questions and provides options or choices for the players, guiding the players to answer the questions because they become curious about the answers. If the coach instead guides the players in a player-centered training environment, then they gradually become capable of holistic thinking in their soccer performance.

TRAIN WITH GAME-LIKE ACTIVITIES, NOT LINES

During every training, there must be a clear direction to teaching and learning, and this includes the heavy use of game-like activities, instead of drills. Even the most successful coaches sometimes forget that no one likes waiting in a line. Drills that involve players waiting for their turn in a line are a waste of everyone's time and effort. Instead, game-like activities are games, drills, activities, and competitions that involve no lines. Because maximum touches is critical to player development, coaches must strive to make sure that players receive the maximum touches with his or her own ball. Game-like activities also simulate real-time competition which simulates game-situations. Scrimmages are as similarly ineffective as line drills because they involve 1 ball for up to 22 players typically resulting in a few dominant players controlling possession of the ball for the duration of the activity. *Accordingly, limit the use of scrimmages as a player development tool.*

Game-like activities that can be used in training fall into three main categories. Select activities from each category that is age appropriate. Three main categories of game-like activities are:

- **Body awareness:** Activities that emphasize the use of body parts, motion, coordination and balance, with and without the ball.
- **Maze games:** Activities in which the player has the opportunity to move in a 360 environment, with and without the ball. Even though the area is defined, there is not necessarily a specific target or boundary to go toward. These activities allow the players to make decisions while moving in all directions.
- **Target games:** Activities that involve solving the objective by going from point A to B. In contrast to maze games, these activities are more directionally defined and can be done with and without the ball.

BE CAREFUL OF OVER-COACHING AND ITS PITFALLS

Unlike most team sports, soccer is a player's game, not a coach's game. For players to become self-reliant, confident decision-makers, a coach must not micromanage the game for them. As a player-centered sport, some coaches become disillusioned as they learn that they are the *guide on the side* and not the *sage on the stage*. In many sports the coach makes crucial decisions during the competition. This outdated coach-centered approach has been handed down to us from other sports and coaching styles of past generations.

In soccer, players make tactical decisions during the match; the coach's decisions are strategic. The ego-centric personality will find coaching soccer troublesome. During the match the coach can call out some general reminders, "mark up" for example, but for the most part should remain quiet, only yelling out loud praises while sitting and quietly observing the match. It is the players who should be heard the most during a match. During

matches, players must also learn to solve their own problems on the field instead of having the coach make substitutions in order to solve the problem for them. In this fertile game environment, some players will grow as team leaders. This will begin with a player directing one or two players, and in time, the entire team. Leaders will guide and inspire the team from within.

Parents and spectators may think the coach is not coaching if there is not constant talking, so parents will need to be educated on why this chatter diverts players' attention. Team supporters too often have their view of the match colored by the way professional coaching is portrayed in American sports and in the sports media. In a coach-centered sport with frequent stoppages in play and timeouts, the coach takes on a direct role during the game. Soccer does not stop except (for a serious injury and halftime), giving the coach a passive and indirect role during the match.

When it comes to player substitutions during games, coaches should embrace frequent but thoughtful and sensible substitutions. Frequent substitutions allow for all players to play and will speed development for a greater number of players. Players have more room to grow when the coach makes sensible substitutions and talks less during matches. Coaches should not platoon players in and out of games in order to wear an opponent down. The coach should decide before the match or tournament what the plan regarding substitutions will be and stick to it while also being flexible for changing circumstances. But the priority should always be to give each player fair playing time as well as the opportunity to meaningfully contribute during matches.

WINNING IS AN OUTCOME, NOT A GOAL

The mission of a soccer should not revolve around winning games, tournaments, or championships. ***Winning is a byproduct of a quality program, but it should not be the driving force.*** Some simply do not see the difference between teaching life lessons through sport and collecting trophies in sport. While some programs may tolerate coaches with winning records but who are poor role models, Towson United does not. They are challenged and removed. Coaches who constantly shout at players, who criticize referees, who are confrontational with opposing coaches, who punish their players for losing a game by making them do physical exercise, who twist the rules and teach their players that *acceptable deceit* overrules sportsmanship and fair play, or who profess that “nice guys finish last,” are poor role models who will not be tolerated at Towson United. This conduct flies in the face of the primary goal of youth sports – to teach the game and instill a love of the sport. At Towson United, such coaches shall be summarily removed from their position and barred from coaching in the future.



II. STAGES FOR THE AGES: A MODERN PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Towson United developed the “Stages for the Ages” player development model based on the US Youth Soccer Association player development model. This year-to-year progression focuses on teaching players the four (4) elemental components of soccer - technical, tactical, psychosocial, and physical - in an age-appropriate manner. The ultimate goal is to prepare the players to participate at the next level. The next level could be the next age group or a different level of competition. This progression requires proper guidance and direction from coaches who understand the overarching objectives of the age-group (described below) beyond simply winning.

The development of a soccer player is a long process in which the players progress gradually from a simple to a more complex involvement in the game. Many of the adults organizing youth soccer do not fully grasp the timeline for the development of a soccer player. Because the majority of soccer players in most communities are children and teenagers, adults think that soccer is a child’s game when in fact it is an adult game. Because of this basic misunderstanding, they believe soccer players are supposed to peak somewhere in the range of 13 to 16 years old. In fact, soccer players do not peak athletically and develop their tactical awareness and emotional control until they are in their twenties, but are too often expected to perform at this level at an inappropriately young age.

The following are age-specific summaries describing age-appropriate objectives and expectations coaches should incorporate into their training and gameday strategy, including technical, tactical, physical and psychosocial components. While these sections are clearly divided into separate age-groups, they each represent a foundation of each player’s development. Accordingly, every coach should possess a basic understanding of how each of the “Stages for the Ages” impacts their own players. Below is a summary of the “Stages for the Ages” model followed by a detailed breakdown of each stage.

“STAGES FOR THE AGES” SUMMARY

Clinic (U6) - “Me & My Ball”	U7 - “Me & My Field”
<p>Technical: basic dribbling/shooting; no hands Tactical: learn when to score a goal (offense) versus stop a goal (defense); understanding boundaries Physical: coordination, balance, body control Psychosocial: sharing, fair play, “how to play,” emotional management</p> <p>By End of Season, players should be capable of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowing which goal to attack/defend 2. Basic dribbling & shooting 3. Stop play when hearing a whistle <p>Coaching Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DO NOT overcoach! Have fun! Let them play! 2. No Lines! Always moving! Getting touches! 3. Positive support and encouragement! 4. Do not force participation; play at own pace 	<p>Technical: dribbling, proper shooting technique, Tactical: occupying space (spread out); role of defense, 1v1 Physical: coordination w/ ball, improved endurance, fluctuate running speeds Psychosocial: working together, sportsmanship, emotional management, creativity, participation</p> <p>By End of Season, players should be capable of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand throw-ins, corner kicks, goal kicks 2. When and how to attack/defend 3. Comfortable in 1v1 situations <p>Coaching Points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DO NOT practice passing! Focus on dribbling, ball control, proper shooting technique 2. Introduce age-appropriate competition without emphasizing scores or wins/losses
U8 - “Me & My Partner”	U10 – “Me & My Team”
<p>Technical: introduction of passing/receiving and occupying space away from ball & teammates Tactical: finding/creating/occupying space to receive ball; passing to open space Physical: develop speed, coordination, balance & stamina with and without the ball Psychosocial: interact positively and confidently within a group setting</p> <p>By End of Season, players should be capable of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Basic attack/defense skills in 1v1 situations 2. Balance in relation to ball (back, forward, side-to-side) 3. Basic coordinated movement with and without ball <p>Coaching Points: create positive environment for learning; emphasize hard work; encourage mistakes as learning device, emphasize sportsmanship</p>	<p>Technical: demonstrate controlled dribbling, accurate passing/shooting, and defensive positioning Tactical: efficiently occupy space in relation to ball & teammates Physical: improve speed, coordination, balance & stamina with and without the ball Psychosocial: positive interaction with teammates/opponents during match (sportsmanship)</p> <p>By End of Season, players should be capable of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Efficient in 1v1 situations 2. Application of basic team attacking/defending strategies 3. Coordinated movement at speed <p>Coaching Points: emphasize hard work, sportsmanship, fair play; support learning by encouraging players to try new things and to make mistakes</p>
U12 – “Me & My Role”	U15 – “Us & Our Strategy”
<p>Technical: improve ball control & quality passing/receiving technique in game situations Tactical: develop attacking & defending techniques; improve team possession Physical: compete to increase, speed, agility, coordination, stamina, & balance in competitive games Psychosocial: cooperate w/ teammates in collective tasks</p> <p>By End of Season, players should be capable of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Application of ball control technique at speed 2. Application of team attacking/defending strategies 3. Improved endurance and speed during match 	<p>Technical: focus on quality passing/receiving, ball control, and finishing in small & big spaces Tactical: application of team strategies to create combination attack and cooperative defense Physical: development of endurance/strength on the ball Psychosocial: comfort with competition in individual and team situations</p> <p>By End of Season, players should be capable of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accurate short and long passing 2. Combining application of team attacking/defending strategies and communication with teammates 3. Combined endurance and speed during match



Clinic (U6) | Me & My Ball

OBJECTIVE: The goal of the Clinic (5 & Under) stage is to introduce the game of soccer to young athletes and expand their elementary movement skills by developing coordination and building overall motor skills.

For many soccer players, the Clinic (U6) program is their introduction to the sport of soccer for the first time. Fun and physical literacy must be at the forefront of the soccer experience at this age. In terms of motor development, cognitive development and social development, generally there are limited differences in the capabilities of the players in this age group. Individual and small group play is essential for both touches on the ball and learning at their own pace. Over-coaching unfortunately occurs too often in this age group. The emphasis however should be on letting the children play and learn at their own pace. Coaches should also focus on the athletes getting comfortable with having a ball at their feet, as well as beginning to understand the concept of what soccer is.

Clinic (U6) - "Me & My Ball"

Technical: basic dribbling & shooting; no hands

Tactical: learn when to score a goal (offense) versus when to stop a goal (defense); understanding boundaries

Physical: coordination, balance, body control

Psychosocial: sharing, fair play, "how to play," emotional management

By End of Season, players should be capable of:

1. Knowing which goal to attack/defend
2. Basic dribbling & shooting
3. Stop play when hearing a whistle

Coaching Points:

1. DO NOT overcoach! Have fun! Let them play!
2. No Lines! Always moving! Get touches!
3. Positive support and encouragement
4. Do not force participation; play at own pace

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U6 PLAYERS

The U6 age group consist of the Kindergarten and Pre-K athletes ages four- and five-years-old. Before a player can be expected to learn soccer-specific skills, the player must first learn to be in control of the body. It is imperative for children to acquire a base of general balance, coordination, and agility before soccer skills. This growth in athleticism is a long-term evolution. How can the coach expect them to control the ball before they can control their bodies? That is why it is essential for youngsters be exposed to movement education. The foundation of movement education must be laid during childhood. This requirement is of primary importance to the youngest players, making ball skills secondary in importance. Do not use a calisthenics approach; instead, keep it fun and enjoyable to foster a desire to play. This intrinsic motivation will grow a passion for the game that could last a lifetime.

Physical characteristics of this age group includes:

- Constantly in motion – love to run, jump, roll and climb
- Eye-hand and eye-foot coordination is raw – not ready for bouncing or flighted balls
- No sense of pace – go flat out
- Physical coordination is immature – can balance on dominate foot
- Catching skills not yet fully developed
- Controlling a ball is a complex task

PSYCHOLOGY OF U6 PLAYERS

It's important to remember the psychology of this age group is just as important as the physicality. Players in this age group are egocentric – a me, my, mine mentality. Young children do not play together; they play next to one another, meaning they do not necessarily interact as they play. This psychosocial reality is called parallel play. Each child is engaged in his or her own game and is not sharing or cooperating in a game. In soccer, this is most evident in the U6 age group and still occurs to a lesser degree in the U8 age group. Players in these age groups swarm around and go after the ball because it is the only toy on the field. They have not yet learned the social skill of sharing, hence why passing (sharing) the ball occurs by chance. All adults around the field when these age groups are playing must realize the children are not small adults. Why should the children suddenly display the social skill of sharing when they do not yet truly display that talent in any other setting? The child's enjoyment at this age is derived from playing in a group. Preschoolers enjoy playing in the presence of others, parallel play, even though they may not always watch or interact with them. However, at this age there is no real interest in competition or outcome. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together but still involved in individual play.

Psychological characteristics of U6 players includes:

- Only understand simple rules
- Individually oriented (me, my, mine) – little or no concern for team activities
- Physical and psychological development of boys and girls are similar
- Psychologically, easily bruised – need generous praise
- Short attention span – tends to one task at a time
- Limited understanding of time and space

OBJECTIVES FOR THE U6 AGE GROUP

Physical: Introduce movement education - balance, walking, running, how to start and stop, jumping, hopping, rolling, skipping, changing direction, bending, twisting and reaching.

Technical: Dribbling (stop and start) and shooting. Experiment with the qualities of a rolling ball.

Psychosocial: Sharing, fair play, parental involvement, “how to play” and emotional management.

Tactical: The concept of boundary lines, at which goal to shoot, playing with the ball wherever it may go, when to score a goal (offense), and when to stop opponent from scoring (defense).

COACH'S APPROACH TO U6 TRAINING SESSIONS & MATCHES

Each session consists of a 30-minute training (practice) designed to give all players maximum time engaged with their own ball followed by a 30-minute 4v4 match. Wins and losses are not recorded, and no standings are kept.

Training: Use the “game” approach to learning soccer, not drills. *Waiting in lines should be avoided.* Training should incorporate game-like activities, not drills, including movement education challenges and “soccer-nastics.” Act as a facilitator rather than a coach. It is important to ensure each child has a ball and to focus on fun and individual success. The benefit of the increased number of touches on the ball in those games is irreplaceable. It is very important that each player has a ball for every training session.

The training session must be player-centered with the coach as a facilitator of the soccer experience. Coaches should be well prepared and have a selection of game-like activities planned, while keeping in mind these young children have short attention spans. Games need not be soccer-oriented – physical activity aimed at improved motor skills is the goal. It is necessary to go with the flow and be adaptable with this age group. Even well-designed games may need to be scrapped. Throughout the season, allow the players to experiment and discover the ball skills being taught on their own.

Positivity all the time is what is important here. Praise loudly and positively when a player does a skill correctly—positive reinforcement. Encourage them to try to do new things with the ball throughout the soccer season. Remember to praise a player for trying something new, not just succeeding at it.

During training games is the best time for the coach to teach rules of the game to the players, i.e., no hands, out of bounds, etc. The coach should demonstrate the skills a few times during the session. Also during the session, call out some of the key coaching points on how to execute the ball skills. Fun games involving small numbers can be played, especially 1v1, 2v1, 1v2 and 2v2 leading up to a final activity of 4v4.

Other effective coaching characteristics include good humor, friendly helper, organizer, stimulator, ability to see soccer from a child's perspective, patient, able to demonstrate movements and simple skills, enthusiastic, energetic, and imaginative.

Match: matches (games) should be unstructured “pick-up” style games. Do not assign positions or roles. Boundaries are not concrete, but rather discretionary. Allow players to continue playing out of bounds so long as it is safe to do so and avoid interrupting play for the sake of enforcing a boundary line. Reduce the “winning and losing” and “*us versus them*” mentality. Focus on fun, not rules or winning. Use the match as an opportunity to teach players about the difference between scoring a goal (offense) and stopping the opponent from scoring (defense), as well as boundaries and stopping at the whistle.

Each player must be given *the opportunity* to play at least 50% of each game, but do not force players to participate – allow players to play at their own pace. Competition and the fear of failure can be very intimidating for players in the U6 age group. Create, foster, and encourage a “no-pressure” environment in which to play and learn. Also, prepare a substitution schedule to create the opportunity for equal playing time. At the matches' end, be sure to congratulate the other team in a safe, fun, and age-appropriate manner.

MANAGING PARENTS' EXPECTATION

It takes the full attention capacity of a U6 player to control the ball because they are still developing basic balance, coordination and agility. What many adults forget from their own youth is that children of this age can only focus on a limited number of tasks at one time. Unfortunately, they are distracted by adults yelling from the touchline. Now they have to make a choice, either play the ball or listen to the coach and/or parents. If the adults want to help the children play their best, they need to be quiet while watching the game. Coaches must set expectations with parents before the season begins and explain that their role is to support and encourage players from the sideline. Directional cheering by parents is often counter-productive for player development; it confuses and distracts the player and team. Positive encouragement by parents is preferable.



U7 | Me & My Field

Objective: the goal of the 6&Under (U7) division is to continue to introduce the game of soccer to young athletes and expand their elementary movement skills by developing coordination and building overall motor skills.

Towson United's U7 Division builds on the player development model of the Clinic program. At this stage, players are exposed to more complex aspects of the sport during 5v5 games. There can be differences now in the physical, cognitive and social development capabilities of the players in this age group. Individual and small group play, especially pairs, is essential for both touches on the ball and learning at their own pace. The emphasis on movement education and body awareness continues with this age group and is expanded to involve even more activities with the ball. These activities should include eye-hand and eye-foot coordination games. This is essential to overall coordination and a well-rounded physical fitness approach as well as enhancing players' general understanding of the sport.

U7 - "Me & My Field"

Technical: dribbling, proper shooting technique,
Tactical: occupying space (spread out); role of defense, 1v1
Physical: coordination w/ ball, improved endurance, fluctuating running speeds
Psychosocial: working together, sportsmanship, emotional management, creativity, participation

By End of Season, players should be capable of:

1. Understand throw-ins, corner kicks, goal kicks
2. When and how to attack/defend
3. Comfortable in 1v1 situations

Coaching Points:

1. DO NOT practice passing! Focus on dribbling, ball control, proper shooting technique
2. Introduce age-appropriate competition without emphasizing scores or wins/losses

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U7 PLAYERS

FROM U6: The U7 age group consists largely of Kindergarten age athletes. Basic balance, coordination and agility must be developed before soccer skills. Again, the fascination for the ball, the desire to master it and the thrill of scoring goals provides the launching pad into a lifetime of soccer participation. It is still appropriate in this age group for the joy and skills of the game be best nurtured by encouraging freedom of on the field and during games. This is the fun phase where a passion for the game must be sown.

Physical characteristics of this age group includes:

- Catching skills not yet fully developed, but progressing
- Constantly in motion – love to run, jump, roll and climb
- Eye-hand and eye-foot coordination is improving – not yet ready for bouncing balls
- No sense of pace – still go flat out
- Physical coordination is immature, but improving quickly
- Controlling a ball is a complex task

PSYCHOLOGY OF U7 PLAYERS

The attention capacity for this age group is still limited to one task at a time, but this capability is beginning to

grow. They are quite rightly focused on the ball. So during a match, the players need to focus on the task at hand, trying to control the ball. Unfortunately, they are often distracted by adults giving advice from around the field. Now they have to make a choice: either play the ball or listen to the adults. If the adults want to help the children play their best, they need to be quiet while watching the children's game.

They are still there to have fun, and because some of the players may be new to soccer, it is imperative that activities are geared toward individual success and participation. Parallel play may occur in training sessions for U7 players, too. From parallel play, as described in the U6 age group, to learning to share with others, these milestones are passed by the end of this age. Thus, players need encouragement to share and approval for trying. Ask them to work with others to solve a challenge. Start them with just one partner and work to a variety of partners from there.

Psychological characteristics of U7 players includes:

- Able to understand moderately complex game rules
- Still individually oriented (me, my, mine) but team activities beginning to emerge
- Psychologically, easily bruised – need generous praise and support from coaches and parents
- Growing attention span – can multitask 2 tasks at a time
- Still possess limited understanding of time and space

OBJECTIVES FOR THE U7 AGE GROUP

Physical: Endurance is beginning to emerge, but agility has yet to develop in most. How to run, stop, and restart is a critical skill to practice.

Technical: Dribbling (stop and start) and shooting. Still experimenting with the qualities of a rolling or spinning ball. “Kick-and-chase” is often mistaken for dribbling.

Psychosocial: Sharing, fair play, “how to play” and emotional management

Tactical: “What is the field?” is explored at this age. The concept of boundary lines, at which goal to shoot and playing with the ball wherever it may go, are appropriate learning objectives, as well as basic rules/aspects of the sport, such as kickoffs, goal kick, corner kicks, throw-ins, are appropriately explored at this age.

COACH'S APPROACH TO U7 TRAINING SESSIONS & MATCHES

U7 players participate in a weekday practice and a Saturday game. Practice drills are designed to give all players maximum time engaged with their own ball, and are given the opportunity for equal playing time during games. Wins and Losses are still not recorded, and no standings are kept.

Training: Continue to use the “game” approach to learning soccer, not drills. *Waiting in lines should be avoided.* Training should incorporate game-like activities, not drills, including movement education challenges. Act as a facilitator rather than a coach. Coaches should be well prepared and have a selection of game-like activities planned, while keeping in mind these young children have short attention spans. Games need not be soccer-oriented – physical activity aimed at improved motor skills is the goal. Even well-designed games may need to be scrapped; it is imperative that coaches be flexible and adaptable. Through these games, expose the U7 age group to the principles of play. It is important to ensure each child has a ball and to focus on fun games. The benefit of the increased number of touches on the ball is irreplaceable. Be well prepared and have a selection of game-like activities planned while keeping in mind these young children have short attention spans.

The training session must be player-centered with the coach as a facilitator of the soccer experience. With this age group it is necessary to be adaptable. Use guided discovery and the coach's toolkit, as discussed in The Primer section, which allows youngsters to play with little coaching interruption and gets them thinking. Throughout the season, allow the players to experiment and discover the ball skill being taught on their own. The coach should occasionally demonstrate skills, or have someone demonstrate a few times during the session. Also during the session, call out one or two of the key coaching points on how to execute a ball skill. Praise loudly and positively when a player does a skill correctly – positive reinforcement. Encourage them to try to do new things with the ball throughout the soccer season.

Match: Preferably these should continue to be unstructured pick-up game style matches. No hyper-organized matches where the score is recorded. Coaches should feel free to change game parameters to meet the needs of the players' development. Matches should be seen as another fun activity that includes a soccer ball. There should be no emphasis on team concepts or positions. Outcome based matches are in their future. Playing for results must not be part of the U7 match.

During matches, coaches must focus on fun, not rules or winning. Do not assign positions or roles. Each player must be given the opportunity to play at least 50% of each game, but do not force players to participate – allow players to play at their own pace. Use the match as an opportunity to teach players about the difference between scoring a goal (offense) and stopping the opponent from scoring (defense), as well as boundaries and stopping at the whistle. Create, foster, and encourage a “no-pressure” environment in which to play and learn. At the matches' end, be sure to congratulate the other team in a safe, fun, and age-appropriate manner.

KEYS TO COACHING

Shooting: Say No to the Toe! Teach using the instep of the foot to shoot. Keep your ankle locked. Stay balanced when you strike. Follow through.

Throw-Ins: Both feet behind the touchline. Both hands on the ball. Ball goes over the head and touches the back of the neck before throwing it. Ball comes in a straight arc over the head (don't twist as you throw). Both feet must stay on the ground. Once the ball is thrown in, the person throwing it in cannot touch the ball until someone else from either team touches it first.

MANAGING PARENTS OF U7 PLAYERS:

Again, coaches must set expectations with parents before the season begins and explain that their role is to support and encourage players from the sideline. Directional cheering by parents is often counter-productive for player development; it confuses and distracts the player and team. Positive encouragement by parents is preferable. It is also important for early childhood coaches and administrators to teach this reality to the player's parents and to let everyone know it is OK to play swarm ball at the U8 age groups. Swarm ball may actually help players improve their dribbling skills and decision-making ability.



U8 | Me & My Partner

Objective: Igniting a passion for the game must be the primary objective for coaches of the 7 & Under (U8) age group. The aim of the coach is to keep their soccer experience enjoyable and to foster a desire to play. This love of the game keeps people in the game for a lifetime.

The U8 Age Group is the age where we begin to introduce more players on to the field, as well as goal keepers. We will introduce a very basic concept of positions but most importantly we begin to transition over to an emphasis on passing and using a teammate. Continued development on individual development and comfort with the ball at their feet is also very important. Ambidextrous skill is certainly a goal for a coach committed to player development. Show players that passing is another option to dribbling. This is not just a technical objective but a psychosocial one since the basis of all teamwork is cooperation between partners. Many U8 activities will be done in pairs to promote communication, cooperation and the conceptualization of soccer principles. Furthermore, encourage them to get better by practicing on their own with the ball. Now is also the opportune time for encouraging skills with either foot as the muscle movement patterns are a clean slate.

U8 - "Me & My Partner"

Technical: introduction of passing/receiving and occupying space away from ball & teammates

Tactical: finding/creating/occupying space to receive ball; passing to open space

Physical: develop speed, coordination, balance & stamina with and without the ball

Psychosocial: interact positively and confidently within a group setting

By End of Season, players should be capable of:

1. Basic attack/defense skills in 1v1 situations
2. Balance in relation to ball (back, forward, side-to-side)
3. Basic coordinated movement with and without ball

Coaching Points: create positive environment for learning; emphasize hard work; encourage mistakes as learning device, emphasize sportsmanship

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U8 PLAYERS

U8 players possess improved pace and coordination from U6. However, the immaturity of a U8's physical abilities are obvious. Physical characteristics of the U8 age group includes:

- Muscles and tendons are still pliable, not stiff
- Beginning to develop some physical confidence (most can ride a bicycle)
- Lack sense of pace – go flat out, chasing the ball until they drop
- Still in motion – twitching, jerking, scratching and blinking are all second nature physical movements
- Still into running, jumping, climbing and rolling
- Neuropathways and muscle memory are still open so ambidextrous play is easier to develop at this age and is strongly encouraged
- Boys and girls are still quite similar in physical and psychological development

PSYCHOLOGY OF U8 PLAYERS

Some U8 players will have played for more than a season; however, this does not mean these players are ready for the mental demands of tactical team soccer. True, they do have an idea of the game with regard to scoring or preventing goals, but the emphasis still needs to be placed on the individual's ability to control the ball. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together, but still involved in both individual and partner play.

Psychological characteristics of the U8 age group includes:

- Like to show skills – need/seek approval
- Still very sensitive – Dislikes personal failure in front of peers, making ridicule from the coach in front of the group very destructive
- More into imitation of the big guys (sports heroes becoming important)
- Still do not believe in the intensity of the team at all costs
- Inclined more toward small group activities

OBJECTIVES FOR THE U8 AGE GROUP

Technique: Introduce ball lifting, juggling, block tackle, shooting with the inside of the foot, toe passing and shooting and dribbling while changing direction. Learn when to pass and to use the correct technique. Receiving passes and ground balls with the inside and sole of the foot. Learning correct throw-in technique. Emphasize using both left and right foot when dribbling. Developing further comfort with the ball at the athlete's foot.

Fitness: Agility, eye-foot and eye-hand coordination, balance, leaping, bounding, tumbling, catching, throwing, pulling, pushing, warm-up activities and movement education.

Psychosocial: Encourage working in pairs, sportsmanship, parental involvement, how to play, emotional management, creativity, dynamic activities, participation of all players in a safe and fun environment. There is still a short attention span unless the player has peaked (keep interest high). Like to show what they can do – encourage trying new things. Developing self-esteem – activities should foster positive feedback and attainable positive success. Being a good teammate - being positive towards teammates if you get scored on, or score a goal

Tactics: Begin to learn how to spread out. Continue learning application of rules for kickoffs, goal kick, corner kicks. Rudimentary understanding of the Goalkeeper position. Learning basic concept of offensive and defensive positions. Introduce the names of positions (fullbacks and forwards, midfielders). Beginning introduction of offsides.

KEYS TO U8 COACHING

Focus on Technique: continue to focus on the technical aspects of dribbling, shooting and passing. Proper footwork is fundamental to a player's development.

Positions: Don't be overly rigid in forcing kids into positions. For this age group, we are teaching concepts far more than we are teaching rigid positioning. We want them to have the ability to be creative and explore their own movement on the field. Do teach that players are either an offensive player or a defensive player. But keep it very basic. Don't be concerned with which end or side of the field they are on. Don't restrict the areas of the pitch they can go to. We don't want defensive players just hanging out on their own defensive box, and we don't want offensive players just hanging out in front of the opponent's goal. We want both position groups to be involved in both areas of play. You should be teaching the two groups that while their focus is on either offensive or defense, they need to help in both areas. No player should play one position for an entire game - let alone a

whole season.

Formations: Formations don't matter. Because we are teaching just the basic concept of offensive and defensive positions, a true formation doesn't matter. Players conceptually should be either an offensive midfielder or a defensive midfielder. We want all players to be involved in both elements of the game. While we are teaching them to spread out and get used to spacing, we don't care if a player is on the left or right side – so long as they are using spacing fundamentals. They may give up some preventable goals, and they may not be where you want them all the time. However, in the long term it does wonder for their development. Just focus on spacing concepts, and offensive and defensive mentalities.

Goalkeeping: The position of goalkeeper is new to their soccer experience at U10. In training sessions, have the players take turns playing in goal. Two training sessions per month should be devoted to goalkeeping. Over the course of the soccer year, every player must have the opportunity to play in goal. The players won't know what their best position may be once they are teenagers unless they are given the chance to try them all.

COACH'S APPROACH TO U8 TRAINING SESSIONS & MATCHES

Training: U8 teams will participate in one 60-minute, weekday practice. Children in the U8 age group still play predominately as individuals and occasionally with a partner. The coach must set up numerous activities where the players are together but are still involved in individual play. This age group prefers individual activities, but it is possible to successfully get them into activities where they play in pairs.

Using game-like activities, which allow for trial and error, exposes children to the components of the game. The key training activities are body awareness and maze games. Introduce a few target games too. They need to touch the ball frequently during fun activities that engage them. Small-sided games (3v3, no GKs) are still undoubtedly the best option for these players. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but it is also an easier game to understand.

While it is still important for the training session that each player has a ball, paired activities will now be done as well as individual ones. Encourage the players to cooperate through passing or helping on defense by running back toward goal. Cooperation in pairs is the foundation to teamwork. Now that children are at an age where they can play together purposefully and toward a common objective, work on cooperative partner activities. Offer big praise for passing, and sharing the ball.

Match: Teams will participate in a full, weekly fixture on Saturdays. Fixtures are 7v7 and consist of four 12-minute quarters with short break between. No extended halftime. Referees and goal keepers are introduced. Scores are recorded, and standings are kept. A playoff tournament is played at the conclusion of the season. Players continue to be given the opportunity for equal playing time during games. U8 players must play at least 50 percent of each match they attend. Remember that the game is for all players and everyone should be encouraged to participate.

Developing a general understanding of the basic rules of the game is an objective in working with U8 players. Proper kick-offs, direct/indirect kicks, throw-ins, corner kicks, goal kicks are introduced and will be enforced by referees. Referees will also enforce very limited offsides, i.e., cherry-picking, but technical violations will not be strictly enforced.

MANAGING PARENTS OF U8 PLAYERS:

Managing parent expectations in an increasingly competitive environment is critical at this age. Seven year olds are starting to understand what it means to play a game. They are beginning to cooperate more with their teammates. They may even pass to a teammate purposefully. But it is important for early childhood coaches

to teach this reality to the player's parents and to let everyone know it is still OK for athletes to play "swarm ball" at the U8 age group. Swarm ball may actually help players improve their dribbling skills and decision-making ability. Continue to discourage directional cheering and encourage supportive encouragement from spectators. Do not permit parents to remain on the same side of the field as the team (except for injury or emergency). Keep the children separate from spectators to emphasize team mentality and the authority of the coaches.



U10 | Me & My Team

Objective: *The U10 stage is the time to introduce basic combination play while also reviewing basic skills of cooperative play, i.e., passing, receiving, and tactical approaches to offense and defense.*

The U10 age group is the beginning of when things begin to resemble “real” soccer. Athletes should have a basic comfort level with the ball at their feet, have a basic understanding of the proper form in which to pass the ball, and a fundamental concept of positioning. While they are still many new soccer players at this age group, the athletes are more able to quickly understand concepts, and catch up on skills missed. This is the age group where we begin to truly teach team concepts.

For U10’s, continue to build the player before the team. Practice individual skills within individual and small group tactics. Training sessions should include fun skill building activities with some teaching of technique. When coaching players in this age group, the coach’s role expands from one of facilitating to being a teacher of technique and game application. However, playing at this age is still very important, so emphasis should shift toward enjoyable skill development. These players start to move from the *how* (technique) to *when, where, with whom* and *against whom* (tactics). Training sessions should still focus on small-sided games (not scrimmages) so players have the opportunity to recognize the pictures presented by the game. These objectives are best achieved through a games-based approach to learning soccer.

U10 – “Me & My Team”

Technical: demonstrate controlled dribbling, accurate passing/shooting, and defensive positioning

Tactical: efficiently occupy space in relation to ball & teammates

Physical: improve speed, coordination, balance & stamina with and without the ball

Psychosocial: positive interaction with teammates/opponents during match (sportsmanship)

By End of Season, players should be capable of:

1. Efficient in 1v1 situations
2. Application of basic team attacking/defending strategies
3. Coordinated movement at speed

Coaching Points: emphasize hard work, sportsmanship, fair play; support learning by encouraging players to try new things and to make mistakes

PHYSICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U10 PLAYERS

Physiologically U10 players are still children, not adolescents. In fact, peak athletic performance takes place in early adulthood, so, for under-10-year-olds, there is a low ceiling to athletic performance. Gross and small motor skills becoming much more refined. Boys and girls beginning to develop separately. Players are developing the pace factor – thinking ahead.

In this stage, children gradually begin to change from being self-centered to self-critical, and develop the need for group games. This is a flux phase in a youngster’s soccer career. The motivation to learn basic skills is very high at this age. The game itself should be central to all technical training. 11v11 is too sophisticated and complicated for young players. Small-sided games (such as 7v7), which provide the right amount of pressure for the child’s level of development, are more appropriate.

These players will demonstrate increased self-responsibility, so they should be given, to a reasonable extent, partial responsibility for their preparation at training sessions and matches. They will still intentionally

play in groups, although individualism is still the core of their game. They are very capable of assuming this responsibility when adults step aside and let it happen. Now they can initiate play on their own, which leads to learning through self-discovery and self-expression. They do enjoy and benefit from competition, so all training activities should have objectives and/or a method of scoring.

During this transitional phase of their psychological development, U10 players (and beyond) become more focused on peer approval and belongingness rather than parent/family approval, and therefore importance of good sportsmanship and encouragement from teammates is important. Use cooperative games and activities in training sessions to further instill a team mentality.

Other psychological characteristics include:

- Lengthened attention span - they are still in motion, but not as busy, only holding still long enough for a short explanation
- More inclined toward wanting to play rather than being told to play
- Psychologically becoming slightly more firm and confident
- Some are becoming serious about their play
- Team oriented – prefer team type balls and equipment. Enjoy the uniforms and team association.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE U10 AGE GROUP

Technique: Experiment with the qualities of a bouncing ball and running with the ball, passing with the inside and outside of the foot (emphasis on quality push pass), instep drive, receiving ground balls with the instep and outside of foot (body behind the ball), receiving bouncing balls with the instep (cushion) and the sole, inside and outside of foot (wedge), fakes in dribbling and turning with the ball. Introduce and crossing/centering. Intently practice throw-ins. For goalkeepers: ready stance, getting the feet set, how to hold a ball after a save, diamond grip, catching shots at the keeper, punting, recovery from down to the ground and up to set position and footwork exercises. Also introduce goal kicks and throwing.

Psychology: Keep soccer enjoyable to foster a desire to play using self-motivation. Working in groups of three, four or five, stay focused for one entire half. There is an increase in responsibility, sensitivity, awareness of how to win or lose gracefully, fair play, parental involvement, how to play, communication and emotional management.

Fitness: Factors are endurance, range of motion flexibility, rhythm exercises and running mechanics. Any fitness activities must be done with the ball. Introduce simple warmup exercised, body resistance exercises, and the idea of cool down.

Tactics: Some tactical ideas are emerging in their game, but their thoughts tend to be vague. This growing capability is one aspect of the flux phase. Often the adults involved with this age group see these abilities appear in matches and leap to expecting adult team-like performance when in fact the children are still learning how to play. 1v1 defending, roles of 1st attacker and defender, 2v1 attacking, what it means to get goal-side, small group shape in pairs and threes (emphasize support on both attack and defense).

KEYS TO U10 COACHING

Focus on Effort, Not Outcome: The adult concept of work rate is driven by the desire to win. Children like to win, but playing is more important. They are engrossed in the process of play, not the outcome. Still coaches and parents should encourage children to try their best. Under-ten-year-olds can understand the broad idea of effort, but the details are still unclear. They continue to equate effort with performance regardless of the outcome. The ability of players to understand and execute consistent play with a good work rate will grow over many years.

These traits should be gradually nurtured by coaches and parents.

Teach Team Concepts: The idea of a “team” and working towards a collective goal is beginning to form in this age-group. Players can understand the concept of finding passes and working the ball up the field instead of just booting the ball downfield and chasing after it. They should be able to spread wide on offense and transition to compact on defense. Moving up and back as a team is also a concept U10 players can execute with practice.

Positions: Players should not specialize at one position. Over the course of a game or a season, they should be encouraged to play and learn about every position, including goalkeeper. Kids will develop preferences, tendencies, and proficiency at certain positions. However, it’s important to emphasize ability to be versatile and capable of playing everywhere.

Defenders/Backs: the role of backs is to defend the goal, protect the goalkeeper, and prevent the opposing team from scoring by controlling the defensive third of the field. On offense, they should be outlets for goalkeepers and then look to pass a midfielder up the touchline. They should spread out when on offense and support midfielders by moving up to the midfield area when on offense. Drop towards the goal, compact inwards and defend the middle of the field when on defense. They also help contain the ball in the other team’s half and keep it on opposing side of the field. Do not keep players standing on their own penalty box; get them used to the idea of pushing up on offense and dropping back on defense. Everyone stays involved and engaged on offense and defense. No one stands around doing nothing, guarding nothing, or picking flowers

Midfielders: Midfielders do the most running, and have the most freedom of movement of any position on the field. Their job on defense is to support the backs. On offense, they must control the middle third of the field. They need to receive the ball from the defense, and transition the ball to the forwards. Depending on formation, they may be required to play wide positions.

Forward/Striker: on offense, forwards receive the ball from the midfield and look to try and either set up a goal, or score themselves – but it’s a forward’s job to create scoring opportunities, not to score goals! *By telling players it’s their job only to score diminishes and minimizes the importance of creating scoring opportunities.* They may feel they’ve failed if they create a scoring chance for their team, but don’t ultimately score. Praise scoring opportunities and the players that create them, not goals and the players that score them. On defense, forwards should pressure the other team’s defenders/backs to try to win the ball on a turnover.

Formations: The introduction of formations should begin at this age group. Coaches must teach the basic roles of each position group as well as sides of the fields. Coaches must communicate the expectations that players should remain on their side or area of the field. The most common formations coaches use at this age group is 2-3-1 (2 Defenders, 3 Midfielders, 1 Forward). This is the most balanced and engaged formation, and transitions well to older groups. Teams should be transitioning to something similar to this by the time the season ends. It naturally teaches spacing and outside play, and since there are more midfielders there is less opportunity for “static” players.

COACH’S APPROACH TO U10 TRAINING SESSIONS & MATCHES

Training: Continue to interweave the principles of play into activities with the U10 age group. In particular, they will begin to comprehend width and depth, but their execution of it will be inconsistent. Time and space relationships are just now budding. This emerging awareness of space is aided by showing the players the triangle and diamond shapes in the game. The triangle shape is of particular importance in building on the idea of support (pairs) from the U8 age group. The large triangle (width and depth) is support on the attack and the smaller triangle (concentration) is support when defending. With depth, stretching out the opposition may occur. Players should

be encouraged and praised for playing on both sides of the ball, which is attacking and defending. Keep in mind that the shape of the triangle changes with passing lanes adjusting in length and angle to support the ball. This constant adjustment is crucial in group play.

While using game-like activities, which allow for trial and error, expose the children to the components of the game. The key training activities are body awareness, maze games and target games. Remember the game is for all players and everyone should be encouraged to participate. The U10 age group is when children are often asked to compete before they have learned how to play. This *too much too soon* syndrome is another symptom of the flux phase.

Devote the end of each training session to playing 4v4, 5v5 and 6v6 practice games with specific objectives in mind – but not scrimmages. Remember, only 1 player touches the ball during a scrimmage, which limits the remaining players' development. Fun games involving smaller numbers can be played, especially 1v1, 2v1 and 3v2 or 5v3 leading up to a final training activity. Always coach for success. It is still important to ensure that each child has a ball and to focus on fun games, but as the players develop psychosocially, they will be ready to participate and cooperate in small groups.

Match: Regardless of the level of competition, U10 players should always play at least 50 percent of the match; they won't grow as players sitting on the bench. Through the course of the season expose the players to each position on the team during match play. Versatility is highly prized at the upper levels of the game.

Once the match begins, the coach should sit down and watch, and let the players do most of the talking during the match. The coach should speak up to praise them for doing something well and for trying what they have been taught in training sessions. If coaches are barking directions and instructions throughout the game, it is a sign that the players were not prepared well-enough at practice. Yelling is not a substitute for proper preparation at training. Training is where coaches should be heard instructing players. Games are for the players to execute.

It is natural for children this young to be inconsistent in their match performance. For that matter, so are adult professional players. The difference between a professional soccer team and a U10 team is simply that the pros make fewer mistakes, but they do make mistakes. Don't fret about inconsistent play with this age group. It's normal for a team to have highs and lows in match performance.



III. Conclusion

Towson United's In-House Program aims to focus more on player development rather than match outcome. This is not to say players should not strive to win. There's nothing wrong with winning. Proper player development leads to good match performance, which often leads to victory. But there are shortcuts to winning, particularly with players younger than high school age - just get the biggest, fastest child around, then outrun and outmuscle the opposition. But this approach rarely results in proper player development.

The Modern Coach always remembers that *the outcome of the game is not necessarily a measure of whether the coach is doing a good job developing players*. Nowhere in this Manual is there mention of the measurement of ball skills; i.e., the number of juggles a 14-year-old should be able to do or the elapsed time for a 9-year-old to dribble through a series of obstacles. Using these measurements in a fun contest format for players can be a positive motivator for youngsters to practice with the ball. However, coaches should not use these measurements to assess player talent or to make player selections.

Players and coaches should instead look to qualitative, not quantitative, measurements to judge player development. This is the drive for excellence (player development) as opposed to momentary success (winning). So how do the Modern Coach measure whether players are growing within the game? The following questions should provide the answers when measuring success for youth soccer program or team:

- **Fun:** Do the players smile and laugh? Do the players look forward to playing? The first question from the player's family should be, "Did you have fun today?"
- **Fair Play & Sportsmanship:** Does a player demonstrate by words and actions a sense of sportsmanship?
- **Rules of the Game:** Do the players know and follow the Laws of the Game?
- **Health & Fitness:** Are the players fit enough to meet the physical demands of the game? Are they developing good nutrition and hydration habits befitting an athlete?
- **Friendships:** Are the players creating new friends within the team and with players from other teams?
- **Skills:** Are the players demonstrating a growing number of ball skills and are they becoming more proficient in those skills?
- **Commitment:** How do the players answer when asked at the end of a game, "Did you try your best?"
- **Roles in the team:** More important than learning a position, are the players learning about positioning? Knowing where the center forward plays in the team formation is important; yet, learning how to move tactically within the game is far more important. Do all of the players get exposed to playing all of the positions?
- **Leadership:** Are players being given the opportunity to take on leadership roles and responsibilities? Are the coaches and team managers teaching leadership?
- **Tactics:** Are the players experimenting with new tactics in matches? The coaches must teach new tactics to the players in training sessions, and then allow them to try out the tactics in a match, regardless of how that might affect the outcome.

- **Retention:** Do the players come back year after year? Retention is recognized also as a short-term measure of success in youth soccer and developing well-adjusted citizens is another long-term measure of success in youth sports.

It takes many years to develop into a quality soccer player. Indeed, that continued development can be seen even in young professional players. Soccer is a long-term development and late specialization sport. Striving to improve individual, group and team performance is more important at the youth level than the score line. Simultaneously, players should play to win. Coaches should teach and develop the players as they learn how to win. Parents should support the players and coaches. Intrinsic success is, by its nature, more difficult to measure than extrinsic success. A trophy is more tangible to an adult than the exhilaration a child feels while playing soccer. But the final measure of success for parents and coaches of the player's soccer experience will require a good deal of patience from the adults. The truest measurement of a coach's success is whether his or her players, exercising their free choice, continue stay in the game. ***Remember, not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts.***



IV. RESOURCES & TOOLS FOR THE MODERN COACH

Appendix A: Sample Training Curriculum

- Practice 1: Player Assessment & Conditioning**
- Practice 2: Individual Skills: Defense**
- Practice 3: Individual Skills: Offense**
- Practice 4: Situational Soccer**
- Practice 5: Team Defense**
- Practice 6: Team Offense**
- Practice 7: Review Individual Skills & Situational Soccer**
- Practice 8: Team Defense & Any Problem Areas**
- Practice 9: Team Offense & Any Problem Areas**
- Practice 10: Season Review & Fun Finale**

Appendix B: Game Management - Pre-game, Game, Halftime, Game and Post-game

Pre-game

- Coaches arrive 30 minutes prior to kickoff
- Set responsibilities with staff
- Consider the environmental conditions
- 5-15 minutes of actual warm-up [5 minutes for U6, 10 minutes for U8, 15 minutes for U10]
 - individual warm-up [U6, U8, U10]
 - pairs [U8, U10]
 - small group [U10] (possession activities, directional games)
- U10/U12
 - Introduce goalkeeper into game/warm-up
 - Introduce dynamic stretching to promote good habits
- Starting line-up
 - Do not over-emphasize position and tactics – avoid specific positions
- Team huddle
 - Final instruction/reminders – cheer!

Game

- Start game, sit down and enjoy the game
- Finding a balance between the puppet master, cheerleader and silent “non-existent” coach
 - Limit coaching!
- Be sure all players get equal playing time
- Be sure players get to play in different positions
- In the event of an unbalanced game/blow-out, look for different ideas to even out the game:
 - Communicate with league officials prior to start of season – comply with league rules

- Make adjustments to teams (borrow a player, re-align two teams)
- Sit key players
- Play key players in different positions
- Subtract a player from the team that is winning

Halftime

- Relax and hydrate
- Get on their level; be sure all players are looking at the coach (no distractions behind the coach – including the sun). Get away from the parents/sidelines!
- Be sure that information is positive, emotions are under control and voice is at a controlled level.
- Sandwich approach of information (+ - +)
 - U6/U8 – simple information, if anything at all
 - U10/U12 – simple to complex (general to specific) with information, address basic principles rather than specific mistakes
- Communicate with staff prior to speaking with players
- Limit the amount of time speaking to your team (think about age of players and how long they can listen to the information)
- Substitutions
- Quick warm-up prior to starting second half

Post-game

- Shake hands (Coach must be a good role model by shaking the hands of referees, opposing coach and players)
- Check for injuries
- Brief cool-down stretch
- Stay positive regardless of the match outcome
- Snacks/drinks
- Reminder about next training session
- Be very brief after game and save discussions for the next training session
- Occasionally address the parents in a post-game discussion

Appendix C: A Checklist of Personal Attributes for Coaches

Appearance

- Dress suitably and groom properly

Disposition

- Pleasantness
- A sense of humor
- Even temper
- Courtesy
- Sympathy
- Enthusiasm

Poise

- Self-control and behave in an adult manner

Character

- Sincere and truthful

- Role model of positive ideals

Leadership

- Accept responsibility
- Plan and organize
- Understand the emotional and psychological characteristics of players
- Good rapport with each player
- Understand the personal needs and problems of players and adjust accordingly
- Discipline suited to the age of the players
- Discipline fairly and impartially - temper discipline with good judgment and humor

Relations with Others With Parents

- Seek cooperation and understanding in achieving goals of the player development model
- Show consideration for their opinions and feelings
- Display friendliness and courtesy

With Colleagues

- Friendly
- Cooperative
- Courteous
- Considerate

With Game Officials

- Be courteous, respect decisions and accept them gracefully
- Avoid bickering and "ref baiting"

Appendix D: The Role of Captains on Youth Teams

Giving a young player the opportunity to serve in the role of team captain can help build a sense of leadership, sportsmanship, responsibility and dedication. Having a turn at being a captain can help to instill these values in young players. Besides the pre-match formalities, the goal of assigning a captain is to delegate responsibilities that are manageable and not overly demanding. Accepting the responsibilities of the captain can help teach players an appreciation of duty while reinforcing their self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. Players often find that being named captain is both challenging and rewarding.

U6: No captains. No refs (parents officiate the game) {new young refs could officiate these matches to build their confidence}. Just show up and play some soccer.

U8: Co-captains for each game so that the kids build self-confidence as they represent their team at the coin toss. There should not be any other real responsibilities for the captains. By having captains in pairs the kids share the responsibility of meeting with the "ref" and conducting the coin toss. Being in a pair gives the children more comfort while interacting with the referee. Change the pairings each game so that by the end of the soccer year each child has had a chance to be a captain and perhaps more than once. Mix up the pairings too so that the children learn how to share leadership with another. That intentional interaction helps to build teamwork and confidence. The coaches should be the refs in the U8 game.

U10: Over the course of the soccer year rotate each player as captain for each match. It's an opportunity to give children experience at leadership and responsibility. Have one or two captains per match as desired.