



## **UNDERSTANDING & COACHING THE U9 & U10 PLAYER**

Dear Coach,

We are pleased you have volunteered and agreed to coach a youth soccer team. Furthermore, we are especially pleased that you have taken time out of your busy schedule to review this manual. Your desire to improve will have a great impact on the players that you coach, as you serve as an important ambassador for the game of soccer.

I encourage you to continue to grow as a coach by attending future coaching courses offered both within the club as well as those sponsored by PHSA. Additional ways to improve as a coach are by watching games in person or on television, reading books, and watching coaching videos. All of these avenues will help you succeed as a coach, but always remember that ***THE GAME IS THE BEST TEACHER!***

In my role as Technical Director, I am here to be of service to you. Please feel free to contact me via email at [technicaldirector@miltonmagic.com](mailto:technicaldirector@miltonmagic.com). Once again, I thank you for volunteering to help in the development of our children and look forward to working with you soon!

**“Theories and goals of education don’t matter a whit if you don’t consider your students to be human beings.”**

***Psychomotor Development-*** is the process of acquiring physical skills as related to mental ability to recognize cues and respond with the appropriate action.

- ☐ Boys and Girls
  - Greater physical differences
  - Psychological differences are apparent
  - Self-critical
- ☐ Motion and Growth
  - Gross motor skills more refined
  - Greater diversity in playing ability and maturity
  - Pace factor becoming more developed
- ☐ Health and Safety
  - Prone to heat loss and related injury
  - Full rest periods are necessary

***Understanding Psychomotor Development as it relates to coaching players***

- ☐ Many players repeat newly acquired skills in an effort to master them
- ☐ Stretching is a requirement for practice and games after muscle warm-up
- ☐ Skill differences among players will be apparent
- ☐ Capable of using multiple motor movements in activities. There is an increased evidence of speed
- ☐ Let the child discover through experimentation after fundamentals are established
- ☐ Players are stronger and have increased endurance
- ☐ Must be aware of heat related injuries

***Cognitive Development-*** is mental development. This includes not only memorization, but also creativity and problem solving.

- ☐ Understanding
  - Recognizes basic concepts of time and space but not always certain why
  - Able to demonstrate responsibility
  - Focus on “me” and the “team”
- ☐ Basic Problem Solving
  - Begins to think ahead
  - Ability to recall specific information
  - Repetition will result in improvement

### ***Understanding Cognitive Development as it relates to coaching players***

- ☐ Many returning players have chosen to play soccer
- ☐ A greater emphasis on responsibility should be introduced (each player should bring a ball to practice)
- ☐ The team will begin to take precedence over the individual
- ☐ Players will demonstrate a greater understanding of consequences and begin to think ahead
- ☐ Basic tactical concepts may be introduced but don't expect players to understand the reasoning
- ☐ Good instruction and demonstration will result in better player retention of information
- ☐ Certain players will want to perform and impress family and friends

***Psychosocial Development*** – is the development of the sense of self in relation to others. It covers a range from individual awareness, to pairs (playmates), to small groups, to large groups.

- ☐ Relational
  - Begins to identify with team
  - Adults outside family are now accepted
  - Enjoys friends
  - Will blame others
  - Prefers team type balls and equipment
- ☐ Sensitivity
  - More intense and serious about playing
  - Needs positive reinforcement
  - Feelings get hurt easily
  - Start to show confidence in an independent ability to solve problems

### ***Psychosocial effects on Coaching Soccer Players***

- ☐ Coach should be aware of the player's fears and peer pressure
- ☐ The player appreciates extra attention and training
- ☐ Introduce team behavior rules and fair discipline
- ☐ Use time-outs rather than exercise for discipline (do not associate fitness with punishment)
- ☐ Solicit parents' help for severe behavior problems
- ☐ Encourage through positive reinforcement over negative critique
- ☐ Praise team and individual sportsmanship efforts

# Basic Coaching Concepts for Players Under the Age of Eleven

## The “Golden Age” for Soccer Skill Learning

When young soccer players reach the age of eight, nine or ten, they have generally accumulated four or five years experience with the sport and have developed some basic skills and ideas about the game. Before age eight, the main goal of coaching is to provide an enjoyable entrée into soccer and ensure enjoyment and fun. In short, the role of the coach is to facilitate games for the enjoyment of the participants. For many players, reaching eight, or nine, or ten (every child is a little different) means new priorities and a new appreciation for their personal responsibility to the game. For the first time, these players begin to realize that winning and losing are tied to ability, not effort, and that skills must be refined for improvement to be noted. The role of the U-9/10 coach is therefore critical in shaping the technical range and tactical insights of the players; the role of the coach is that of a teacher. The period around eight or nine is considered the beginning of the “Golden Age” for skill learning for a number of reasons. Players will listen to and comprehend more complicated directions. Players will carry out repetitive “drill” activities and appreciate their purpose. Players will spend time working on their skills alone, if they are motivated. Players will appreciate the importance and thrill of learning new skills and refining existing techniques. Players will begin to identify with national or international heroes and begin to emulate their skills and personalities. Players love to compete and strive to win. Players begin to equate fun with improvement. Players begin to equate their personal identity and self-esteem with their perceived ability and feedback from significant others, including peers, parents and coaches. Coaching nine and ten year-olds is a formidable task that requires a number of skills on the part of the adult. These skills include practical soccer knowledge, the ability to demonstrate and inspire by example, some basic understanding of child psychology, an appreciation of purpose relative to the age and ability of the players, and the ability to teach for long-term growth. With that said, the elements outlined below are all within the technical and tactical range of nine and ten year olds players in Ohio, although it should be acknowledged that in some parts of the world, and some parts of the United States, players of the same age might be more or less advanced. Our goal, as coaches in Ohio, is to develop basic skills and ideas about the game at an age when players are highly receptive to instruction and highly motivated to learn. The following elements represent a checklist for assessing the performance of individual players. Some players will be quite advanced in some areas and not others. Some players will be capable of executing some skills against one level of opponent, but not another. Some players will be able to execute techniques in a drill, but fail to apply them as skill when under pressure from live opponents. Some players will be competent, but

not outstanding. Some players will be technical, but not skillful, while others will be skillful, but not technical. When viewed as a developmental continuum, all players will score high in some areas and low in others. Coaching “well” means assessing player’s abilities and insights and slowly moving them towards the “ideal” of the top level in the time available to us.

## Individual Technical and Tactical Issues for U-9’s and U-10’s

### **Contacting the Ball**

***How many ways can the player kick or dribble or control the ball?*** There are six surfaces (inside, outside, instep, sole, toe and heel) used for kicking, dribbling or controlling a soccer ball. The ball can also be driven, chipped, volleyed, half-volleyed, side-volleyed, curled and lofted. The U-9/10 player should be challenged to expand their range of surfaces and textures (weights and spins) in an ongoing process of technical refinement.

***Is the player two footed?*** Juggling and dribbling practice should always involve the use of both feet and young players must be encouraged to experiment with all six contact surfaces. For the more motivated players, juggling, kicking and Coerver’s\* are essential “homework” activities for developing a comfort level with the ball. \*Coerver’s are individual dribbling moves named after the Dutchman, Wiel Coerver, who created the training program.

### **Passing**

***Does the player purposely pass the ball towards teammates?*** Players should be asked to control the ball and look for teammates rather than simply kicking the ball forward or to safety; it is often necessary to remind young players that the goalkeeper is always the most open player on the team when they are under pressure or no obvious forward passing options are available. At this age, the “thinking” behind a passing decision is often more telling than the outcome, and young players must be encouraged to attempt to maintain possession by passing (or dribbling) even as their limited range of techniques fail them.

***How far can the player kick the ball accurately?*** Players should be encouraged to pass within their technical range. Technique, physical strength and the size and weight of the ball all impact kicking distance and accuracy. In the small-sided games environment, shorter passes should be expected and encouraged, with aimless “boots” to safety, or to the opposition regarded as wasted possessions.

***Does the player use disguise and deception when passing?*** Encouraging more frequent passing (and dribbling) with the outside of the foot will help improve the level of subtlety in young players. The use of the hips to deceive opponents can also become a feature of play for nine and ten year olds.

### **Shooting**

***Does the player shoot, when possible?*** A player's first thought in possession should always be "Can I score a goal from here?" Goals in practice should be wide and high enough to encourage shots from various distances and angles and young players should be reminded that the objective of the game is to score more goals than the opponent in the time provided. Shots can be placed, driven, chipped, curled, volleyed, half-volleyed, side-volleyed, or improvised using any other legal body part.

### **Ball Control**

***How many touches does the player take to control the ball?*** The earlier a player decides what to do with the ball, the faster they will play; however, many U-9 and U-10 players will not look up before they have secured possession because their skill level will not allow them to concentrate on two things (the ball and the next action) at once. Time, space, vision of the field, and a comfort level with the ball are the most important elements in reducing the number of touches necessary to control the ball.

***Does the player understand their tactical options before the ball is controlled?*** Vision for "What next?" is a key element in the positive use of the "first touch," and coaches should challenge players to appreciate their immediate tactical situation as early as possible during play. Coaching should attempt to develop "pre-control" vision whenever possible by asking players to assess the availability of space around them before receiving a pass.

***Does the player open their body when possible when controlling the ball?*** Players who open their body towards the opponent's goal before receiving the ball take fewer touches and play faster. Players should only open their bodies when they have space to do so. This skill begins to emerge at the U-10 level, although some younger players can grasp the concept.

### **Dribbling**

***Does the player have the skill to dribble out of pressure, or past an opponent?*** Dribbling practice should include basic moves to turn away from pressure and also ideas on how to use changes in pace and direction to maintain possession or beat an opponent. As the most artistic aspect of soccer, young players must not be discouraged from learning to dribble the ball through early

and repeated failures. At this age, repetition in practicing dribbling moves in isolation and in live tactical contexts is critical for developing touch and creativity.

***Does the player run into open space with the ball?*** Running forward with the ball is important for making defenders commit to the ball, for shortening passing distances, for changing the rhythm of play and for creating shooting possibilities. Players must be encouraged to quickly dribble the ball into open space and also encouraged to use the outside surface of the foot when “speed dribbling.”

***Does the player dribble with their head down and rarely look to pass or shoot?*** While it is important to encourage young players to quickly dribble the ball into open space, players must also be aware of their passing and shooting options. Given that the ball can travel faster when kicked, it is important to encourage dribbling players to look up during those moments when they are in open space and not touching the ball, and when they are momentarily clear of opponents.

***Does the player use disguise and deception when dribbling?*** The most difficult opponents are “wrigglers” who are unpredictable in their dribbling. Players should be encouraged to combine dribbling moves and become comfortable making multiple, abrupt changes in direction.

## **Heading**

***Does the player head the ball?*** Heading becomes more common by ages nine and ten and practicing and playing with lighter balls will help overcome any initial fears of performing this difficult skill. It should also be stressed that there is NO medical evidence supporting the claim that heading a soccer ball is dangerous to the participants.

## **Support**

***Does the player move with the game or do they pass and stand still?*** Young players should not be restricted in their movements on the field and moving “with the game” should become a natural extension of passing. Passing sequences involving two and three players should be encouraged and can be expected at this age. These beginning attempts at combination play will become essential elements of mature play. At the U-9 and U-10 levels, an increase in the speed of ball circulation, coupled with a more controlled rhythm of play can be expected from competent players.

***Does the player move into open spaces when not in possession?*** Players should be encouraged to “find” new supporting positions away from teammates rather than be told where and when to move. By age ten, some children have started to think more abstractly about the use of space away from the ball; however many others do not yet demonstrate this spatial awareness, making large-group positional instruction irrelevant for the vast majority of nine and ten year-olds. More advanced nine and ten year olds will often appreciate supporting

positions to the side of the field (width) while failing to demonstrate the importance of creating space downfield and ahead of the ball (depth).

***Is the player more comfortable when facing the opponent's goal than when playing with their back to the opponent's goal?*** Some players are uncomfortable checking and receiving the ball with their back to goal. While older players will ultimately be selected to positions based on this skill, all young players should regularly experience this challenge as a natural part of their soccer education. Before the ability to play effectively with "back to goal" develops, young children must first learn to find passing lanes, judge when and how to run for the ball, learn how to control and turn with the ball, and learn how to disguise their movements. Because of the reduced technical and tactical demands, small-sided games create the only natural environments that provide repeated experiences in learning this difficult aspect of soccer.

### **Defending**

***Does the player try to recover the ball when possession is lost?*** "Defending" at this age should be no more complicated than encouraging young players to try and win the ball back when lost. The better players can grasp the concept of "marking" an opponent and "picking up" opponents when not in possession, and they will recover behind the ball as a group. However, in deference to the technical difficulties associated with attacking play for most nine and ten year-olds, any concentrated emphasis on "team" defending should be delayed until at least U-11.

### ***Does the player simply kick at the ball when an opponent is in possession?***

Tackling for the ball can and should include efforts to regain possession. The player who routinely kicks the ball away should be encouraged to use their body and the open space away from the opponent to attempt to win the ball back.

### **Transition**

***Does the player mentally transition after a change in possession?*** When the ball turns over from the attacker to the defender or from the defender to the attacker, the game offers chances to demonstrate awareness of two very important concepts: immediate recovery of the ball and immediate counter-attack to goal. Players should be assessed on how well they understand these concepts and encouraged to react as quickly as possible to any change in possession. By extension, the players immediately in support of the ball can also be assessed on how well they react to help their teammates.

## **Creativity**

***Does the player improvise when solving tactical problems?*** Those players who use non-standard techniques to solve tactical problems are demonstrating signs of creativity. A “good” pass gets to its target at a pace that can be controlled, regardless of the technique used in the delivered; similarly, a goal is a goal, regardless of how it was propelled into the net.

Young players who improvise should be encouraged, not scolded, and it must be remembered that for young players, the “thought” behind an action is generally more telling than the outcome, which is often limited by experience and technical range. Three elements impact creativity. The first is technique, the second is tactical awareness, and the third is confidence. Players who have the audacity to think and act out of the ordinary may be future stars of the game, and, while their techniques will be refined over time, their willingness to take risks must be nurtured at every level. Creative players are not always the easiest in

# **SAMPLE TRAINING SESSIONS AND ACTIVITIES**

## **NUMBER TOUCHES**

*Warm-up or -down activity.*

*Each player has a ball. Coach calls out a number, "25", the players must get that number of touches (dribbles) as fast as possible.*

**COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Encourage players to keep eyes up.*
- 2. Encourage small steps and fast footwork.*
- 3. Make sure players keep moving.*
- 4. Encourage changes of direction.*
- 5. Encourage touches with all and different parts of the foot.*

**TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

- 1. Only use right foot, left.*
- 2. Only use inside of foot.*
- 3. Only use outside of foot*

## **PROTECT THE CONE**

*Define a rectangular space. Each player starts with a ball and a cone. Each player must protect their own cone while trying to attack and kick over other cones. Player must keep the ball under control while defending and attacking. When defending try to block attackers by keeping your ball and body between the cone and the attacker. On attack try to maneuver around defenders while controlling your ball to get a clear kick at their cone. If your cone is kicked over you can set it up again after you do an exercise, dribbling move, or juggling of the soccer ball.*

**COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. This game allows players to stay included by doing some remedial exercise. Choose activities that can be performed quickly so players can get back involved.*
- 2. Vary the activity to include exercises like pushups, sit-ups, cartwheels and also dribbling; pull backs, stepovers, touches on ball, hopping over ball etc.*
- 3. Make sure players control the ball while defending and attacking.*
- 4. Watch for players who DEFEND or ATTACK more often.*
- 5. Watch and help players determine when to attack and leave the*

- cone, also when to defend and stay at home around the cone.*
- 6. Help players remember to keep their body and the soccer ball between their cone and the attacker.*
  - 7. Explosive, quick move will help attackers maneuver around defender.*

## **BIG SQUARE LITTLE SQUARE DRIBBLING**

*Define two squares, one large and a second smaller but within the big one. Assign two or three defenders to the little square, without soccer balls, the rest of the team on the outside of the little square but inside the big square, dribbling their soccer balls. On command the players dribbling must try to get through the little square without the defenders stealing the ball. One point each time players get the ball across the square. If defenders win the ball they become the dribbler and the player from whom ball was taken becomes the defender. Defenders must stay in the small square.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Players must control the ball while dribbling across the square. No points should be awarded for ball kicked across.*
- 2. Defenders must win the ball to get out. Three consecutive touches.*
- 3. Watch which players directly confront defenders.*
- 4. Watch for players who avoid defenders and try to sneak across.*

### **TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

- 1. Let players decide when to go across. First player to get 10 points is the winner.*
- 2. Use visual cues. When John starts across all players must go across. This is player controlled and other players will have to keep their eyes up and off the ball to look for John.*
- 3. Work your defenders as a group: They stay in until they collectively win 5 points. Then assign a new group.*

## **SCHEMER PASSING**

*Groups of four or five with one ball per group. Start out with players moving and passing the ball. After a few minutes, designate a schemer in each group. This player should have a different color or pinnie on. All instructions now go through this player. Schemer gives each player in the group a number. Players must pass in sequence, but each pass must come back to the schemer. For example, schemer passes to #1, who passes back to schemer, who passes to #2, who passes back to schemer, etc. Have several contests on who can finish the cycle first.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Demand quality passes, both pace and accuracy to the player's feet.*
- 2. All passes should be a distance of at least 15 yards. The schemer can control this by not passing if player is too close.*
- 3. Players should start their runs just before their number is due. Run should be to the ball, not away.*
- 4. Players whose number is not up should move away to create space, then come in hard when their number is due.*
- 5. Ball should be driven hard over long distances, but on the ground.*

### **TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

- 1. Schemer unlimited touches, all others one touch.*
- 2. Schemer must pass with outside of foot, others inside push pass.*
- 3. Within the space allocated, make the biggest possible passes.*
- 4. Play only with the weak foot.*
- 5. Play only with the strong foot.*

## **SCHOOL PASSING**

*Each player should start with a ball. The activity leader calls out a number. The players must react by forming groups of that number and passing one ball per group. Then give the players problems to solve, such as,  $2+3=?$  or how many quarters in a dollar? or the number of letters in the word candy.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Players must respond quickly to form groups.*
- 2. When passing make sure they pass to their teammates feet.*
- 3. Watch to make sure different groups of players are being formed.*
- 4. Make problems that leave odd numbers out: they then try to make a group closest to that number.*

## **STRIKE OUT SHOOTING**

*One ball for two players. Players start five yards apart. Every step back after kicking gradually increases the distance between the players to 20 yards. When the receiving player cannot get to the ball in two steps, both players start again at five yard apart.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Players contact ball on their laces.*
- 2. Eyes should be on the ball.*
- 3. Non-kicking foot should be pointed at target player.*
- 4. Ball should stay on the ground.*
- 1. As distance increases, players must kick the ball harder.*

## **HEADING UP**

*Players move around a defined space freely, one ball per player. While moving, players toss the ball in the air with their hands, then head it up in the air. Players try get the ball under control within one bounce and dribble away. Repeat.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Use the forehead to contact ball.*
- 2. Hit on the underside of the ball to drive it into the air.*
- 3. Use legs to spring up at the ball.*
- 4. After players get the feel encourage them to head it hard and get it as high in the air as possible.*

### **TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

- 1. Same as above except head the ball down. Now players must use forehead and contact the top half of the ball to make it go down.*
- 2. Toss, head twice: first low, then high and away.*
- 3. Partners, toss the ball to partner who tries to head it back over the tosser's head.*

## **HEADING GAME**

*Start with 2vs2 on a 20 x 10 yard grid. Make sure the goals are large enough so players succeed. Then make them smaller as the drill progresses. Have enough balls ready at each goal so game is not interrupted by chasing balls. One team advances the ball by tossing it back and forth. When they get to an area near the goal, one player tries to head it in the goal. After the head, both players on that team run back and defend their goal line. Defenders can use only body and head to prevent goals (no hands), and must stay on their goal line. Play for a limited time, or to a score, then match up different teams.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Encourage players to attack and defend quickly.*
- 2. When heading for goals, players should head the ball down, toward the goal line with a hard, aggressive shot. This can be accomplished by contacting on the top of the ball. Players may have to jump, get the body in the line of flight, then attack with a snapping motion, uncoiling the neck and back.*
- 3. As the players get better, try to catch the defending team backing up with a quick head over the top and toward the goal. This can be done by contacting the ball on the bottom.*

### **TRY THESE VARIATIONS:**

- 1. Must be a head, head to score.*
- 2. Must contact ball while jumping (both feet must be off the ground).*
- 3. Encourage players to throw from different angles.*
- 4. Head, then volley.*

## **THREE GOAL SHOOTING**

*Start with two teams of equal number. Each team has three goals to defend and three to score in. Each team has one keeper who must try to defend all three goals. Play regular soccer rules.*

### **COACHING POINTS:**

- 1. Attacking team should try to change the point of attack away from the keeper, then proceed to get a quick shot off.*
- 2. Defending team must try to force the attackers in one direction so their keeper knows which goal to defend.*

# Coaching Methodology

- ☐ “If you aren’t 15 minutes early, you are 15 minutes late”

## **No-No’s**

- ☐ don’t allow your players to pick their own teams
- ☐ false praise
- ☐ prolonged stoppages
- ☐ associating fitness with punishment

## **Yeses**

- ☐ Incorporate games that players are already familiar with, into your training session (playground games, physical education games, etc.)
- ☐ Stretching, and selecting certain players to lead stretches, are chances to develop leadership in your players
- ☐ Do you refer to what you worked on in your last practice before your next game?
- ☐ Federal Express / UPS Stoppages
- ☐ Coach the positive!
- ☐ Encourage decision making and problem solving by allowing groups to “strategize” before beginning and in between activities
- ☐ Send them away with “soccer homework”

## ***Principles and Methodology of Coaching***

- ☐ Developmentally appropriate
- ☐ Clear, concise, and correct information: Brevity – Clarity – Relevance  
Simple to complex: there should be a flow that is appropriate to the age of the players and the topic of the practice – in some instances this will proceed from a warm-up to individual activities to small group activities to large group activities (THE GAME) – While the progression may vary, every practice should start with a warm-up and end with “The Game.”

## ***Designing a Training Session***

- ☐ Helpful questions to ask yourself when planning a training session
  - ☐ are the activities fun?
  - ☐ are the activities organized?
  - ☐ are all of the players involved in all of the activities?
  - ☐ is creativity and decision making being used?

- are the spaces being used appropriate?
- is the coach's feedback appropriate?
- are there implications for the game?

***Variations, Restrictions, and Alterations to keep you players excited about training:***

- ☐ Number of balls
- ☐ Number of teams (instead of the traditional 2 teams, why not play with three!)
- ☐ Size of field (short in length and wide in width and vice versa)
- ☐ Number of goals
- ☐ Size of goals
- ☐ Various ways of scoring a goal (passing, shooting, dribbling, etc.)
- ☐ Size of balls
- ☐ Touch restrictions (maximums and minimums)

# Coaching Comments and Their Messages

Much of what players hear from the sidelines reinforces the “fear-soccer” of the direct style and moves them farther away from the playing habits that will help them grow as intelligent soccer players. There are some simple and obvious reasons why our average player in Canada has never developed the competence to enjoy the game and play into adulthood. Evolving a culture will be a slow group effort, involving educated coaches and parents. What follows, is a sample of typical comments heard at soccer games, and the underlying messages that are being subtly relayed to the players about their significant adults’ respect for, and understanding of the game.

**Comments:** *Get it out of here! / Great kick! / Get rid of it! / Boot it long! / Don’t pass it backwards, you might lose it! / Don’t ever pass the ball across the field!*

**Message:** Don’t take any chances in trying to keep possession. You are going to be under pressure, so get the ball as far downfield as early as possible so that the ball is away from our goal. Don’t take the time to look for a teammate and don’t worry where the ball ends up. Just make sure you don’t lose possession and risk conceding a goal.

**Style conflict:** If we never ask young players to take risks and try to play constructive soccer at an age when results don’t matter, when will they ever develop the skills, insights and confidence to play in control, at speed, and under pressure?

**Comments:** *Don’t play with it! / Too many touches! / Don’t hold onto the ball!*

**Message:** You don’t have the skill to dribble the ball to create space or buy time for a pass, and we might lose a goal if you are dispossessed. Better to play safe and clear the ball forward out of our end.

**Style conflict:** Dribbling is the most important skill a young player can learn because they will never have another chance to become a creative player.

**Comment:** *Never kick the ball like that! Always use the inside of your foot.*

**Message:** There is only one correct way to kick the ball and that is not the right way. I have all the answers and you must follow my direction because I am the coach and I am in charge. If you don't do as I say, you will sit on the bench.

**Style conflict:** Creative players solve problems in novel ways. They do the unexpected and use whatever insights they possess to arrive at solutions. A good pass, for example, is one that arrives at its target and can be used to the teams' advantage, regardless of how it was delivered. When we tell players they "cannot" use technique in a unique way, we are chipping away at their ability to think for themselves and perpetuating a culture where players have limited skills and no creativity.

**Comment:** *Always play the way you're facing.*

**Message:** I heard this maxim somewhere and I haven't thought through what it means, but you were just caught in possession when trying to turn up field and this seems like the time to make a coaching point.

**Style conflict:** This is a coaching contradiction. Players are often asked to receive the ball with their back to goal and turn against pressure. The most difficult opponents are unpredictable in their ability to receive passes and attack space behind and beside defenders. It is a difficult, yet necessary skill for forwards and midfield players. If we always ask players to pass the way they are facing, we make play too predictable and devalue the skills and insight necessary to recognize the opportunity to turn a defender or receive the ball into an open space. The most common reason why players lose possession is that they have no vision of the field behind them before trying to turn.

**Comment:** *Always look to pass the ball "Short-Short-Long."*

**Message:** I saw a coach demonstrate this drill at a coaching clinic once, but I haven't thought through what it actually means, other than you should play two short passes and then make a long pass.

**Style conflict:** Another coaching contradiction usually featured in warm-up drills. In the real world of soccer, passes should be played short or long based on the position of defenders and teammates and the skill level of the player in possession. In the real world of soccer, players are never required to play the ball long after a number of short passes, or vice versa. A more reasonable coaching comment would be to play short passes until there is a tactical advantage in playing a longer pass to a teammate in space.

**Comments:** *That's a card, Ref!* / *Offside!* / *Hey Ref, call it both ways!* / *Unintentional Ref; that's not a foul!* / *That's a handball!* / *Didn't you see that, Ref?* / *Ref, you suck!* / *What game are you watching, Ref?*

**Message:** "I know everything about the interpretation of the rules, and the referee, players and parents need to know it." By attacking the credibility of the official, we send the message to the players and the parents that referee abuse is acceptable. When we serve as a negative example, or condone a vocal parent or player's negative outbursts by not rebuking them, we are demonstrating disrespect for the game. We also send a strong message to the players that appealing decisions and questioning the authority of the official is an acceptable part of a soccer education.

**Style conflict:** Refereeing is a matter of opinion and many new referees are just learning to understand the nuances of officiating what can be a very fluid game. There are good and bad referees, good and bad players, and good and bad coaches. Everyone makes mistakes and everyone should be allowed to learn their craft without undue abuse. Coaching players to react to any call by taking a quick restart or by organizing the defense is a much more proactive and productive approach to dealing with refereeing decisions. Without a playing background, a refereeing license, and years of experience in soccer, questioning calls is usually the last action an inexperienced coach should undertake. Coaches, who truly work from a developmental bias, view positive and negative refereeing decisions as an integral part of the game, and which present valuable learning opportunities for their players. Life is not always fair!

In summary, the safety-first, fear-driven, direct, approach to youth soccer develops players who are uncomfortable and, probably, incapable of playing constructive soccer. Only through more focused, less pressured coaching, and more appropriate small-sided games, can we provide an environment where our young players have the opportunity to play soccer as adults in our national style.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[www.socceronline.com](http://www.socceronline.com)  
[www.soccercoaching.net](http://www.soccercoaching.net)  
[www.eteams.com/soccer/](http://www.eteams.com/soccer/)  
[www.soccerperformance.org](http://www.soccerperformance.org)  
[www.worldclasscoaching.com](http://www.worldclasscoaching.com)  
[www.mnyouthsoccer.com/coaches/articles.cfm](http://www.mnyouthsoccer.com/coaches/articles.cfm)  
[www.successinsoccer.com](http://www.successinsoccer.com)  
[www.worldclasscoaching.com](http://www.worldclasscoaching.com)  
[www.the-fa.org](http://www.the-fa.org)  
[www.uefa.com](http://www.uefa.com)  
[www.soccerclinics.com](http://www.soccerclinics.com)  
[www.socceracademy.com](http://www.socceracademy.com)  
[www.soccerclub.com](http://www.soccerclub.com)  
[www.decatursports.com](http://www.decatursports.com)  
[www.bettersoccermorefun.com](http://www.bettersoccermorefun.com)  
[www.worldofsoccer.com](http://www.worldofsoccer.com)  
[www.facoachingcourses.org.uk/](http://www.facoachingcourses.org.uk/)  
[www.nscaa.com](http://www.nscaa.com)  
[www.ussoccer.com](http://www.ussoccer.com)  
[www.usysa.org](http://www.usysa.org)