



SSA Under 8 Practice Structure

Young players need to learn to dribble within a variety of playing situations, such as dribbling forward unopposed, changing speed and direction, shielding the ball from opponents, dribbling past an opponent, and using dribbling to get away from pressure. The ability to dribble is absolutely critical since dribbling is the foundation and preparation for the other fundamental skills of soccer, such as controlling, passing and shooting. Players have to learn to combine body control, agility, coordination and balance with the mechanics of dribbling. This process of learning to dribble involves trial and error. Overtime, players will discover the contrast between a 'soft' touch and a 'hard touch' on the ball and will develop a 'feel' for the ball providing them the basis to develop new skills. Passing can now be introduced to players as they begin to experience success technically and will share the ball a bit with a teammate or teammates. Every aspect of play coached in the U6 age must be reinforced at U8.

Technical, Tactical, Physical, and Psychological Characteristics

Technical:

- Every player should have a ball
- Enhancement of dribbling skills using all foot surfaces
- Enhancement of motor skills developed with and without the ball
- Starting to learn how to pass. Players should be encouraged to pass within their technical range
- Starting to learn how to receive the ball and control it in as least touches as possible
- Encouragement should be on controlling the ball and trying to keep possession, not just kicking the ball down the field
- Starting to learn how to shoot
- Throw-ins can be briefly taught
- Heading may occur but should not be an important focus
- Players should be touching the ball as many times as possible with both feet
- Involve the ball in as many activities as possible

Tactical:

- Positional coaching is still irrelevant and detrimental to their fun, enjoyment and progress. Players can be set up in a diamond shape but must be allowed to move freely
- Rather than be told what position to play, young players should be encouraged to move to "find" new supporting positions away from teammates so that passes can be exchanged
- Passing to other players should be expected and encouraged at this age, although dribbling the ball is still the most likely method of advancing the ball
- Still heavy emphasis on individual technique rather than group tactics. Lots of 1v1, 2v1 and 2v2 towards goal
- "Defending" should be no more complicated than encouraging the player to try and win the ball back as quickly as possible when possession is lost (immediate chase)
- Defenders should be encouraged to try to dispossess opponents rather than simply kicking the ball away, or to safety

Physical:

- Development for boys and girls are quite similar
- Constantly in motion, but, with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly (frequent, brief breaks)
- Still into running, jumping, climbing and rolling
- Players have improved eye - hand and eye - foot coordination but it is not completely mature
- Skeletal system growing rapidly, which often results in an apparent lack of coordination

Psychological:

- Need constant reinforcement to stay engaged
- Focus is on them and their friend
- Beginning to develop time and space relationships
- Attention span a bit longer than a U6 player but still not a "competitive" stage
- Still find it difficult to attend to more than one problem at a time
- They go in two directions
- Able to follow 2 or 3 step instructions and are starting to have a good understanding about what it means to play a "game"
- Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play and remembering what goal they are going for... but, in the heat of battle, they will sometimes still forget



- Inclined towards small group activities
- Easily bruised ego. Have a great need for approval and have a fear of failure. Give praise
- Starting to imitate older players or sports heroes. Want the same "gear" as them

Under 8 Practice Structure

- Select 4 or 5 activities from the U8 Practice Activities curriculum document or US Youth Soccer U8 Manual/DVD
- Be prepared with an additional 1 or 2 activities that you can swap in if an activity isn't quite working out
- Always end with some type of scrimmage for the last 1 or 2 activities
- Each activity should last between 8-12 minutes
- Give players a short water break (1-2 minutes) after each activity
- Dribbling, shooting, and passing are the main focuses
- Introduce juggling
- Individual (1 player, 1 ball), and pair (2 players, 1 ball) activities
- Players working on own, in cooperation with a teammate, or against a teammate