

Characteristics of U8 Soccer Players

(Second & Third Grade)

Developmentally Appropriate:

There are no goalkeepers in the U8 age group so that all of the players may chase the ball around the field. The kids want to be where the action is and at this age it is around the ball. This will provide the opportunity for the children to further develop their running, jumping and kicking coordination. These are valuable traits for all soccer players to develop. The smaller number of players takes into account the egocentrism of this age group and therefore allows each child more opportunities for shooting, passing and dribbling the ball. With fewer players on the field each child has an increased number of contacts with the ball and has more actual playing time. Additionally the players will be required to make more decisions and experience repeated game situations frequently. The involvement of players will be more consistent. While learning both offense and defense, players will become well rounded and will understand more readily the roles and importance of teammates. Children in the U8 age group will intentionally play in pairs. The smaller number of players on the field will make it easier and more likely that passing and receiving will occur.

- Physical Development
- Mental Development
- Social Development

Physical Development

- Skeletal system is still growing: growth plates are near the joints, thus injuries to those areas merit special consideration.
- Cardiovascular system is less efficient than an adults; a child's heart rate peaks sooner and takes longer to recover.
- Temperature regulation system is less efficient than adults; children elevate their core temperature more quickly and take longer to cool than an adult.
- Improvement in pace and coordination from U6; however the immaturity of a U8's physical abilities are obvious.

Mental Development

- The limited ability to tend to more than one task at a time leaves little or no capacity for "tactical" decision making.
- Concept of time and space relationship is just beginning to develop and will be limited by the capacity to attend to multiple tasks.
- Limited experience with personal evaluation; effort is synonymous with performance.

Social Development

- Self-concept and body image are beginning to develop, but very fragile.
- Great need for approval from adults such as parents, teachers, and coaches; like to show individual skills.
- Easily bruised psychologically by adults; negative comments carry great weight.
- Like to play soccer because it is "fun", intrinsically motivated.
- Their universe is expanded to the neighborhood.
- True playmates emerge with the inclination toward small group activities.
- There is a desire for social acceptance; they want everyone to like them.

General Characteristics of Children U8

- Attention spans a bit longer than U6, but still not at the "team at all costs" intensity.
- Inclined more toward group activities.
- Still in motion - twitching, jerking, scratching and blinking are all second nature physical movements.
- Santa Claus is no longer a peer topic of discussion.
- Boys and girls still quite similar in physical and psychological development
- Beginning to develop some physical confidence (most can ride a two-wheeler).
- Still into running, jumping, climbing and rolling
- More into imitation of the big guys (sports heroes becoming important)
- Unfortunately at present few are soccer players.

U8 Players STILL LACK A SENSE OF PACE – THEY WILL GO FLAT OUT.

(They will chase the ball until they drop)

Typical U8 Training Session

- A typical U8 training session should not exceed 1 hour.
- Warm-up, each player with a ball, dynamic stretching and (soccernastics, juggling), (15 min.)
- Introduce partner activities.
- A mixture of individual and partner activities
- Maze-type games, introduce target games. (25 min.)
- Conclude with small-sided game 4v4 to two goals, no GK's. (20 min.)

U8 Coaching Activities Checklist:

- Are the activities fun?
- Are the activities organized?
- Are the players involved in the activities?
- Is creativity and decision making being used?
- Are the spaces used appropriate?
- Is the coach's feedback appropriate?
- Is the coach guiding or controlling the players in the activity?
- Are there implications for the game?