



***The Official  
US Youth Soccer Coaching Manual***

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# **The Official US Youth Soccer Coaching Manual**

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## ***Dedication***

To the most important people in youth soccer today—the youth parent/coach. Your efforts start the wheel of inertia that initiate a love of soccer for children, which through the help of countless others will provide the foundation for people to experience the joy of participation throughout their lifetime.

## ***Introduction***

US Youth Soccer is delighted to present this coaching resource to our greatest asset—the youth soccer coach. Many great players can trace their success to the coaching that they received at an early age. We hope that you, the youth soccer coach, will one day look back with pride at the opportunities you created for learning and enjoyment. A supportive, child centered, positive experience in youth soccer is vital to the growth of our sport.

Far too many soccer coaching books and videos focus solely on the “X’s and O’s” or are written for those who coach players older than age 14. Few of these resources deal with the most important years in player development, ages five through fourteen. Our philosophy of coaching youth soccer places great importance on age appropriate activities and creating a child centered learning environment. This manual contains a gold mine of information for novice as well as experienced youth coaches. Using an educational and sport science foundation rather than a simple collection of drills allows the youth coach a better understanding of the player.

We urge you to continue your coaching education through coaching clinics offered by your US Youth Soccer State Association. Contact your local club, league, State Association or visit [www.UsYouthSoccer.org](http://www.UsYouthSoccer.org).

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# ***Chapter 1***

## ***Caution: Children At Play, Proceed With Care***

***“Play is the Key to Open Many Doors.”***

***Dr. Marianne Torbert, Professor, Temple University***

***Director, Leonard Gordon Institute for Human Growth Through Play***

In the 21st century, children ages 5 through 12 years old are playing soccer in vast numbers throughout North America. And the number of players has increased significantly over the most recent several years. In 2003, there

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were over 19 million total soccer participants in the U.S. with over 8 million soccer participants under the age of 12 (SGMA, 2003).

However, fewer than 20 percent of our youth sport coaches have received any type of training to become coaches (Marten, 1990; Stewart & Sweet, 1992). This translates into an imperative need to educate parents and volunteer coaches. Recent studies show that more than 73 percent of all kids who play organized youth sports end up quitting by the time they reach the age of 13 (Time Magazine, July 12, 1999).

Some things that parents should know or inquire about before enlisting their children into organized soccer include:

- Is your child ready (physically, mentally and socially) to participate in team sport activities?
- What is the coach's philosophy?
- Will the parents be responsible for transportation, communication, fundraising, dues, snacks, etc.?
- Must the parents attend training and games?
- What are the costs involved?
- Will my son/daughter play as much as the others?

State and national youth coaching courses have been specifically designed for coaches of under-6 through under-12 players. Your US Youth Soccer State Association or local league can provide scheduling information about the courses.

### ***Children and Play***

Children benefit in many ways from playing games if the games are appropriate for the child's mental and physical development. Chances are good that the child will have a positive experience in the games.

Most young children from ages 5 to 8 like to run, jump, roll, climb, skip, fall down and shout while involved in play. All this makes a strong case for them to play soccer. This behavior should be considered when adults set up a playing environment.

Activities should fit the developmental levels of the children. Avoid the opposite approach of having the children fit the activities. If an activity does not fit the needs of the child, the child will show either frustration if it is too difficult or boredom if it is too easy. Coaches should be well aware of a child's varying

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developmental levels and how their development affects the way they play soccer.

Soccer is natural for young children because soccer players experience body awareness and they use various body parts. How they use balance, agility, coordination, vision and social interaction can determine how they develop physical and social skills.

As players get older, their development (i.e. psychomotor, cognitive and psychosocial) levels mature. This growth allows coaches to create more complexities in the training environment. For example, under-6 players must each have a ball; under-8 players should use one ball in pairs; under-10 can share one ball among four players and one ball for eight players is appropriate for under-12 players. The imbalance of more players and fewer balls forces more abstract thinking by the players. Remember, in games soccer coaches can't stop the run of play to get everybody on the same page.

Now that we have touched on the idea of what is developmentally appropriate, let's describe how coaches can implement it. Players are grouped by similarity of age, but their developmental stages might not be equal. Coaches must prepare and implement a training environment that allows for each player to find success in the activity. Muska Mosston, a leading physical education teacher, introduced the concept of an instructional approach known as the "Slanty Line." The Slanty Line is a conceptual approach with very real implications. It is built on the belief that in every activity, each participant should have the opportunity to take part at their own ability level.

Imagine the old game of "High Water/Low Water" played with a rope. Two children held the rope at a certain level and everyone jumped over it. If you were unable to jump over the rope you were eliminated. The rope continued to be raised until the best jumper was determined. The paradox here is that the individuals who needed the most practice jumping, received the least.

### **Activity Box**

*Each player with a ball. The players must toss their ball in the air and clap as many times as they can before catching the ball. The coach then asks each player how many claps they did before they caught the ball. (Players are to be congratulated whether they clapped twice or six times). They are then asked if they think they could beat their number with a second try. The answer hopefully will be, "I'll try".*

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Mosston would like to take the same game, but slant the rope. Now all participants can receive the same amount of turns and when a child is ready to try a new height, the opportunity is still there.

It is this concept that we would like to challenge all coaches to implement. Can you present activities in practice in which all players receive the same practice opportunities and are able to improve their skills? We believe this is more than just a theoretical concept, but an instructional method that should be the foundation of all coaching and the right of every youth soccer player.

For example, if a player performs 15 ball taps in 30 seconds, challenge the player to perform 20 ball taps. If another player completed 22 ball taps, challenge them to perform 25 ball taps. Place both players in a potential situation of personal success. We all need some form of success in whatever we are trying to accomplish. Why should young soccer players be any different?



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# ***Chapter 2***

## ***Foundations of Coaching Children***

### ***The Art and Science of Coaching***

***“The most important things that must be seen in youth soccer are those things that are unseen.”***

***Dr. Ronald W. Quinn, Associate Professor, Xavier University***

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Is coaching an art or a science? With the rapid advances in sports technology, it could be a science. However, since it deals with children, youth coaching could be an art that only improves with experience.

Coaching is both an art and a science. All involved with coaching—whether volunteer or paid—and the administration of youth organizations should address player development from an educational training perspective. Rainer Martens, a noted youth sport researcher and author, stated that youth coaches exert great influence on young athletes, but fewer than 20 percent of these coaches have received any type of training to become a coach. If we are truly concerned with the positive development of children to become productive, compassionate and moral citizens through sports, then all should be adequately prepared to be a youth coach.

Whether paid or a volunteer, coaches are still involved with the same aged child. Children do not make any distinction between a “professional coach” or a “volunteer coach.” Both coaches can have a profound influence on how a child views sport, physical activity, themselves and others. Jay Coakley, a noted sport sociologist, states:

“Coaching education programs will become more popular because of an effort to certify youth coaches as experts. This will be done to satisfy parents’ demands for more professional approaches to youth sports and to minimize legal liability. Youth programs will emphasize sports development rather than recreation, and parents will become increasingly concerned about how their child’s participation may pay off in the future—in scholarships and social acceptance. ”

### ***The Role and Importance of the Science of Coaching***

Over the last 30 years, we have experienced an information explosion. Technology and science, our knowledge of physical training, growth and development, and instructional methods have dramatically improved during that time. We now know that it is dangerous to deny an athlete water during a training session, and certain stretches such as the “hurdlers stretch,” place unnecessary stress on the knee.

Children who specialize in one sport too early are more prone to overuse injuries and burnout. “Military” style coaching is no longer appropriate for youth soccer. Unfortunately, this information is not common knowledge within youth organizations. Many coaches still deny children water, many have them run laps as punishment, and many run a practice like a drill sergeant, ignoring the creativity and energy that children bring to the sport. It is important that coaches seek out current information on child development by attending clinics, going to the library, and/or searching the internet.

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## ***The Role and Importance of the Art of Coaching***

The art of coaching is difficult to describe because it can't be measured by quantitative data in a society that is most interested in measurement. Our educational system is based on proficiency tests, SAT/ACT scores and teaching to the curriculum. To place value on something that is difficult to measure faces much resistance. Still, the importance of interpersonal skills, developing a healthy team climate, imparting a moral and value-based coaching approach is gaining strength as an integral part of the youth soccer experience. This qualitative approach can be measured and for our purpose can be viewed as good art—you know it when you see it. A good coach who is actively practicing the craft of coaching is easily identified. The players will be active, coaches are teaching, players are learning and everyone is having fun.

The quality of player/coach interaction, the development of player self-esteem and self-confidence, and introducing children to sport as a life long pursuit with strong moral values are the primary objectives of youth soccer in America. Developing winning teams or pursuing sport for future economic gains creates very few winners and countless losers.

Ron Quinn states, "The needs of the child, while playing soccer, should be placed above the needs, convenience and self-interest of the adults. True player development focuses on the development of the player, not the development of the team! Up to age 12, this should be the only criteria used in designing and running (youth soccer) programs.

## ***Child-Centered Coaching***

Richard Schmidt, a motor learning and motor development expert, developed a schema theory (1975, 2000), which suggests that children up to age 14 should experience a wide range of movement in early life to aid in solving future movement challenges. "When people practice a number of specific throwing distances, they learn something that allows them to generalize this experience to the performance of many throwing distances."

Child-centered coaching places a high priority on the total development of the young athlete. The early specialization of sport skills has a limiting effect on child development. Sport skills require specific motor patterns and a child should be exposed to a wide range of movement experiences early in life. A great basketball player doesn't necessarily have the skills to be a great baseball player at early ages. Does the name Michael Jordan ring a bell?

When developing youth soccer players, apply the schema theory by presenting a wide range of movement activities and challenges during practices.

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The three learning domains described below provide a conceptual framework to guide us in the design of developmentally appropriate games and practices.

### ***Psychomotor (Physical)***

Children grow at different rates. Balance, center of gravity, length of limbs, body mass, and gross and fine motor control all play a part in a child's ability to move effectively. Within the same age group, some are shorter or taller than others, some have better balance, and others fall down quite often. As a result, we cannot pass false judgement on a child whose development is a little slower than the rest of the team.

Activities should be designed in which players are provided the opportunity to practice a wide range of locomotor movements (running, skipping, hopping, galloping, leaping, etc.), nonlocomotor movements (bending, pulling, twisting, pushing, etc.) and other movement components such as balance, change of direction, strength, and cardiovascular endurance.

### ***Cognitive (Thinking & Learning)***

Knowledge gained from studying early learning theories can be used to help plan effective experiences for youth sport beginners. It is equally important to understand how a child thinks; how they perceive and understand their surroundings and the world. Experience and challenging the mind become the two most important characteristics of learning and future performance.

The authors have introduced the work of various cognitive theorists such as Jean Piaget, Eric Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Albert Bandura in an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. If we understand how the child thinks, or their stage of development, then perhaps we can better understand the child.

### ***Psychosocial (Psychological & Sociological)***

It has already been mentioned that nothing good happens in isolation when learning sport skills. We cannot teach dribbling without creating an interest and desire to dribble. Force-feeding skill development through drills does not work! There is a great tendency to underestimate the importance and role that emotion, feelings and motivation play during the youth soccer experience. Young children don't pass the ball to a teammate in the best position to receive it; they pass to their best friend. Why? Because most tactical decisions don't

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## ***Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory***

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) is credited with forging the single most comprehensive theory of intellectual development. He discovered early in life an interest for studying children and in particular how they responded to questions and how they reasoned answers. He determined that children think in entirely different ways than adults. He spent countless hours observing children's spontaneous activities. His attempt was to learn from the children themselves. He primarily interviewed and observed children between the ages of four and twelve.

Piaget recognized that children pass through "stages" of development at different rates (periods) and attached little importance to the ages associated with each stage. He did believe that children moved through these stages in the same order. He did not think that these stages are genetically determined. They represent increasingly comprehensive ways of thinking. He felt that children were constantly exploring, manipulating, and trying to make sense out of the environment and were actually constructing new ways to deal with it (Kohlberg, 1968).

Piaget developed a four-stage approach that is often referred to as The General Periods of Development. According to Piaget, development is not governed by internal maturation or external teachings; it is an "active construction process," in which children, through their own activities, build increasingly differentiated and comprehensive cognitive structures (Crain, 2000). For the purposes of youth soccer, parents and coaches have to provide an environment in which children can participate independently and with their peers at constructing their own soccer environment.

### ***Stage Summary***

**Sensory Motor** (0-2): Learning through senses and early development of language.

**Preoperational** (2-7): Early childhood, very egocentric, highly imaginative.

**Concrete Operational** (7-11): Development of rule structure, cooperative play and development of friendships.

**Formal Operational** (11+): Abstract thought and expanded social groups.

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exist and they are most concerned with sharing the ball with a few of their best buddies. If we recognize this, then we can work within it and create activities in which players get to know each other better.

## *Principles of Coaching*

The principles of youth coaching are guidelines developed as a foundation or a sounding board to assess the appropriateness of an activity or training session. The following six principles are presented so that youth players receive a healthy and positive youth soccer experience.

- ***Developmentally Appropriate.*** This challenges the coach to examine the appropriateness of the activity. The requirements or demands of the activity should fall within the range of a player's abilities. Examples include: Attempting to teach a wall-pass to U8's when they cannot think in advance of the ball or asking a U6 player to stay in a specific position when their spatial awareness is limited and possess a strong desire to chase the ball.
- ***Clear, Concise and Correct Information.*** How instructions are given is crucial when dealing with young children. Too much information overwhelms them and too little information doesn't give them enough to get started. Provide enough information to get them started and then add new challenges.
- ***Simple to Complex.*** Are the activities presented in a way that allows for ongoing modifications and new challenges to meet the player's interests and abilities?
- ***Safe and Appropriate Training Area.*** The area should be free of hazardous materials (e.g., glass, stones, branches, holes, etc.) and be safe from traffic or other environmental dangers. The training environment should be psychologically safe. Does the child feel emotionally secure? Is the fear of failure reduced? Can the child take creative risks without the fear of admonishment from the coach?
- ***Decision Making.*** Are there opportunities for the players to make decisions? Decisions may be spatial (where to run or pass), temporal (when do I pass or run), or kinesthetic (how do I handle the ball)? These need to be present in all activities for learning to occur. Remember that learning is not efficient and that effective learning may be the result of inefficient trials.
- ***Implications for the Game.*** The activities presented in a training session must in some way reflect the demands a player faces in the game. The younger the player the less clear this may seem, while the older the player (i.e. 10 or older), the more clear it will become. However, the implications for the game are even

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more important for the younger players. The coach at this level is providing the foundational movement and thinking skills that will enable the player to later solve more complex problems.

### ***Eliminating lines, laps and lectures***

This was to be included as a principle of coaching, but we decided that its importance warranted its placement here: Eliminating lines, laps and lectures means:

- a) having players stand in lines waiting for their turn generally indicates an inappropriate activity. If players are standing and not moving the activity will not keep their interest;
- b) running laps, especially without a ball, is a waste of time. All practice activities should take place on the field, preferably with a ball;
- c) lectures should be left for the classroom. Children come to practice to be active and participate, not to be talked to for extended periods of time.

Often, coaches design activities that focus on determining a winner. These activities typically involve elements that lead to players being eliminated from the activity. Those eliminated first are players who usually need the most work on technique and decision-making. Design activities that keep all players engaged throughout the length of the activity. Eliminate elimination games!!

### ***Punishment***

The use of physical activity such as laps, push-ups, sit-ups etc., as punishment for misbehavior is an inappropriate method of discipline. Players will come to believe that physical training is actually a form of punishment. Players need to understand the importance of fitness and making them run when there is a behavior problem is counter to what you want to develop. When the consequences warrant, short-term exclusion from the activity will often get a positive result.

### ***Game/Activity Classifications***

Game/activities are organized into three separate categories. It is important for coaches to select game/activities from each category that are age group appropriate. The categories are:

***Body Awareness*** — activities that emphasize the use of body parts, motion, coordination, balance with and without the ball.

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**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 both with and without the ball.

**Maze Games** — activities in which the player has the opportunity to move in a 360° or circle environment with and without the ball. Even though the area is defined, it does not necessarily have a specific target or boundary to go to. These activities allow the players to make decisions while moving in all directions.

There are times when the concepts of each of these three types of activities may be utilized in a single activity.

### **Drills versus Game/Activities**

Drills are generally an absence of thought. An individual repeats the same movement or patterns exactly the same way each time. This approach with regard to youth soccer has several limitations.

During a soccer game the environment is constantly changing, therefore activities must also reflect this ever changing competitive environment. Children are drawn to games and activities like opposite poles of a magnet, whereas drills repel them and decrease their interest. A game/activity approach creates an environment that allows technique, tactics, fitness and creativity to develop in harmony. Below is a simple illustration of the differences between “Drills” and “Game/Activities.” Which do you think best fits the developmental needs of children?

### **Learning Through Game/Activities**

#### **Characteristics of Drills**

Static  
Military  
Lines  
Boring  
No Thought  
Age Inappropriate

#### **Characteristics of Game/Activities**

Dynamic  
Organized but unstructured  
Free Movement  
Fun  
Decision Making  
Age Appropriate



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The embedded method of teaching physical skills or games involves a brief introduction and demonstration, a warm-up and stretching period, organization of instructional groups, practicing and repeating specific sport techniques, intermittent verbal cues or demonstration, and concludes with “the game.” This approach, although efficient from an organizational perspective, may not be the most effective. What has been lacking are the opportunities for players to practice the various techniques in the context of the actual game.

Team sports present a dynamic and unpredictable environment. To isolate specific techniques is unwise since technique is useless without the dynamics of time, space, decision making, and teammate/opponent movements.

This is where the article “Teaching Games for Understanding,” (TGFU) approach (Turner & Martinek, 1995) is gaining importance in academic literature. This approach works on the premise that nothing happens in isolation. It teaches that technique cannot be learned without incorporating decision making, without considering the emotional and motivational state, and without creating an environment that mirrors the physical demands of the game. If learning a skill is not enjoyable and if it does not feature lots of movement, the players will stop participating before they get to the game. If learning occurred in a static environment, do the players possess the understanding to make game decisions? That would be unlikely.

The game/activity approach is a dynamic instructional method that allows the participant to fully experience the sport. It is not the “just let them play,” approach. Proper technical execution is not important. Technique will improve with practice and experience. Children need to make decisions, exert themselves physically, perform technical skills and, most importantly, have fun. The game/activities presented in this manual and in the recommended books employ a coaching method in which the emotional, physical and mental aspects are addressed. The checklist below provides a measuring stick to evaluate practice activities.

### ***Game/Activity Checklist***

- Are the activities fun? Are they enjoyable to perform and will it keep their interest?
- Are the activities organized? Are the objectives clear? It doesn’t need to be highly structured or without any rules, but the purpose and guidelines of the activity need to be understood.

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- Are the players involved in the activities? Is there maximum participation of all players, or are some more active than others?
  - Is creativity and decision making being used? Are their decisions to move or employ a particular skill ever changing, or are they just repeating the same movement without thinking?
  - Is the space appropriate for the age group and number of players? If they can effectively move without colliding into each other as well as not becoming too exhausted from trying to cover too much ground, it is probably a sufficient area. Is the space allowing for the objectives of the activity to be realized?
  - Is the coach's feedback appropriate? For younger players, feedback should be positive and frequent. Players up to around age nine view effort and ability as synonymous. If they try hard, they believe they are really good. Coaches should try to combine feedback with the player's first name. It leads to a more personalized approach and players tend to focus on the feedback better.
  - What are the implications for the game? Are the objectives of the activity related to the demands they will face in a game? The younger the child, the broader and less clear the activity objectives may appear in relation to the game. But a closer examination may reveal key building blocks. These blocks may be in any one or all three of the learning domains (psychomotor, cognitive, and psychosocial).

### *Summary*

Coaching is a very complex and complicated activity. We need to take it much more seriously and recognize the important role of the coach. A passage on readiness in *Zorba the Greek* by Kazantzakis seems appropriate to conclude this section.

"I remember one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the bark of a tree, just as a butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited a while, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help with my breath. In vain.

It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had

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forced the butterfly to appear all crumpled before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand. That little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm.”

Can we really afford to disrupt the great laws of nature and create an environment in which youth players have not had the developmental time to adequately prepare? Shouldn't we blend the science and art of coaching so that our young people view sport as a healthy, life long pursuit?



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# *Chapter 3*

## *Effective Coaching Behavior*

***“If a coach is constantly talking or yelling at players during the game, it prevents your players from thinking for themselves.”  
Steve Sampson, Former Men’s National Team Coach, June 1998***

You have just volunteered to become a soccer coach for a youth program in your community. Congratulations! You have just agreed to pursue one of the most rewarding and difficult challenges in which you have ever engaged. To enjoy the best possible experience, you need to adopt a number of characteristics and behaviors. Few of us possess all the abilities required to properly coach young children.

The youth sport experience is all about children. Being an effective soccer coach requires certain traits. You must be a responsible adult at all times. You must possess a strong desire to work with children and to understand the complexities that exist within children of different ages, levels of development and maturity. How can you provide the best environment for children to grow, develop, and have fun?

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There are dozens of positive characteristics that one must possess to become an effective youth soccer coach. Some are listed below:

### ***Characteristics of Effective Youth Coaches***

- **High Moral and Ethical Standards.**

Be an appropriate role model.

- **Honesty.**

Be fair, no one likes it if you cheat.

- **Respect of Players, Parents, and Community.**

Develop strategies to develop positive relationships with all involved.

- **Understanding Readiness Factors for Participation.**

Maturation — when to begin, how the game is structured.

Learning — what are children able to comprehend and how do they learn.

Motivation — internal desire to play and have fun.

- **Communication.**

Appropriate verbal and nonverbal responses (body language & gestures).

Appropriate language (words, tone, volume, rhythm, articulation).

- **Development of an Appropriate Temperament for Coaching Children.**

Be sensitive to each child.

Exhibit a calm personality.

Show patience.

Observe and Guide; Don't Direct.

Use your normal voice, not a whistle.

- **Ability to Motivate Positively.**

Develop high levels of self-confidence.

Positive coaching.

Don't yell.

- **Possess Leadership Qualities.**

Be prepared.

Be organized.

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Demonstrate discipline — identify appropriate and inappropriate behavior and enforce team rules.

Learn to be critical of behavior, not a player's personality.

- **Be Dedicated to Child Development and the Sport of Soccer.**

Understand what is appropriate for different ages and levels of play.

Let every child play (and play a lot).

- **Be Enthusiastic.**

Your enthusiasm is contagious.

Celebrate!

- **Have a Good Sense of Humor.**

Keep things light.

Have fun.

Smile and laugh.

- **Must Have Current Knowledge of Coaching Youth Soccer.**

Learn about children and how they learn.

Learn the rules.

Learn appropriate practices, activities, and content.

Learn appropriate tactics and strategy.

Learn how to have fun.

### ***Developing Practice Procedures (Protocols)***

**Equipment** - Every player must have a ball to use at every practice. So much more can be accomplished if everyone can be engaged in play at the same time. Players who have to wait their turn will often become bored and disenfranchised with the activities. Coaches should always bring a couple of extra balls with them to practice in the event children forget their ball. Cones and disks help organize playing spaces and can be used to designate boundaries, goals or a target area. Colored scrimmage vests will enhance the practice settings by allowing different players to be placed in a group. It avoids "shirts and skins" which is helpful in direct sun or in coed situations. Both are inexpensive and can be easily obtained.

It is also important to keep equipment in one designated area and to teach the players the procedures for getting and returning equipment. This will help keep your practice space organized and will help you keep track of equipment.

**Instant Activity** — When children arrive at soccer practice, they are ready to play. They often arrive at different times and wait until the coach determines when

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practice will begin. Prepare activities in which the children can engage immediately upon arrival. They can play with a ball by themselves, engage in practice with a coach, play 1 v 1 with a teammate, or get in a group and begin to play. By the time everyone arrives, they are all playing and you can sit back and watch for a few minutes. They come to play; let them.

**Start & Stop Signals** — It will be important for you to devise starting and stopping signals that the players can see or hear. How do you want activity to begin or stop? These basic concepts need to be taught so players understand exactly what the signal means. Many of the games played by young players have names (hospital tag, everybody is it, etc.). Allow players to find space and begin moving and then use the name of the game to initiate play. The word “freeze” is a common stop signal and players should immediately stop when they hear the word. Avoid using a whistle. Players need to hear voice commands.

**Forming Groups** — How do players get partners? What do you do when you have an odd number of players and the number doesn't fit the activity you want to do. A coach needs to solve this problem. No player should be eliminated or have to wait their turn. Players are taught how to quickly get a partner (it doesn't have to be their best friend every time), or to get in groups. If there is an odd number, the players need to sort it out by forming one or two different-sized groups that will adapt to the activity the coach has implemented. Everyone is accepted; no one is rejected.



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## ***Understanding the Potential Impact of a Youth Soccer Coach***

- The coach is likely to be the first person of influence in the child's sport involvement.
- Have total respect for the players, parents, officials, the game and yourself.
- Never make physical gestures or verbal statements that are meant to embarrass or humiliate a player, opponent, parent, or official.
- Be sure everyone plays an appropriate amount of time regardless of the score.
- Set a language example and enforce it. No swearing or use of profanity ever!
- Be a disciplinarian! Enforce your philosophy.
- Demonstrate sportsmanlike behavior. Shake hands with the opposing coach and be sure to praise the opposition. Encourage your players to do the same.

### ***Summary***

A coach's influence on a young child is extremely important. The effect that a coach has could last for an extended period of time beyond the season. Therefore, your personality, action and words could have a dramatic positive, or negative, effect on each and every child. The value of understanding children, being fair and enthusiastic, as well as being a positive role model, cannot be underestimated.



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# ***Chapter 4***

## ***Coaching Five and Six Year Olds: “Which Way Do I Go?”***

***“From 3-6 years of age children should be absorbed with play,  
in games of their own devising.”  
Plato 427-347 B.C.***

### ***One ball, One Player***

Before we determine which way we are going, we need to know as much as possible about whom is going with us. In this chapter, the age group is U-6's, which has a window of developmental growth difference between ages four to seven. The time of year and policies of the youth soccer program may include children who are about to turn five and children who are nearly seven years old. This is a large range based on an individual players level of development and may pose additional challenges to the youth coach.

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Let's touch on their developmental patterns. On the soccer field their ego-centric behavior is quite observable. Players commonly use such expressions as "my ball," "not yours," "mine" or "me, me, me" and why shouldn't that be the case. Each player brings a ball and they want to touch it as often as possible, because that's fun.

### ***Psychomotor***

Physical movements such as running, jumping, skipping, hopping and maintaining balance are not fully developed at this age. When changing direction, a U-6 child will often tumble as a result of a high center of gravity. This does not imply that they are clumsy. They also play at full speed until they drop and then after a brief rest, they are ready to go full speed again. Children in this age range need multiple breaks during practices and games to allow for recovery, as it is difficult for them to sustain a high intensity of play for long periods of time.

### ***Cognitive***

They can perform tasks one at a time when simple directions are given. Complex tasks are difficult as U-6 players have difficulty linking skills together. A visual demonstration is often necessary to help them to understand more clearly what is expected of them. "My Ball," is a commonly used phrase from this age group. This is because they don't quite understand what it means to participate as part of a team.

Tactics at this age are very limited. Their biggest concern during their play is to determine which way to go when they have the ball. Boundaries may not mean much to many children in this age group. It is common to see most or all of the players continue to chase the ball after it has gone out of bounds.

### ***Psychosocial***

The youth soccer experience might be their initial exposure to team sport. At this point the coach must recognize the importance of the young player's need to feel secure in practice and game environments. Their social development at this time is often limited to one best friend and many are just adapting to the social interactions that occur at school. The coach must be sensitive to this when selecting practice activities, which must include positive social interaction. Activities that involve interacting with all of the members of the team are important.

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***Some general characteristics of the U6 player include:***

- Constantly in motion
- Short attention span (easily distracted)
- Individually oriented (egocentric)
- About 3 feet, 3 inches tall
- Weigh between 30-50 pounds
- Easily bruised psychologically
- Primitive eye-foot coordination
- Little concern for team activities
- Balance on the dominant foot
- No sense of pace; they will often run until they drop

***Implications for training the U-6 player include:***

- Give brief directions; repeat when necessary.
- Many activities of short duration.
- Lots of water breaks.
- Limit training sessions to 45 minutes
- Emphasize familiarity and confidence with the ball (every child must have access to a ball throughout every training session)



***Sample Game/Activities***

It is important to vary the activities from practice to practice. New and different activities can be added over the course of the season. Each activity can also be modified to make it more or less challenging (this depends on the developmental levels and abilities of the children in the group). Remember, every child must have a ball. The following series of activities can be utilized during every training session although it is wise to develop new activities and games and introduce them over the course of the season.

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### ***Game 1: Ball Retrieve (Body Awareness/Target Game)***

The coach stands in the middle of the training site and collects all of the balls. The coach then explains that he will throw the balls in different directions and that each player must bring their ball back to the coach as quickly as they can. The coach puts various conditions on how they retrieve the ball (an example: with one hand; one hand with the ball touching the forehead; both hands and the ball touching their belly button, etc.). Once the children show comfort with the exercise, they are asked to maneuver the ball with their feet. Once a comfort level is reached again, the coach then creates a different challenge for the players to solve.

### ***Game 2: Body Part Dribble (Body Awareness)***

Each player has a ball in an area such as a 20 x 20 yard circle or square. Players dribble their ball in the space and avoid touching other players. While they dribble, the coach or leader calls out a body part, such as "forehead," "elbow," "chin," "knee," etc. Simon Says is a good variation of this activity. After the player has touched the body part to the ball, the player should then immediately continue to dribble. This activity promotes listening skills and reinforces the knowledge of body parts. Very young players do not understand left or right direction. If you say "left elbow", don't expect compliance from the player.

### ***Game 3: Glob (Target Game)***

Players like this so much they would likely perform this activity for the entire training period if permitted. Begin without a ball. Use cones to outline the sidelines and the finish line (a 20 x 20 yard space should be adequate). Stand in the middle of the area and talk and act like a Glob, challenging the players to TRY to run (without the ball) across the space without being caught (tagged) by the nasty Glob. Ham it up a bit to have more fun. Then, have them try to get across Glob Country by dribbling their ball while the coach tries to touch their ball out of bounds. Their re-entry back into the game can be done in many ways, (i.e. three foot taps on the ball, throw the ball in the air clap twice and catch it, etc). This is not an elimination game.

### ***Game 4: Everybody's It (Maze Game)***

This activity borders on the edge of controlled mayhem. In an appropriately sized space (approximately 20 x 20 yards), develop boundaries. Each player runs around, staying inside the boundaries, trying to tag as many other players while at the same time trying to not get tagged themselves. Give a signal of when to begin and let

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them play for 30-45 seconds. It's a game of total vision, requiring the players to have full awareness of what's around them. They need to learn how to move into spaces to attack (tag), and out of space to retreat (avoid being tagged).

### ***Game 5: Gates (Maze Game)***

The coach places cones throughout the training area (20 x 20 yards) in pairs about three feet apart. Upon command, players dribble a ball through as many "cone gates" in the time specified by the coach. Sixty seconds work well. Parents should help the players count how many times they pass through the gates as the ability to dribble through gates and count is difficult at this age. Each player gets a chance to repeat the exercise to try and beat their own score. It is appropriate for younger players to compete against themselves, not other players.

In all the games, start first without a ball. After the players understand the objective and the rules of the game, introduce the ball.

We end each age-specific chapter with a graphic representation of the tactical characteristics of players in this age group. Our first tactical sign for the U-6 player is demonstrated with a One-Way Sign.







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# ***Chapter 5***

## ***Coaching Seven and Eight Year Olds: Are You My Teammate?***

***Maria Montessori, an Italian Physician and Educator, who lived from 1870-1952, developed the idea that structuring the play environment enhanced learning. We believe that by designing cooperative and competitive activities, young players better learn and understand how to begin to be part of a team.***

### ***Two Players - One Ball***

This is the age where players can begin to understand the concept of working with a teammate. The notion, or willingness, to intentionally pass the ball to someone is just beginning to take hold. In the U-6 year old age group, efforts from coaches and parents to encourage the player to pass the ball usually

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failed. Coaches and parents will have more success encouraging players to pass the ball in the seven to eight year old age group. In this age group, the player begins to think beyond their personal needs and actively looks to pass to a teammate. In many cases they will pass to their best friend and not necessarily the player in the best position to receive the ball.

Some players will be more developmentally mature and seem more advanced than others. To help offset this, encourage continued practice without creating an elitist attitude. Some players will go back and forth between egocentric play and cooperative play while others will appear to lag behind due to a slower developmental path.

The “two players-one ball” concept that applied to this age group should encourage a coach to design activities in which players are sharing a ball. However, this does not mean that players should no longer do activities that require individual ball work. Even professional players work individually with a ball! An NBA player will go to the gym and work on their dribbling skills and jump shot. Do not ignore exercises used in earlier developmental stages.

### ***Player Characteristics***

It is important to have a basic understanding of how a player thinks, feels, acts and moves. Below is a brief description of the domains of learning in seven and eight year olds.

#### ***Psychomotor***

- Skeletal system is still growing; growth plates are near the joints. Be aware of possible injuries to those areas.
- Cardiovascular system is less efficient than an adult's; 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 down than an adult.
- Improvement in pace and coordination from U-6; the immaturity of a U-8's physical abilities are still obvious.

#### ***Cognitive***

- Concrete Operational Stage (see Piaget text box, Chapter 2). Language vastly expands and ability to recall previous events is enhanced.

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- Show a limited ability to tend to more than one task at a time; the simple task of controlling the ball demands most of the attention capacity, thereby leaving little or no capacity for tactical decision making.
  - Understanding of the relationship between time and space is beginning to develop and will be limited by the individual player's capacity to attend to multiple tasks.
  - Show limited experience with understanding personal evaluation; effort is synonymous with performance; they feel if they tried hard, they performed well, regardless of performance.

### ***Psychosocial***

- Self-concept and body image are beginning to develop, but are 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. Play for their own enjoyment.
- Their universe has expanded beyond their home environment to the neighborhood.
- True playmates emerge with the inclination toward small group activities.
- Team identity is limited; "I play on Coach Tom's team" or "I play on the Tigers." Club and league concepts are nonexistent.
- There is a desire for social acceptance; they want everyone to like them.
- The influential person is most likely their father or significant parent.

### ***General Characteristics of U-8 Players***

- Attention span is a bit longer than the U-6 player, but still not at the "team at all costs" intensity.
- Inclined more toward group activities.

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- Still in motion-twitching, jerking, scratching and blinking are all second nature physical movements.
  - Still very sensitive (dislike personal failure in front of peers); ridicule from the coach in front of the group is very destructive.
  - Santa Claus is no longer a peer topic of discussion.
  - Boys and girls are still 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 (identifying with sports heroes is becoming important).
  - Still lack a sense of pace; will run very hard most of the time and chase the ball until they drop.

### ***Typical Training Session Format***

- Should not exceed 1 hour.
- Warm-up, each player with a ball, stretching and soccerastics (individual and paired activities with the ball). Allow 10 minutes for this.
- A mixture of individual and partner activities. Add more maze-type games and introduce target games. (30 min.)
- Conclude with small-sided game 4v4 to two goals with no goalkeepers. (20 min).

## ***Sample Game/Activities***

### ***Game 1: Math Dribble***

Every player has a ball and works within a confined area. Players dribble to keep control while avoiding others. While they dribble, coach or leader calls out a math problem. The players immediately solve the problem by forming the appropriately sized group. This activity organizes groups without asking players to choose a partner or counting off. For example, if your next activity requires partners, call out 1+1 or 3-1. The activity encourages dribbling in a

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confined area, changing direction and changing speed. Quick reaction to cues, awareness of other players, problem solving and listening skills are stressed.

### ***Game 2: Ball Retrieve in Pairs (Target Game)***

Work with one ball between two players. Using general field space, start from the middle of the field. One pair of players hands the coach a ball who tosses it away and calls out a number from 2-10. Whatever number the coach calls, each pair of players must return the ball to the coach by passing the ball with their feet in exactly the asked for number of touches. The players decide how to solve this problem. The coach should rapidly toss balls away to keep the activity flowing. The coach can also move to a different space after the ball has been tossed so that players must be aware of where they are going. The activity encourages working in pairs, pacing of passes, playing to a target, and keeping the heads up to scan the environment.

### ***Game 3: Gates in Pairs (Maze Game)***

Using pairs of cones, the coach constructs 8 to 12 randomly spaced goals that are placed approximately three yards apart. Each pair of players should have one ball. After a signal from the coach, pairs of players attempt to play as many passes to each other as possible through the gates in 60 seconds. Players cannot play a ball through the same gate on consecutive passes. At the end of 60 seconds, challenge players to improve on their first score. This activity encourages problem-solving, speed of passing, changing direction, receiving and passing to feet, communication and cooperation.

### ***Game 4: Pac Man (Maze game)***

Each player has a ball in a confined area of approximately 20 x 20 yards. Adjust the space to accommodate the number of players. All but two players must place their ball outside the area. The two players with the ball are the Pac Men. Pac Men dribble their balls and attempt to hit other players below the knee with a pass. Players try to avoid being hit by running, dodging and jumping. Once a player is hit, he/she gets their ball and becomes a Pac Man. The game continues until all players have been hit and have their ball. The activity encourages dribbling and passing to a moving target, decision making, changing direction, cardio-respiratory endurance, and allows all ability levels to play equally. If players are hit early, they will have more opportunity to dribble. If they manage to avoid getting hit until near the end of the game, their challenge increases greatly.

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### ***Game 5: Boss of the Balls***

This is a small-sided game of 4 v 4 to two small goals and is played in an area of approximately 20 x 30 yards. The coach is standing at the midline with all of the balls. Ball one is put into play and the game begins. As soon as a goal is scored or a ball goes out of bounds, the coach tosses or kicks in another ball. When the coach runs out of balls, players run to collect and return all the balls and the game begins again. Note to Coaches and Parents: don't retrieve balls! The game must have a natural ending point. When a coach runs out of balls, players must gather them up if they want to keep playing.



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# ***Chapter 6***

## ***Coaching Nine and Ten Year Olds: Team Identity***

***Friedreich Frobel, German Educational Reformist (1782-1852 A.D.), fostered the idea that learning can occur through play and games.***

### ***One Ball - Four Players***

Children at this age are typically enrolled in grades 4 and 5 and may have been playing soccer for half of their lifetime. Some children, however, choose to

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begin play in soccer at this age. Both boys and girls are beginning to demonstrate an improved ability and a mastery of some aspects of basic locomotor, nonlocomotor, and manipulative skills (the ability to control objects, either directly through hands and feet, or indirectly with an implement such as a tennis racket).

They have also begun to develop basic technical abilities to play soccer and their cognitive understanding of tactics and strategies is evolving. They are beginning to demonstrate an ability to think in advance of the ball (anticipation). Formal schooling plays an increasingly important role in the development of children's thinking. They will demonstrate a very basic form of self-awareness; of realizing what they know and what they don't know

### ***Psychomotor***

During this period, children gain a tremendous amount of physical strength, endurance, and power. Strength is related to body size and muscle mass. During childhood and adolescence, boys tend to have greater strength, especially in the trunk and upper body when compared to girls; however, leg strength differences are minimal.

Motor performance is most often measured by a variety of motor tasks that require speed, balance, flexibility, explosive strength and muscular endurance. Children are in a linear growth mode (from head to toe) that peaks with a growth spurt at adolescence. Some children will grow faster than others. Height can approach 5 feet and weight can reach 80 pounds or more.

Significant physical differences appear between genders from 10 to 11 years of age and onward.

### ***Cognitive***

There are significant changes in a child's memory ability in nine and 10 year olds, particularly in deliberate recall memory. By the age of 11 or 12 their deliberate recall memory is similar to an adult's.

They have the ability to remember and follow more complex instructions, which enables them to solve higher-level problems. Improvements in memory reflect a child's increasing fund of knowledge and experience. Children begin to move from Piaget's 3rd period of cognitive development (concrete operations) to the 4th stage of cognitive development (formal operations). Children in this age group develop an ability to focus longer and stay "on task." They begin to sequence thought and actions and they begin to think in advance of, or anticipate, the ball. They will start recognizing when and where to move with and without the ball and they begin to develop a sense of pace. Young soccer players must be observed and assessed in authentic game related activities that



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foster learning in all three identified domains—psychomotor, cognitive and psychosocial.

### ***Psychosocial***

Players begin to initiate play on their own and are likely to want to play rather than to be reminded that it is time to go to soccer practice. Many players are becoming more serious about their play and with whom they play. Peer group attachment and the pressure generated by peers become significant. There is a need to belong and the association with a team becomes increasingly more important. They will develop a group of friends; there is great social need to interact. Adults outside of the immediate family (most notably the coach) begin to take on added significance. Gender differences become more apparent. Over 76% of girls aged 9-12 cited “FUN” as the primary reason to be physically active (Jaffe & Manzer, 1992).

## ***Sample Game/Activities***

### ***Game 1: Ball Retrieve - Groups of Four***

Players are in groups of 3 or 4 with one ball in general space, about half a soccer field. The coach tosses or plays the ball away and players must return it to the coach with each player touching the ball (feet only) at least once. The final pass should be played to a player standing next to the coach. The coach then calls out a number and players must return the ball in exactly that many passes. The activity encourages players to think in terms of length and width as well as collective play. The coach can move within the space to make the task more difficult.

### ***Game 2: Elbow Tag***

Players are in pairs with their elbows hooked and standing in a random formation. The other hand is on their hip with elbow bent. The coach breaks apart one pair and gives one player a cone or small ball to carry. This player chases his/her partner and tries to tag them with the cone. The players may not throw the object. If they tag their partner, the player drops the object and the roles reverse. The player who is being chased tries to get safe by hooking onto an empty outside elbow of another player. Once this occurs the player on the opposite end must leave and is now being chased by the player with the object.

Once the players get the hang of it, involve another pair, so now you have two chasers and two players being chased. Players chasing can tag anyone who is not safe on

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an elbow. Continue adding chasers and runners until the game completely falls apart from sheer fun and chaos. This activity encourages quick thinking and anticipation, as well as a great deal of sprinting and changing direction.

### ***Game 3: Hurricanes & Ladders***

Play consists of two teams of 5 to 7 players with one ball using half a field. One team starts out as the ladder; the other is the hurricane. The coach tosses the ball away and the ladder group must run to the ball, form a line and immediately begin handing the ball to the end of the line in an over the head/between the legs fashion.

At the same time the hurricane team forms a tight circle or huddle and watches while one team member runs around the huddle as many times as possible before the ladder group completes the process of passing the ball from the front to the back of the line and yells stop! The number of circles is counted and the roles reverse when the coach tosses the ball away again. Play until one team reaches 10. This activity encourages teamwork and problem solving.

### ***Game 4: Defrost Tag***

Start with two equal teams and a 30 x 30 yard area. One entire team is inside the area without balls. The other team starts on the outside of the area with one ball per player. On the coach's signal, the team with the balls dribbles into the area and tries to hit the other team players below the knees. Emphasize passing, not shooting, the ball. Players can run or jump to avoid getting hit. Once a player is hit with a ball, they freeze and must stand with legs apart and hands on hips. A frozen player can be unfrozen if a teammate crawls through the legs. The objective is to see how long it takes to freeze the entire team.

Safety note: as long as a part of the crawling player's body is still beneath the frozen player, both players are safe and a ball cannot be played at them.

Only when a player crawls completely through a frozen player does the frozen player become unfrozen. Both are then actively back in the game. Use a time limit or end it when all players are frozen. Make sure that each team gets a chance to play both roles. This is a great activity for deceptive dribbling, passing to a target and fitness, as well as fostering communication and problem solving skills.

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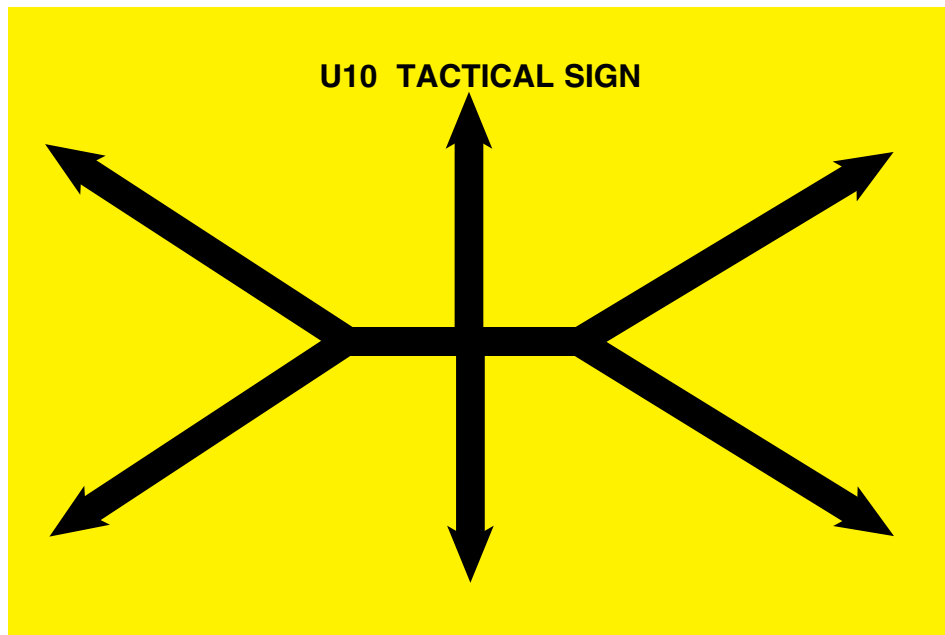
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### ***Game 5: Get Outta-Here***

Set up a small-sided field with two equal sized teams. Players will play in a two versus two format played to two small goals at each end of the field. A 30 x 20 yard space with goals approximately 6-8 feet across and 4 feet high will work well but any small size goal will work. The starting point is on the outside of the field at the mid-line.

The coach tosses a ball onto the field and one pair from each team runs onto the field for a 2 v 2 situation. If a goal is scored, the scoring team stays on while the defending team sprints off and a new pair runs on. If a ball goes out of bounds or a goal is not scored, coach shouts "Get Outta-Here" and both pairs must run off the field and are replaced by the next two players from each team. Teams with odd numbers of players must organize effectively so that every player plays an equal amount.

Each team must keep track of the total number of goals they score. The game can be played to a final score or with a time limit. This is a fast paced activity that requires concentration from everyone on and off the field.





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# ***Chapter 7***

## ***Coaching Eleven and Twelve Year Olds: The Dawning of Tactical Awareness***

***William James, An American Educator/Psychologist (1842-1919), promoted the idea that play was the result of instinct. He furthered the idea that children learn best when they are motivated by their own interests.***

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## ***One Ball Four to Eight Players***

Teetering on the edge of childhood and adolescence, the U-12 player presents a myriad of problems, but a gold mine of potential. Not only can they follow complex instruction, they now have the ability to create their own variations of the games. When compared to younger players, the U-12 player demonstrates a greater degree of analytical thought, which enhances tactical understanding. Still, their performance during match play will be inconsistent. Much of their training should consist of small-sided games with various playing or field conditions placed upon the players.

### ***Psychomotor***

As muscles mature, strength and power become a factor in their performance. Prior to age 11, running up and down the field presented a physical challenge in itself. With a size #4 ball in play and natural muscle development taking place, the U-12 player can strike the ball with ample distance and with a degree of directional confidence. A coach can ask and should expect players to execute a pass successfully much of the time.

Coordination improves in the 11 and 12 year old. In order to strike a soccer ball with one's foot and send it in a predetermined direction, it requires proper technique and coordination of the entire body. Players will begin to gain more confidence with the ball above their waist and upper body traps and heading takes on a bigger role in their play. Skills of the goalkeeper are also being developed and require flexibility, agility and overall body coordination. Players are growing and many players may be well over 5 feet in height and 100 pounds in weight. There are now significant, observable differences between genders.

### ***Cognitive***

Educators refer to the U-12 age as a fertile period for learning. They contend that enough basic knowledge is present to allow a nonrestrictive element of inquiry on the part of the learner. This means they can sequence thoughts and actions and perform more complex tasks. Players at this age are entering Piaget's fourth stage of cognitive development called formal operations. Players can be expected to use more abstract thought in meeting the demands of the game.

A coach can expect his players to understand the game and use teammates to help solve problems. If training sessions present appropriate problems for players to solve, reasonable game results can be expected.

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At this point in the development, U-12 players should be able to simultaneously run, strike the ball and think. The idea that field space can be successfully covered by several small passes or one properly played pass begins making sense to players. The U-12 player is usually eager to learn. They are very much internally motivated to play but the nature of training sessions is crucial. It may stimulate or stifle the learning process.

### ***Psychosocial***

Whether a child enters puberty early or late has important psychological implications. These implications have direct impact on how a child develops relationships with teammates. Girls have a tendency to form cliques, boys take a more broad approach to team relationships. Popularity influences self-esteem. The manner in which they feel about themselves can determine how they relate to their teammates. Rules can be modified and created based on acceptance and/or agreement from the group.

### ***The Game as Teacher***

The U-12 player should be exposed to as many game-like situations as possible during training. For this to happen, all of the elements of the game that create realistic situations should be in place. These elements include: ball, field, laws, teammates, opponents, and objectives.

- **Ball** - The use of a ball by each player throughout practice is essential for building confidence and maintaining realistic qualities that relate to playing soccer. Young players need to practice individually with a ball, a partner, in small groups and with their team as a whole. Having plenty of balls available increases opportunities for decision-making and less time is spent retrieving stray balls.
- **Field** - Select the size of the playing area to correspond to the age, skill and demands of the practice. The size of the space puts some limitations on players. Too small a space may frustrate players as they don't have enough time or space in which to play. Too large an area will not challenge the players to "make" their own space, may lull them into feeling too comfortable and won't prepare them for the rigors of game space.
- **Laws** - The use of the laws of the game and fair play (sportsmanship) should be emphasized in practice. This will lead to compliance in games. Laws such as off-side should be included in sessions that relate to how the law is enforced in the game.

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- **Teammates and Opponents** - All decisions in the game are made based on the position of the ball, the objective of the game, the positions of teammates and the positions of the opponents. This requires keen observation of all players.

The decision to pass, shoot, dribble, cross, and receive in one direction or another are all made based on this observation.

- **Objectives** - Players should be challenged to play to an objective. Whether they score a goal or create points, the players should set and achieve results of their play.

### ***Correcting Technique***

Technical correction (i.e., foot placement, follow through, etc.) are effective with this age group since they can now visualize what it is you want them to do and how you want them to do it. Using the “freeze” method during play to describe, explain and correct is useful, but it should not be over-used. Trial and error, which includes free play, is a process of eliminating those skills that fail and experimenting with those that lead to success. Players need to be encouraged to self-correct mistakes they make during their play. This comes from instruction, feedback, and experience.

When introducing new skills, one must manage the tightrope between challenge and frustration. If practice is too simple, the player might lose interest; if the practice is too difficult, frustration creeps in rapidly and the player may give up, thinking that they “won’t get it.”

### ***Tactical Awareness — Team Concepts***

It is easy to fall into a detrimental method of coaching known as “over coaching.” The coach should first wait and observe, so players can search for solutions. Try hinting at something rather than offering an all out solution. Ask opinions (make sure you know the right answer). When time comes to coach, communicate clearly, concisely and correctly. An U-12 player can discuss and understand basic tactical concepts such as depth, width, balance and individual player responsibilities. But, remember that not everyone on your team will be at the same level of tactical understanding.

At younger ages, distribution of the ball by the coach has many advantages, but as players get older they must experience realistic restarts. Goalkeepers must be encouraged to distribute the ball from their end and field players should play the ball from the touchlines. Allow players to keep score during games, encourage good sportsmanship and allow for a competitive atmosphere to exist in practice.



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Bear in mind many players are afraid to experiment in practice and games for fear of failure. This fear is related to many cues given consciously or unconsciously by adults. Young children care a great deal what adults think of them. They strive to perform for adults, to the point of substituting safe, mediocre play for more daring and dangerous play. We must allow players the freedom to play without fear to encourage their more creative responses.

### ***Why Small-sided?***

When we see a professional soccer game we watch as 22 players attempt to score goals or to try and prevent goals from being scored. This is a simple and true outlook on the game. All players must at one time or another be both an attacking player and defensive player. Youth players need to practice this condition until the reaction becomes permanent. Small-sided games provide this opportunity in abundance. The ebb and flow of 4 v 4 and other small-sided combinations offers innumerable situations in which transition takes place.

### ***Characteristics of Small-sided Games***

- More opportunities to play the ball. The fewer players on the field, the more possible times a player will come in contact with the ball. In fact, players will find they have no choice; the ball will quickly find them!
- More opportunities to score. Many players in an 11v11 game are not inclined to seek the goal, because they are so far away or because of defensive restraints.
- More opportunities to scheme. As we play we must constantly change and adapt to our surroundings. This challenge is the basis for tactics. How do we solve the puzzle?
- More opportunities to coach. The small-sided game allows coaches a perfect opportunity to observe and analyze the individual and collective responses of players under quick game-like conditions. Are players comfortable with the ball? Are they confident in defense? How well do they adapt to the unexpected? Do they recognize goal-scoring opportunities?

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## ***Sample Small-sided Game/Activities***

### ***Game 1: Grab the Tail (Warm-up)***

On a field 25 x 20 yards (based on 12 players), players tuck a scrimmage vest into the back of their shorts. On the coaches signal all players try and grab each other's tail and throw it to the ground. All players continue to play even if they have lost their tail and play until there is one player remaining with a tail.

A variation is to allow the player to keep any tail he/she has captured. See who can collect the most tails. This activity encourages quickness, speed, and scheming.

A quick warm-up activity should be followed by several minutes of stretching especially emphasizing range of motion in the major muscle groups.

### ***Game 2: Soccer to One Target (Target Game)***

On a 40 x 30 yard field (12 players), each team has five field and one target player (he/she can be the goalkeeper). The target player may run the length of the goal line opposite the field players of his own color. The object is to score by playing the ball to the hands or feet of the target player. The target then distributes the ball to the opposite color, before it crosses midfield, who then attempts to play the ball to their own target.

Keep the game continuous. A variation to this is the team that scores keeps possession and attempts to score on the opposite target. The team who gave up the score must change ends of the field quickly in order to defend the distribution of the ball to a member of the team who just scored.

This small-sided game encourages accuracy and pace of pass, an early forward pass, following the pass and distribution. Coaches should observe and praise players when they recognize the forward pass, keep possession long enough to get a clear chance to play forward and are in good position to receive the ball.

### ***Game 3: Barrel Ball (Target Game)***

This is commonly called a street-game. Use up to half the field with a barrel in the middle. The rules are quite simple: two teams play against each other and score a goal when they hit the barrel. The last player who touches

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the ball before it hits the barrel receives the goal, regardless of which team shot the ball.

Players are not permitted to touch the barrel. It would be good to have at least a one yard dead space around the barrel where players are not allowed to stand. Award bonus points for a ball that is played in the barrel (this is difficult but a great challenge)! This is a great small-sided game that can be used to start or end a practice. Players have to possess the ball under pressure, find the open player and make accurate passes, and shoot the ball quickly and accurately when presented the opportunity.

#### ***Game 4: Triangle Goal (Maze Game)***

Using cones or flags create a triangle goal in the middle of your training space. The sides of the triangle should be approximately 8-10 yards in length. Two teams of approximately 6-8 players each play against each other. The defending team places three goalkeepers on each line of the triangle goal while the remaining 3-5 players defend against the attacking players. A goal may be scored on any side.

The team in possession is the attacking team and attempts to shoot or pass the ball across any one of the three triangle sides. The height of a “good” shot (goal) is determined by the coach. When possession is lost, goalkeepers must vacate the goal and the team that has lost possession must employ a quick defensive transition to avoid being scored upon. Play is to a set number of goals or to a time limit.

If a goal is scored the team who scored can become the defending team or can be allowed to retain possession and try to score again. If the defending team gains possession, the three goalkeepers sprint out and three new players from the other team must run in and take up goalkeeper positions. The roles are now reversed and play continues. This activity encourages transition play and changing the point of attack.

#### ***Game 5: Four Goal Game***

Two teams play on a 40 x 30 yard area with goals in each of the four corners. Each team will defend two goals and attack two goals. Goalkeepers are optional. One goalkeeper could be utilized to defend both goals. This game encourages changing the point of attack and establishing field width. Players are able to identify which goal is the most vulnerable to attack.

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## ***What About Goalkeeping?***

### ***Last line of defense - first line of attack.***

Many of the law changes in soccer have been centered on goalkeeping; how quickly the ball is released, what is allowed in the passback, etc. All of these new laws have forced us to reconsider the overall dynamics of goalkeeping. More than ever before, modern goalkeepers cannot detach themselves from the game. They have become vital elements of the attack as well as their more traditional role as the last defensive stand. They must be accurate passers of the ball during distribution, reliable receivers of the ball under pressure and even show deftness at heading when clearing errant back passes.

This means that the youth goalkeeper must be competent in field skills. Most goalkeeping skills are specific to the position (catching low, medium and high balls, diving, throwing). Older players are more likely to embrace goalkeeping as a more or less permanent role. How well these players incorporate the physical and mental skills of both field player and goalkeeper will determine the true effectiveness of their jobs as the first line of attack and the last line of defense.

### ***Some Key Considerations***

- Players at the U-10 level and older should be encouraged, not forced, to be exposed to goalkeeping roles in practice. Many players develop goalkeeping skills at older ages. Exposing many players at U-10 and U-12 to the position could help identify a hidden talent. Further, exposure to the rigors of goalkeeping may help field players understand the difficulty of the position.

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- Goalkeeping should become an active part of every practice. Unfortunately, many coaches incorrectly set up practices where goalkeepers work mostly by themselves and call on them only for shooting exercises. Goalkeepers should be used early in practice in technical development with the ball at their feet, and either as targets or in their primary role in front of the net to solidify their importance. They should not only play as shot blockers and distributors of the ball, but as active communication links with the rest of the team.
  - The role of the goalkeeper needs to move beyond that of a shot blocker during shooting practice. Coaches should permit goalkeepers to distribute the ball, which increases their decision-making and communication abilities. The goalkeeper's offensive role should develop in concert with their defensive role.
  - Be Active. Concentration by the goalkeeper is vitally important to their effectiveness. Goalkeepers who stay on their line or who are not attached to the rest of the team will soon be reacting to a desperate situation instead of a relatively safe one. Encouraging goalkeepers to be involved and ready goes a long way in reducing dangerous situations.
  - Goalkeeping is a tough job. Much is expected of goalkeepers, but they receive very little praise. In many ways, goalkeepers are subject to open and unforgiving exposure. Mistakes are clearly showcased and become very personalized, and psychologically deflating. Mistakes will be made. Encouragement and understanding mixed with sound coaching advice will go a long way in creating a stimulating playing environment.
  - When to begin as a goalkeeper is a question asked by many coaches. The authors believe that initiating goalkeeping in games prior to age nine is inappropriate. Children should be exposed to body movements that simulate what goalkeepers do, but to put them under the pressure of being a goalkeeper before they have developed some basic psychomotor and cognitive skills is inappropriate.



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# ***Chapter 8***

## ***The Role of Competition in Player Development***

***“If you can’t afford to lose, you probably shouldn’t play”  
Bernie DeKoven — Play Designer and Author of *The Well Played  
Game: A Player’s Philosophy****

Competition in youth soccer in America can either be the best thing that could happen for a player or a major catastrophe. The first and most important question that must be asked is how appropriate is the competition?

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Players improve their ability to play soccer through proper coaching, training on their own and appropriate competition. What is more appropriate, competitive games with scores of 6-0, 7-2 and 9-1 or games with scores of 2-1, 5-4, and 1-1. In the first set of results whether it was a win or a loss, there was little or no chance of the player benefiting from the outcome. The second set of results clearly shows games in which the players were in a situation of pressure, either to come from behind or to maintain a close lead. In the games with pressure, player growth is far more likely to take place.

The authors advocate a de-emphasizing of competition at the earliest ages. We support games in which the score is not kept, nor are records of teams or leaders in numbers of goals scored. Children may know what the score is but it is important for adults not to dwell on who won or lost. A more appropriate question at the end of a game is not "did you win?" but "how did you play today?" Getting players to focus on and verbalize how they played in the game brings more meaning to their experience. We need to get away from the win = success and lose = failure mentality, especially with young children.

As players get older (U-10), children have a better understanding of how to play and the elements of competition. They begin to be able to put winning and losing into perspective. It is still important however to balance competition and cooperation during training sessions.

When training young players, coaches can get a great deal out of appropriate kinds of competition as well as using varying types of cooperative activities.

The following is a brief explanation of the competitive activities that could be introduced for player aged nine and older:

- **A Slap Behind the Back** - two players stand on either side of a ball with one hand behind their back. The object is to tag the opponent's hand (the one held behind the back) by moving around the ball. Players may not step over the ball. The first to get three or five tags wins that competition. After three to five trials, they can switch and try the same activity with a different partner.
- **My Ball Your Ball** - two players face each other with their feet perfectly square to one another. They have a ball between them. Each player puts two hands on the ball and at a given signal, each tries to pull the other off balance without letting go of the ball. The task ends when one player loses his/her balance. Try two or three trials and then get a new partner.
- **Keeper's Nest** — Groups of four with one ball per group. One player (keeper) guards, but can not touch the ball. The keeper may stand over the ball. The objective is for the other three players to get the ball away from the keeper without being



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tagged and frozen by the keeper. The keeper's goal is to freeze the other three players. Once a player is frozen, he/she remains frozen until all of the players are frozen or the ball is snatched away. A frozen player can be allowed to recite the alphabet or count to 10 by thousands before returning to play. Players try to steal the ball by pulling it backward with the sole of the foot or by knocking it to one of the other two players (possession is the key). The keeper is not allowed to wildly swing his/her arms in an attempt to tag a player. Switch positions after one or two trials.

- **Everybody's It** — Organize players in an appropriate size space. A space approximately 30 x 30 yards for 12 players will work well. Everyone starts without the ball and each player attempts to tag as many players as possible in 30 seconds. Everyone is "it" adopts both an attack and defensive mode. Players will learn how to interact with others in a small area and will work on agility, balance and decision-making skills. Once players have an appreciation for how the game is played, have everyone play the same game while dribbling a ball. This activity is fun, gets them warmed-up and requires them to work reasonably hard for short periods of time.
- **Soccer Golf** - This activity involves two players, each with a ball. The first player plays a ball with one strike as far as they wish. The second player has two strokes (kicks) with their ball to hit the serve of the first player. If successful, the second player wins the hole. If the second player misses, the hole goes to the first player. The player who wins the hole serves first to start the next hole.
- **Soccer Marbles** — One ball per person with players in pairs in a large, open space. This is a passing game where the players' take turns trying to hit each others ball while passing. One player plays his ball as far as he wishes using an inside or outside of the foot pass. The second player then attempts to pass his/her ball and hit the ball of player number one. For a hit, score one point. For a miss, the moment the passed ball has gone completely beyond the resting ball, the other player's turn begins. There is an advantage to immediately chase your ball after the pass so you can be in a position to strike the ball immediately after your partner's ball misses. Play to a time limit or to a set number of hits (example: 10).

Mixing competitive games with cooperative games can quell the heated emotions that could occur from the competitive games.

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### ***Selected Cooperative Games:***

- **Between the Head, Up and Down** - two players put the ball between their foreheads and jump up and down on one leg. See how many times they can jump up and down without dropping the ball.
- **Ball Pass Over and Under** - the ball is passed with hands first over the head and then through the legs to see how many passes can be done in 20, 30 or 40 seconds. This can be done with pairs standing back to back or in groups standing in a line one behind the other. Players form a line with enough space in-between to receive the ball but allow them to "fix it" if they stand too close to one another.
- **Ball Pass Inside and Outside** — set this up similar to over and under (back to back), but instead of passing the ball overhead and between the legs, pass the ball to the person behind you by twisting and turning to either side without moving your feet. Players can both turn to the same side or to opposite sides.
- **Juggling for Numbers** - two or three players juggle the ball and keep it in the air as long as possible. Count the number of touches or length of time. Restrict to only certain body parts (i.e. thighs, feet, head etc.)

### ***Summary***

Appropriate competition can be one of the major factors that keeps players coming back to play soccer. By the same token, contrived or inappropriate competition for the benefit of adult ego, or any other reason, can best be classified as abusive. And, by the way, don't count out pick-up games as being positive development activities. The players always make sure that sides are even.

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# ***Chapter 9***

## ***Team Management***

***“Failing to Plan, is Planning to Fail.”  
Anonymous***

When you volunteered to coach a youth soccer team, you were most likely given some information. The information likely included rosters, games and practice schedules, and rules. The requirements of team administration are frequently not fully covered.

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It is important to recognize that each player comes to your team with parent(s). Effective communication and coordination with these parents will make the job of coaching a lot more enjoyable. There are two steps you can take that will help improve communication and coordination with parents: a “Philosophy of Coaching” and a “Parent—Coach Meeting.”

### ***Philosophy of Coaching***

- Compose your philosophy of coaching before your first practice. The central theme should include player development and fun with purpose. The primary motivation for children to participate in sports is to have fun and improve.
- When writing your philosophy, consider the following questions:
  1. Beliefs
    - a) Why do you want to be a youth coach?
    - b) Why do we have youth soccer?
    - c) What are your responsibilities to each player, to the team, to yourself and to the community?
    - d) What is a successful season?
  2. Motivation
    - a) Why are you interested in coaching?
    - b) What do you enjoy most about coaching?
    - c) What do you like least about coaching?
  3. Experiences
    - a) Past — What were your personal childhood experiences in sport? Were they enriching or inhibiting?
    - b) Present self-evaluation. What are you doing now to become a better coach?
    - c) Future — What experiences will I seek to improve my coaching?

### ***Parent-Coach Meeting***

An effective parent-coach meeting, held during pre-season, can establish a solid foundation for an enjoyable season. Many parents sign up their children for youth sports without considering realistic or age appropriate expectations. This is why your coaching philosophy should be the first topic presented at the meeting. Set goals and expectations based on developmentally appropriate principles.

Below are other issues that need to be covered during the parent-coach meeting:

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- **Player Information.** This includes medical information (such as asthma, allergies, recent injuries), previous experience on other teams; and family situations, such as custody, that may affect a child's participation or ride home. Ask only for information you need to know and avoid details that do not relate to your role as coach.
  - **Parent Information.** It is important to be able to reach parents in case of an emergency. Coaches should obtain from each parent home, work and cell phone numbers. To enhance further communication, obtain e-mail addresses as well.
  - **Player, Parent and Coach Responsibilities.** The coach should arrive before time for practice and also finish practice on time. Coaches must provide cones, vests, an air pump, extra soccer balls and a first-aid kit. Players are responsible for appropriate dress, including shin guards, as well as a ball and a water bottle. Additional responsibilities will be covered in the risk management section.

### ***Soccer Sideline Ethics***

(The following information is printed with permission of Len Oliver, Director of Coaching, DC Stoddert Soccer League, Inc. , Washington, D.C.

The DC Stoddert Soccer League encourages participation in youth soccer for what it is—youngsters having fun. Coaches, parents, and spectators should show only good adult behavior on the sidelines and act as role models for the younger players. Help create a positive soccer atmosphere. Influence your youngster's soccer experience by following these "Soccer Sideline Ethics."

#### ***1. The Fun is Playing***

Encourage youngsters in skill development and 100% performance. Winning is not their motivation. They want to be having fun. So lighten up, decrease the competitive pressures, and encourage skills, teamwork, self-esteem, and good sportsmanship. Enjoy this opportunity to be with youngsters on the field.

#### ***2. Know the Game and the Laws***

Soccer looks simple but it is complex to play, coach, and officiate. You'll enjoy the game more by understanding soccer skills and tactics, the flow of play, and how the game is played. Soccer is free-flowing with ever-changing situations and constant problem solving by the players. Soccer is physical and demanding. With few timeouts, it is fun to watch. There are only 17 laws in soccer. Understand the basic laws and increase your enjoyment of the game.

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### **3. Support the Team, Not Just Your Youngster**

Give encouragement to the entire team. Don't yell constantly at a youngster. Avoid giving directions while they are playing. Soccer is above all a player-dominated game and they have to make the decisions on the field. Always be positive, win or lose. Don't get over involved emotionally.

### **4. Practice Good Sportmanship**

Always show sportsmanship and enthusiasm. Young people learn by example. Encourage your players to play by the rules. Cheer good play by both teams. Ask your youngster: "Did you have fun and try your best?" rather than, "Why didn't you win?" Win gracefully, not boastfully. Lose without being negative. Make sure the end-of-the-game rituals (such as the handshakes) reflect good sportsmanship.

### **5. Let the Players Play**

Soccer--a players' game. Youngsters participate for their enjoyment, not ours. To children, playing is more important than winning, while winning is more important to parents and coaches. Emphasize player development and having fun over winning.

### **6. Let the Coaches Coach**

The coach, volunteer or paid, provides guidance, skill instruction, and supervised fun for your youngsters in soccer. Respect the coaches and their decisions. Their concern is the whole team, not just your player. Don't undermine, second-guess, or criticize a coach in public. Most coaches will listen to parents in private, and may ask parents to help with practice.

### **7. Let the Referee Judge the Game**

Soccer referees control the game the moment they enter the grounds. Most are young and are still learning to referee, just as the players are learning to play. They respect fair play, sportsmanship, skill, and the spirit of the game. Referee calls are final. No player, coach, or parent ever changed a ref's decision, but the criticism disrupts the game. Support the referees.

### **8. Get Involved with Soccer**

Come to the games in the spirit of fun and play. Meet other parents and coaches. Make sure your youngster comes ready to play--with the proper equipment and attitude. Help them develop the skills and tactics for the game. Go to a pro or college game with your kids, or watch a game on television with them. Kick the ball around

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with them. Soccer isn't easy to play, so don't criticize your player for losing or making mistakes—applaud good effort.

### ***9. Be a Supportive Soccer Parent***

Volunteer to help with practices or with transportation. Soccer teaches discipline and responsibility, so be on time! Support the coach whenever possible. Be more concerned with your player's long-term development of skills and tactics than with short-term winning and losing. Focus on skill accomplishments and effort.

### ***10. They're Only Kids. It's Only a Game.***

Allow your child to be a child. Kids see soccer as fun, learning new skills, emulating heroes, being on a team, gaining success by touching the ball, and just being involved. Soccer can teach skills for life, building character, self-esteem, and awareness of others. There's no such thing as a loss if players do their best. You'll see wonderful progress if fun and skill development are your priorities.

### ***Training Young Players***

Practice sessions with young players should consist of games and activities. When evaluating your practice sessions, use the following "Coaching Activities Checklist."

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### ***Coaching Activities Checklist***

- **Are the activities Fun?** Players learn better in an enjoyable environment. When players feel that a specific activity is fun, it is a good indicator that the activity is developmentally appropriate.
- **Are the activities organized?** This does not mean regimented, it means there should be rules and objectives.
- **Are the players involved in the activities?** Players enjoy activities that present an achievable challenge. Activities that are too difficult will frustrate players and activities that are too easy will cause boredom. Design activities that engage children in play at all times.
- **Is creativity and decision making being used by players?** Player development is enhanced when challenges require players to solve problems by using their own skills and cognitive abilities. Children need to be challenged to “Fix It.” “Fix It”, implies giving the players the first opportunity to solve the problem.
- **Is the space used appropriately?** A space that is too large or too small will affect the quality of an activity. Also, make sure the area is safe.
- **Is the coach’s feedback appropriate?** It is important to encourage young players. Positive feedback will encourage players to continue to try.
- **Are there implications for the game?** Players should be engaged in activities that help develop psychomotor, cognitive and psychosocial abilities that are needed to play soccer.



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# ***Chapter 10***

## ***Risk Management: Keeping Children Safe***

### ***Prevention***

The first line of defense in the treatment of athletic injuries is to prevent them. This is accomplished by a well-planned program, competition among equal ability groups, proper warm-up and adherence to the Laws of the Game. Other factors that can lead to the prevention of injuries:

- Proper use of equipment (shin guards, no jewelry, uniforms designed for the climate).
- Upkeep and monitoring of playing surfaces.
- Proper fitting shoes, proper type of shoe for the surface.
- Ample water supply and rest breaks.

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- Avoid scheduling training during the hottest periods of the day and when there is intense humidity.
  - Full rehabilitation of an injury before returning to play: This should be determined by a physician.
  - A physical exam by a physician prior to participation.

The coach or assistant should be responsible for assessing injuries. Coaches should attend a certified first aid course. The American Red Cross now offers a course for sport safety training.

The coach should call the parent of a player who has been injured to check on the player's condition, whether or not the parent was at the game or practice. Each coach should have access to a first aid kit and ice at practices and games. For ice, place a tray of ice cubes in an empty bread bag and place it in a cooler.

Care should be taken to avoid contact with blood or body fluids and to properly dispose of items contaminated with such fluids.

### ***Risk Management***

When you agreed to become a coach, you accepted the responsibility to provide a safe environment for the players. Below are some issues that you need to take into account.

- Providing proper instruction for the activities. Attending coaching courses and clinics will help improve your coaching abilities.
- Providing proper equipment for the activities. Always check the field and any equipment before every practice and game.
- Make a reasonable selection of players. Be certain that players match ups don't result in an injury. The standard age groupings that are used will help reduce this probability.
- Provide proper supervision of training and games. Be in a position where you can see what all of the players are doing.
- Take proper precautions to guard against post-injury aggravation. Make certain that when a player is injured that he/she receives proper medical care and has been cleared to return to practice and play.

### ***Three very important points to remember.***

- Never leave a player alone after training or games.
- Be certain that players depart with their parents or a designated individual.
- Avoid being left alone with players who are not your children.

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## Care

If an injury appears serious, call 911! Injuries such as sprains, strains and contusions should be treated with R.I.C.E. (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) for no longer than 20 minutes. The R.I.C.E. treatment is the only first aid treatment that is safe for a sports injury without professional advice. Applying ice chills the injured area, which causes the blood vessels to contract and restricts circulation to the injured area. This reduces swelling. Any treatment other than R.I.C.E. can worsen an injury. Any player requiring such treatment should not return to play. Applying pressure with an elastic bandage inhibits the accumulation of blood and fluids in the area. This minimizes pain and swelling. Do not apply the elastic too tightly.

- Elevation decreases fluid accumulation to the injured area.
- Follow-up care with a physician is recommended.

### *Some familiar terms that you should know:*

- **SPRAIN** - Ligaments are bands of tissue that attach bone to bone and stabilize joints. A sprain is an injury to one or more ligaments. Care: R.I.C.E.
- **STRAIN** - A tearing injury to a muscle or a tendon (tendons attach muscle to bone). Care: R.I.C.E.
- **CONTUSION** — An impact injury to a muscle or tendon caused by an outside force, which causes hemorrhaging (heavy bleeding) to the surrounding tissue. Care: R.I.C.E.
- **ABRASION** - A loss of surface area of the skin caused by sliding. Care: the area should be cleaned with an antiseptic to prevent infection. An antibiotic ointment should be applied to keep the wound moist and destroy bacteria.

### **Heat Injuries You Need to be Aware of:**

- **HEAT CRAMPS** - An involuntary contraction of a muscle or a muscle group that is repetitive and rapid in nature. Care: rest, drink water and stretching.
- **HEAT EXHAUSTION** — The surface temperature is about normal, the skin is pale and clammy, profuse perspiration, fatigue and weakness, headache; perhaps cramps, nausea, dizziness, possible vomiting and possible fainting (the player will probably regain consciousness as the head is lowered).

**Immediate Care — Call 911!** Move to a cool area (air conditioning is best), have the player lie down with feet elevated, remove restrictive apparel when appropriate, cool the victim with wet cloths or by fanning. If a player vomits, take him to a hospital immediately.

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- **HEAT STROKE** — The body temperature is high, the skin is hot, red and dry, the sweating mechanism is blocked, the pulse is rapid and strong; the player may lose consciousness.
  - **IMMEDIATE CARE** - seek immediate medical care (Call 911)! While waiting, treat the same as with heat exhaustion, keeping in mind that if you reduce the body temperature too rapidly it can cause internal bleeding.

*General principles when handling an injured player:*

- Avoid panic.
- Use common sense.
- Seek professional help.
- Check for breathing, bleeding, consciousness, deformity, discoloration and shock.
- Depending upon the nature of the injury, avoid moving the player, i.e., an obvious break, an unconscious player, and/or a head or neck injury. When in doubt, don't move them. Inspire confidence and reassure the player.
- Determine how the injury occurred.
- Use certified athletic trainers when available.
- Always err on the side of caution.
- If a player has had medical attention, he/she must have written permission from the doctor to return to activity.

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# ***Chapter 11***

## ***Coaching Players with Disabilities***

***“The Game for ALL Kids”, US Youth Soccer Motto***

TOPSoccer (The Outreach Program for Soccer) is a community based training and team placement program for young athletes with special needs. The emphasis of the program is on development, training, and meaningful participation rather than competition. Our goal is to enable the thousands of young athletes with disabilities to develop their physical fitness, technical skills, courage, and self-esteem, through the joy and excitement of playing soccer. Contact your State Association or US Youth Soccer for information on starting a TOPSoccer program.

### ***Coaching Athletes with a Disability***

For those coaching athletes with mental or physical disabilities, the question often arises “What do I do different?” Coaching players with a physical or mental disability is not much different than coaching any other player. We should focus on what the player CAN DO rather than what they CANNOT. Instead of using “age appropriate” games and activities we simply substitute “developmentally appropriate” games. A thirteen-year-old player with Down Syndrome may not have much success with activities geared to age but may show success by using activities designed for younger players.

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Coaching materials available from your State Association or US Youth Soccer that will prove valuable include the “Assistant Coach” series for Under 6 & 8’s and Under 10’s. Each contains twenty “practice plans” similar to a schoolteachers lesson plan.

Coaching in TOPSoccer does not have to follow the “traditional” model of a youth sports team. Small sided, full sided, indoor, outdoor, skills only or camps are all different methods of running a TOPSoccer program. Unified games allow for disabled and non-disabled players to participate together.

### ***Seven Keys to a Successful Program***

1. Placement of players by ability, not age.
2. Emphasis on ability not disability.
3. Player involvement.
4. Meaningful experience for players, not just mere tokenism.
5. Achievement of individual goals.
6. Dependability and stability of coaches.
7. FUN! FUN! FUN!

### ***Guidelines for Modification of Play***

#### ***For Children with Orthopedic Impairments:***

- Reduce field size
- Increase numbers of players on team
- Use a “pusher” for children in wheelchairs, if needed
- Use under inflated soccer balls or Nerf balls

#### ***For Children with Visual Impairments:***

- Increase size of ball used
- Use brightly colored balls
- Wrap goals with brightly colored tape
- Use “beeper” balls
- Have helpers to aid children in running when on the field
- Have some kind of sounding device near or in the goal

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### ***For Children with Hearing Impairments:***

- Learn some hand signals or sign language
- Get an interpreter if possible
- Work out hand signals with your volunteers

## ***Disabilities and Teaching Strategies***

### ***Mental Retardation:***

Players who have at least two limitations of adaptive skills that are pre-sent from childhood (daily living, self care, self directions, etc).

#### **Teaching Strategies for individuals with mild retardation:**

- Put individual in less demanding sport position
- Overteach the cognitive information
- Emphasize fitness activities

#### **Teaching Strategies for individuals with severe retardation:**

- Emphasize range of motion exercises
- Have individual propel himself as much as possible
- Concentrate on postural righting activities

### ***Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder***

A condition that describes players who display hyperactive behaviors, have difficulty attending to the task at hand, and tend to be impulsive.

#### **Teaching Strategies:**

- Highly structured environment
- Reduce teaching space
- Control extraneous stimuli
- Larger number of activities, shorter time on each
- Positive behavior modification program
- Use brief instructions

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### ***Autism:***

Classic autism is defined as a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3.

#### **Teaching Strategies:**

- Use a consistent behavior modification program
- Teach in a less stimulating area
- Use an established routine with repetitive transition strategies
- Use a predictable routine
- Be consistent in use of terms, equipment, and practice organization
- Use vigorous aerobic exercise to reduce self-stimulating behavior

### ***Behavior Disorders:***

A condition of disruptive or inappropriate behaviors that interferes with a player's learning, relationships with others, or personal satisfaction to such a degree that intervention is required.

#### **Teaching Strategies:**

- Remove distracting objects
- Impose limits on use of equipment and facilities
- Use games of social interaction
- Expect aggressiveness and monitor it closely
- Use activities that provide immediate feedback

### ***Cerebral Palsy:***

A disorder of movement and posture caused by a defect in the developing brain.

#### **Teaching Strategies:**

- Work on muscle stretching
- Develop range of motion
- Develop postural alignments



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### ***Visual Impairment:***

Includes all levels of vision loss, from partially sighted to complete blindness.

#### **Teaching Strategies:**

- Use other sensory means for providing information
- Use games for social development
- Use a beeper, constant sound source, etc.
- Place player where they can best hear instructions
- Use contrasts between figure and background
- Increase or decrease the grade of the playing area to indicate play boundaries
- Begin new game in slower motion

### ***Hearing Impairments:***

Includes all levels of hearing loss, both deaf and hard of hearing.

#### **Teaching Strategies:**

- Make sure the player can see your lips when you talk
- Use visual demonstrations
- Learn basic signs and use them
- Stand still when giving instructions

### ***Learning Disabilities:***

A disability in which the individual possesses average intelligence but is substantially delayed in academic achievement.

#### **Teaching Strategies:**

- Work on body/space problems with action songs, games, mirrors, and tactile activities
- Work on balance and upper/lower body coordination for motor proficiency



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# ***Chapter 12***

## ***Street Soccer***

### ***Defining Their Own Vision***

***“Negative comments or over-coaching only discourage children from continuing to play soccer. The more our young soccer players enjoy themselves, the greater the likelihood that they will remain in the game.”***

***Steve Sampson, Former Men’s National Team Coach, June 1998***

The game of soccer has produced many legendary players. Pele, Maradona, Cruyff, Beckenbauer, DiStefano, Best, Puskas and Eusebio are a few who, in their own way, have left a significant mark on how we envision the game. However, it becomes difficult to categorize such players because in their own unique way they have left their individual mark upon the game. They played different positions, but each defined their own vision of soccer. The creative method

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by which this was accomplished is difficult to isolate; however one important element becomes clear: their vision of the game was the consequence of the experimentally free environment of the street!

Most American soccer families are first generation and the experience of the game is new. Many youth coaches are recruited from households where the majority of coaching experiences by these volunteers are from American baseball, football and basketball. It is uneasy for even the most well-meaning of these coaches to stand idly by and watch a game or practice without comment or command.

Many parents use the model that they see in Major League Baseball, the NBA or the NFL, and as a result believe that a coach must be constantly directing the fortunes of their players, or they feel they are not doing their jobs.

However coaches that absorb themselves so completely in the practice and games may not achieve the goals they assume will occur. There is always a need for advice and coaching. This is, of course, the role of a good coach. But, there is also a time to let players explore the game to experiment without fear of repercussion.

Therefore it becomes important to afford players the opportunity to play in a safe but free and unrestricted environment, to allow them the chance to define their own vision of the game and dare to take their place among the greats of the game.

### **Street Soccer Formats**

There are many forms in which free play may be organized. The three formats below each have merit, but all free play should contain certain standards:

1. **No coaching:** Coaching of course defeats the purpose of “street” soccer. Adults should be present in supervisory roles to protect the safety of the players. They should not interfere with the play.
2. **No parents.** We love you, but go shopping!
3. **No referee.** Let the players determine what is a foul and how to settle borderline disputes.
4. **Players are responsible to organize the game.** Who plays where? How should we defend? Who marks who? Players need to make, perhaps for the first time, elementary decisions about how they play.
5. **Players keep and report their own score.**

#### ***Format #1 - The Dutch Plan***

This is basically a tournament format that demands self-responsibility from players. Several charts are set up giving instructions on which field is which and when

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and where each player is to report for each game. Several games are played, each with different opponents and teammates but the collective score of the team is kept individually by the player. Scoring systems can be simple or complex. For example, award three points for a win and one point for a tie, award one point for each goal, or two points for a shutout. These can be used independently or in combination.

The games are played on a 40 x 20 yard area with small goals and no goalkeepers to encourage distance shooting. Kick-in or throw-in, corners or no corners are options to be determined before the games begin.

### ***Format #2 - The Texas Plan***

This format covers the same basic ideas as the Dutch Plan but the teams are permanent and rotate against other "set" teams. The groups change week to week but stay four versus four. Players can be organized into teams of four or five with one substitute. The order of substitution should be left up to the players. This game uses a field 30 x 20 yards with no offside and no goalkeeper. "Kick-ins" are preferred over throw-ins. Teams play five games of ten minutes each (running time) and keep their own score.

**For 36 players on 4 fields:** use 9 teams of 4 players each. Some teams will play four games and some will play five.

**For 44 players on 5 fields:** use 11 teams of four players each that play a round-robin tournament. It is not possible with this number of players for all teams to play equally.

**For 48 players on 6 fields:** use 12 teams of 4 players each. Every team will play five games.

### ***Format #3 - The Florida Plan***

This is another simplified version of the Dutch plan. Instead of using charts the coach simply lines the players up and counts the first four as team one and indicates which field they should play. Each player receives an individual number and keeps their own score. This score is given at the conclusion of each 6-10 minute game (running time). Players are asked not to play with those they have already been teamed with so that players must learn to play to the strengths and weakness of the moment.

### ***Summary***

The reluctance of parents to allow children to play in unsupervised groups is understandable. Public parks and playgrounds are not as safe as a generation ago when such play was not only standard but also encouraged.

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Despite this, today's young athletes still find ways to separate themselves from adult-centered activities. Skateboarding, in-line skating and surfing are examples of sports devoid of traditional coaching. Still, those young athletes are still able to develop dynamic and imaginative skills.

Somehow a compromise between training and free play must be found. There is a great advantage in having adults at games for encouragement but children need opportunities to play, be creative, and interact with their peers on their own terms.

A child's first coach should provide a rewarding experience. However there are times when players must be allowed to express themselves within the confines of free play. The ability to organize a game, choose sides and mediate disputes seem to be skills lost or, at the least waning, in youth sports. Street soccer addresses this problem and challenges its participants to organize a team, solve problems, observe tendencies of other players and consistently react and dictate the flow of the game. It also leaves them with their imagination intact.

We are so accustomed to today's tournament filled landscape that we may wonder how we ever played without them. Whatever happened to the old neighborhood where the World Cup was played every day? When someone was always wearing or pretending to wear the number 10 of Pele, the number 1 of Kasey Keller, the number 9 of Mia Hamm, or the number 10 of Michele Akers. Imagination was everywhere.

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# ***Chapter 13***

## ***Sports Nutrition for Youth Soccer***

***By***

***Kristine Clark, Ph.D., R.D.***

***Director of Sports Nutrition, Center for Sports Medicine,  
The Pennsylvania State University***

In the last 10 years a growing interest in nutrition for youth soccer players has occurred. After all, without adequate calories and carbohydrates for energy to train and compete or without appropriate fluids to avoid dehydration, even the best coaching and training strategies won't make for an optimal performance. Key nutrition strategies for the young soccer player include: knowing what to eat on an average training day by understanding basic principles of good nutrition and athletic performance; knowing when and what to drink to prevent dehydration and premature fatigue on the playing field and knowing what to eat after exercise or competition to recover quickly or prepare for another game. Eating before exercise is critical to optimize energy levels on the playing field. The following points are key to young soccer players to promote optimal performance.

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## ***The Perfect Training Diet for Soccer Players***

As a coach, parent, or athlete, you have to have enough information about food and nutrition to create a good training diet. The training diet is the foundation for feeling on top of your game during practice or during a game. In fact, many research studies have shown that eating great before a game does not provide as many performance benefits as eating great Monday through Thursday for practice.

How much energy a player has at practice determines how much work can be done on the playing field or in a weight room. If inadequate carbohydrate is in the diet, glycogen levels - the storage form of carbohydrate - will be low and energy levels will be low. But, on the other hand, if glycogen levels are high because of good food selection and appropriate timing of meals, energy reserve levels will increase.

### ***Key Principles to a Good Training Diet***

Carbohydrate is the major nutrient that fuels the working muscle cell in the game of soccer. **THE ENERGY NUTRIENT!** The diet should be high in carbohydrate-rich foods.

Protein is **THE HEALING AND RECOVERY NUTRIENT!** Although important for growth, formation of red blood cells, and hormones, protein is not the key energy nutrient. The diet should include a moderate amount of protein-rich foods.

Fat is the second **ENERGY NUTRIENT**. The muscle cell uses fat as a secondary energy source. The diet should be moderately low in fat.

### ***What Should You Eat Before Working Out?***

The two key nutrients important before exercise are water and carbohydrate. Examples of carbohydrate-rich foods that can easily be eaten as an early morning, mid-morning, afternoon, or early evening pre-exercise meal include:

#### ***Eating carbohydrate-rich foods prior to exercise will:***

1. Raise blood sugar
2. Protect glycogen stores
3. Provide an immediate form of easy, accessible fuel

#### ***Without carbohydrate prior to workouts:***

1. Lower blood sugar (hypoglycemia) would cause early onset fatigue during training or competition



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2. You begin to breakdown important body tissues, such as muscle, instead of building it up

### **Morning meal ideas or anytime snacks**

- 2 pieces of toast with jelly or honey (30 grams carbohydrates)
- 1 bagel with jelly or honey (32 grams carbohydrates)
- 1 chocolate granola bar (20 grams carbohydrates)
- 1 cup oatmeal, 1/2 cup skim milk (32 grams carbohydrates)
- 2 cups cold cereal, 1 cup skim milk (44 grams carbohydrates)
- 1 cup orange juice (26 grams carbohydrates)
- 1 cup applesauce (60 gram carbohydrates)
- 1 medium banana (26 grams carbohydrates)
- 1 cup cooked rice mixed with 1 cup vanilla yogurt (36 grams carbohydrates)

### **Afternoon meal model or anytime snacks:**

- Sandwich with high protein filling (meat, cheese, fish, egg salad)
- Salad, fruit or vegetable
- Cooked vegetables (broccoli, carrots, etc.), one piece of fruit
- Beverage: milk (soy or regular), juice, sports drink

### **Evening meal model or anytime snacks**

- Chicken, turkey, beef, fish - 4-6 oz (size of the palm of an adult's hand)
- 2-3 cups of a high carbohydrate food /starchy food (rice, pasta, potatoes, corn, peas), can also include breads and cereals
- Vegetables (2 cups), Fruit (2 pieces), and Milk (1-2 cups) or Juice (1-2 cups)

### ***Eating After Exercise***

Although much emphasis gets placed on eating before exercise for energy, what is eaten after exercise determines how quickly the young athlete recovers and is able to perform either the next day or during a consecutive game.

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The rules of thumb regarding recovery nutrition and soccer focus on two leading nutrients: carbohydrates and protein. First, carbohydrate-rich foods eaten within the first two hours after intense physical activity restore glycogen, the body's storage form of carbohydrate. Glycogen is the name of the carbohydrate used during soccer and can only become a fuel source if the athlete eats adequate amounts of carbohydrate-containing foods (rice, pasta, cereals, bread, fruits, juices, sports drinks are some examples). During exercise, glycogen is broken down to its smaller carbohydrate component, glucose, to be used as energy. Hundreds of calories worth of glycogen get used in one game of soccer and consequently must be replaced at the end of the day. Simply eating carbohydrate-rich foods will do the trick! But, what appears to be important is the timing of eating these foods. For example, eating carbohydrate foods within the first two hours after exercise stimulates glycogen formation at a quick pace. Once the two-hour "window of opportunity" is over, glycogen will still be formed, only at a slower pace. Researchers have demonstrated that glycogen replacement in athletes who have depleted their stores can take up to 20 hours. This means that there is usually no time to lose. Having bagels, pretzels, sports drinks, fruits, snack bars/candy bars with peanuts, sandwiches, and juices available after a game or in a locker room will certainly allow athletes to start eating and drinking carbohydrates immediately.

The second nutrient to pay attention to after exercise is protein. Although most food groups contain varying amounts of protein, the two groups containing the most are the meat or meat alternative group and the dairy products group. Studies have shown that specific amino acids can counter protein breakdown after intense physical activity. Foods from both the meat and dairy groups contain all of the essential amino acids, making them excellent choices to promote. For example, yogurt, milk, cheese and ice cream provide protein as well as carbohydrates to promote glycogen formation. On the other hand, turkey or beef burgers, a tuna fish or peanut butter sandwich, or a cup or two of peanut and sunflower-rich trail mix will boost protein.

By eating adequate protein after exercise young soccer players give themselves an advantage in two ways. First, they're eating appropriate nutrients (amino acids) to help repair the wear and tear on their muscle cells and secondly, they're eating the nutrient that will promote growth of muscle cells. The combination of carbohydrate and protein after exercise is the key formula for optimal recovery along with adequate fluid.

### ***Fluids and Their Importance***

The archenemy of any athlete is dehydration. At a level of only 1-2% dehydration, a young soccer player will start to feel prematurely tired or fatigued. This could occur after playing for only 15 minutes under intense sun or within 30 minutes

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of normal weather conditions depending on how much fluid had been consumed prior to playing.

Whether an athlete prefers water or sports drink, both are the solution to dehydration.

To help an athlete understand the critical aspect of fluid needs, discussing the role water plays in energy metabolism can be helpful. Each exercising muscle cell uses water as part of the process of breaking down energy nutrients such as carbohydrate and fat. As exercise becomes prolonged, more energy is needed to fuel activity. In addition, as sweating occurs to cool the body during activity, more water is lost. If fluid is not replaced, the body's ability to sweat is decreased and the body's internal core temperature increases. In the extreme case, heat stroke can occur due to an excessively high internal core temperature. There are many degrees or stages of dehydration before this, but the bottom line is that no degree of dehydration is good. Preventing dehydration can be simple as long as the soccer player will drink as frequently as possible during a game and go into the game well hydrated.

Water, in and of itself, is a nutrient. It provides no calories or energy, but it can adequately hydrate an athlete both before and during play. However, excellent studies have shown that athletes don't drink an adequate volume of water alone. Since taste appears to influence the amount or volume of fluid consumed at any given time, sports drinks that come in a wide variety of flavors and colors appear to stimulate thirst and consequently volume consumed. The fact that sports drinks contain a small percentage of carbohydrate, sodium, and potassium almost make them a superior fluid to water. However, water, in many cases, can be an adequate hydration beverage. If a young soccer player appears to sweat profusely, losing noticeable body water, a sports drink may be the better choice in preventing dehydration. It is strongly recommended that both sports drinks and water are made available to young athletes and that the coach encourages frequent drinking, beyond the level of basic thirst.

Recommendations for drinking before, during and after a game of soccer are as follows:

**Before a game,** drink 16 oz. or 2 cups of fluid one hour prior to playing

**During a game,** make an effort to drink 4-6 oz. or 1/2 cup of fluid every 15-20 minutes of play time

**After a game,** drink immediately and often until urine color is very light yellow to clear

Encourage athletes to carry water bottles and start hydrating in preparation for a game the night before. According to some studies, urine color can be related to

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hydration status and this may be a good way to help younger athletes pay attention to how much they've had to drink.

## **Supplements**

Because appetites can become suppressed during competitive seasons, supplemental calories may help prevent unnecessary weight loss.

Players must understand that a protein or carbohydrate powdered supplement is simply calories that they can DRINK instead of EAT. They're the same calories found in food, but might, for some players be easier to consume. There's nothing magical about liquid supplement calories. In fact, the soccer players I've worked with had very little success in maintaining their playing weight with the help of supplements alone. Supplements can't take the place of meals. They're meant to be eaten IN ADDITION to meals, to provide extra calories during the day that can't be added at mealtime either due to lack of appetite, exhaustion or because of fullness.

Good choices in supplements are powders that can be easily mixed with milk or juice (rich sources of calories themselves). Chocolate appears to be a popular flavor and many of these carbohydrate-protein powders taste acceptable. Look for a supplement that will contribute approximately 600-1000 calories. Your target calorie goal is an extra 1000 calories per day.

Although some are costly, sports bars and sports drinks are fairly convenient to buy and consume. Some sports bars contain excellent sources of protein and carbohydrate and contribute 300-500 calories per bar. Sports drinks contribute carbohydrates, the best source of energy, along with water for hydration. Studies show that athletes will drink more volume of fluid if the beverage tastes good. Candy bars containing peanuts are also good sources of protein and carbohydrates. Powdered supplements can be added to milkshakes for a protein and carbohydrate boost, although they are expensive.

In addition to extra calories to maintain weight during a competitive season, soccer players may benefit from taking a multiple vitamin-mineral supplement. Since calorie consumption may not be perfect and food selection irregular, a vitamin-mineral supplement could help players meet daily needs. Since a basic vitamin and mineral supplement doesn't provide calories, players need to understand that again, this merely supplements their diet. Food selection should be important as their primary source of nutrients.

Vitamins and minerals do not provide energy. Carbohydrates, proteins, and fats are the energy nutrients. But, vitamins and minerals play key roles in helping the body break down carbohydrates, proteins and fats for energy and build other body structures.

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This chapter has focused on the role an optimal diet can have on athletic performance for youth soccer players. The most important aspect of this chapter was the role of carbohydrates in promoting high levels of energy, and fluids for decreasing dehydration. Encourage your athletes to care about their food selection and reap the benefits of good nutrition. They may become a better soccer player than they ever expected!

***Additional Sports Nutrition Resources:***

**Victory at the Training Table:** A guide to sports nutrition by Jim Jordan, Polly Jordan, and Craig Horswell PRC Publishing, 4418 Belden Village St., N.W., Canton, Ohio, 44718-2516, 1994.

**Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook:** Eating to Fuel Your Active Lifestyle by Nancy Clark. Leisure Press, Box 5076, Champaign, Ill. 61825-5076, 1990.

**Foods, Nutrition and Sports Performance,** edited by Clyde Williams and John Devlin, Published by E 7 FN Spon, 1992.

**Eating for Endurance** by Ellen Coleman. Bull Publishing Co., P.O. Box 208, Palo Alto, CA, 94302, 1992.

**ACSM Fitness Book** by the American College of Sports Medicine, Leisure Press, Box 5076, Champaign, Ill., 61825-5076, 1992.



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# ***Chapter 14***

## ***US Youth Soccer Modified Rules of Play***

### ***Guidelines for Under 6's and Under 8's***

#### ***1. The Field***

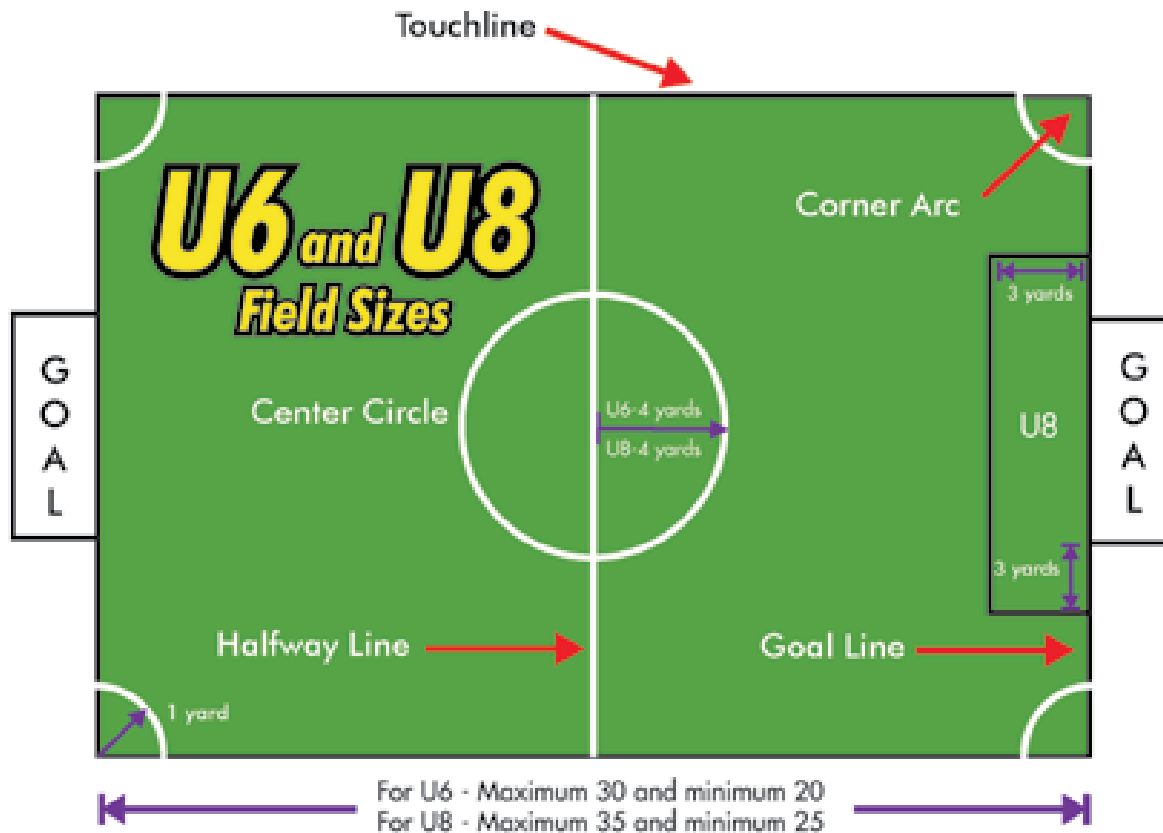
3v3 for Under 6's length not more than 30 yards nor less than 20 yards and its width not more than 25 yards nor less than 15 yards.

4v4 for Under 8's length not more than 35 yards nor less than 25 yards and its width not more than 30 yards nor less than 20 yards.

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The field will have distinctive markings called boundary lines. These lines make the field into a rectangle as diagramed below. One additional line divides the field in half (the halfway line).

The purpose of soccer is to score goals so goals must be placed on either end of the field lengthwise. Goals can be two cones set a few feet apart or a more formal goal. (Eighteen feet wide by six feet high or smaller) Cones, flags or discs can be used if goals with nets are unavailable.



## 2. The Ball

Under 6 and Under 8's size 3. Larger balls are heavier and take the fun and safety out of the game. Make sure there are plenty of balls to go around — but only one is needed for the game!

## 3. The Number of Players

Maximum number of players will be determined by your local association. US Youth Soccer recommends that U6 play 3v3 and U8 play 4v4. Teams and games may be coed and EVERYONE plays a minimum of 50% of the game. Substitutions are allowed any time the ball is out of play. There are NO goalkeepers.



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#### **4. The Players Equipment**

Players will want to wear a shirt, shorts, socks and a good pair of running shoes. Some may wear soft-cleated soccer shoes. Shin guards are required for safety reasons and should be covered by a pair of high socks. Clothing should not be restrictive.

#### **5. The Referee**

(Game Manager, Coordinator, Observer, Director, Parent Volunteer/Coach) Your job is to keep the playing environment FUN, SAFE and focused on the child.

In addition you need to keep time, enforce the rules, stop and restart the game. When you stop the game because of a foul, ball out of play, goal or another reason, take the time to explain to the players why! This is their first experience with soccer, too, and the BEST time to educate all on the Laws of the Game.

#### **6. The Assistant Referees**

Not used in the small-sided game.

#### **7. The Duration of the Game**

Length will be determined by your local association. Games for Under 6's should last approximately 32 minutes. Games for Under 8's should last 48 minutes.

US Youth Soccer recommends no more than 4 equal 8 minute quarters for Under 6's and no more than 4 equal 12 minute quarters for Under 8's. This recommendation makes it easy for the coach to give each player equal time and allows rest between quarters. There should be a short break between periods for water and physical recovery.

US Youth Soccer recommends substitutions between quarters to ensure that all players present play a minimum of 50% of the game.

#### **8. The Start and Restart of Play**

All players must be in their own half of the field with one team kicking off. Opponents must be 4 yards from the center mark at the kick off.

Before the game decide who will kick off to begin the game and then change the kick off team at the beginning of each quarter. Kick off is intended to ensure possession and must go forward to a teammate. The ball is not kicked to the other team.

#### **9. The Ball In and Out of Play**

When the WHOLE of the ball goes over the WHOLE of a boundary line, the ball is out of play. Putting the ball back into play will be discussed later.

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Remember, the FUN of the game is movement of the ball. When everyone has to stop to restart the game, the FUN has left the game for the moment. Try to keep the ball moving and not be too eager to call the ball out of play.

### **10. The Method of Scoring**

A goal is scored when the WHOLE of the ball goes over the WHOLE of the part of the goal line defined by the cones or actual goal.

Scoring goals is possibly the MOST fun a soccer player has during a game. Give players every opportunity to score a goal.

### **11. Offside**

Offside is not used in the small-sided games.

### **12. Fouls and Misconduct**

Fouls can and will occur even at this level. All fouls shall result in a direct free kick with opponents at least 4 yards away.

- Kicks or attempts to kick an opponent
- Trips or attempts to trip an opponent
- Jumps at an opponent
- Charges an opponent
- Strikes or attempts to strike an opponent
- Pushes an opponent
- Tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball
- Holds an opponent
- Spits at an opponent
- Handles the ball deliberately
- Plays in a dangerous manner
- Impedes the progress of an opponent

Soccer is a contact sport and each action is dealt with at the time it occurs. Explain the foul in simple terms, restart and let the game continue.

### **13. Free Kicks**

All free kicks will be direct.

All opposing players should be 4 yards away from the ball prior to the kick.

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#### **14. The Penalty Kick**

Not used in small-sided games.

#### **15. The Pass-In**

When the ball goes completely over one of the longer boundary lines last touched



by a player on Team "A", a player on Team "B" shall kick the ball back into play. This is football — let's play the ball with the feet and get comfortable with the ball. More touches means better technique!

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## **16. The Goal Kick**

If the team attempting to score a goal kicks the ball over the goal line outside the goal posts, the opposing team puts the ball back into play with a goal kick. The kick should be taken within 2-3 yards of the goal and opposing players must be 5-6 yards away.

## **17. The Corner Kick**

Use an direct free kick with the opponent 4 yards away. If the team defending against a goal being scored, kicks the ball over the goal line outside the goal posts, the opposing team puts the ball back into play with a corner kick.

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# ***Chapter 15***

## ***The Importance of Responsible Coaching***

As a youth soccer coach, you want your team to win as many games as possible, and as a Responsible Coach, you want to prepare your players to win off the field, too.

Few players continue their soccer careers beyond the youth level; fewer still beyond high school. Only the elite of the elite play college or professional soccer. However, all soccer players can learn life lessons from their experience.

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This chapter, produced by Positive Coaching Alliance ([www.PositiveCoach.org](http://www.PositiveCoach.org)) in conjunction with Liberty Mutual, will help you understand:

- Why you should be a Responsible Coach
- What a Responsible Coach is
- Coaching beyond the X's and O's
- How to implement three key principles of Responsible Coaching

### ***Why You Should Be a Responsible Coach***

Coaches are among the most influential adults in the lives of youth players. In conjunction with parents and teachers, coaches are key to developing character in our children.

Research shows that children who compete in youth sports achieve better grades, are less likely to engage in dangerous behavior and tend to live healthier lives due to improved fitness they carry forward from youth sports. One way to ensure that children gain these benefits is to offer them Responsible Coaching.

Soccer provides the chance to teach life lessons, *if* coaches become Responsible Coaches.

### ***What is a Responsible Coach?***

You may wonder what we mean by "Responsible Coach." Let's begin by explaining what a Responsible Coach is *not*. A Responsible Coach is not:

- soft
- a source of empty, unearned praise
- satisfied with everyone just having fun

Responsible Coaching is more difficult, challenging and rewarding than taking a win-at-all-cost approach. In addition to learning your "X's and O's" and competing fiercely for wins, you also commit to:

- Placing education and character development *before* wins

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- Coaching beyond the “X’s and O’s”
  - Coaching players to master soccer
  - Filling “Emotional Tanks” to improve performance and instill love of sport
  - Living and coaching by a code of honoring the game

US Youth Soccer offers information on soccer strategy and coaching skills at [www.usyouthsoccer.org](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org).

### ***Coaching Beyond the “X’s and O’s”***

Responsible Coaching requires deep knowledge of soccer. Know your X’s and O’s and age-appropriate activities. Then, realize there is much more to being a Responsible Coach.

The life lessons you teach your players will carry far beyond the playing field. Preparing your players for competition entails imparting values that will impact them long beyond their playing days.

The best coaches build opportunities for character education into their program by creating, recognizing and capitalizing on teachable moments. They think about the following questions when it comes to their players:

- If they fail, will they try again?
- Are they committed to helping to make their teammates better?
- How can I cultivate their confidence and curiosity so they seek and welcome feedback?
- Will they compete in a way that makes their coaches, families and themselves proud?

Soccer frequently tests character. Players must push past what they think are their limits to chase that last loose ball to the touch line. They must prepare themselves for the next shot despite a disappointing miss. After each tackle, they’ll need character to bounce up and get back in the game.

Therefore, Responsible Coaches are character educators, who seize soccer’s endless procession of teachable moments. They teach their players life

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lessons in persistence, teamwork, sacrifice, effort, empathy, discipline, leadership and overcoming adversity.

Helping soccer players improve is rewarding, but not nearly as rewarding as helping shape the values players will carry with them throughout their lives.

### ***Responsible Coaching Principle #1: Coaching for Mastery***

What is the first question people ask children when they see they're wearing a sports uniform?

"Did you win?"

Our society often puts scoreboard results ahead of everything else. Responsible Coaches care about the scoreboard, but they care more about instilling a mastery approach in their players, which will help them win throughout their lives.

A simple way to remember the three keys to the mastery approach is the acronym ELM; where ELM stands for Effort, Learning and Mistakes:

- 1) Effort -- always give 100%
- 2) Learning -- improve constantly as you gain knowledge
- 3) Mistakes are OK -- mistakes are how we learn

Research shows that when coaches focus solely on the scoreboard, players' anxiety increases, which causes them to make more mistakes because they play tentatively and timidly. Ultimately, anxiety undercuts self-confidence, which affects performance and takes the joy out of sports.

The scoreboard focus increases anxiety because players can't control the outcome on the scoreboard! Players become anxious about things that are important to them that they can't control. A win on the scoreboard depends a great deal on the quality of the opponent, which is outside of the control of an individual player or team.

Sports psychology research shows that teams and players who take the ELM Mastery approach (giving 100 percent effort, constantly learning and bouncing back from mistakes) consistently win more contests. By moving your players' focus off their scoreboard results and on to their effort, you'll have happier, more self-confident players and the wins will come.



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The following provides guidance in introducing these concepts to your youth soccer players and a tool to help them adopt your mastery approach.

### *Introducing the ELM Tree of Mastery to Your Team*

At the start of the season, let your players know that:

- 1) You will always be proud of them as long as they **give 100 percent effort** (regardless of the outcome on the scoreboard).
- 2) You want each one of them to **constantly strive to learn and improve**. This involves them comparing their own performance to their own performance (i.e. Are they better than they were two weeks ago?).
- 3) Mistakes are an inevitable part of the game. If they are giving 100 percent and trying new things (as they strive to improve), mistakes are bound to occur. Your best players are those who find ways to quickly **bounce back from mistakes**.
- 4) Teams that focus on giving their full effort, constantly learning and improving, and bouncing back from mistakes, **actually win more** than teams who consistently focus on the scoreboard.
- 5) You want a team that focuses on the ELM Tree of Mastery (Effort, Learning and Mistakes) because players who do this well are **less anxious** on the field and have a **greater sense of confidence** in themselves and their abilities.

Simply introducing the mastery approach to your players at the start of the season won't make it take hold. Revisit pieces of it at each practice. Ask your players if they remember what the "E" in ELM stands for, and when they don't remember the first time, remind them, and then ask them again next practice!

### *Team Mistake Ritual*

Fear of making mistakes can negatively impact performance. The way in which coaches deal with players' mistakes may be the single most important thing they can do. Adopt a physical team ritual for players to use to get past a mistake, so they can focus on the next play. A good time to use this is after a missed shot or buying an attacker's fake.

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Talk to your players about what ritual they want to use. Some players like to “brush it off,” signified by pretending to dust off their uniform. Some teams make a fist and then open it to “let the mistake go.” Rituals remind players that mistakes are inevitable, and the most important thing is how players react right after their mistakes.

## ***Responsible Coaching Principle #2: Filling Players’ “Emotional Tanks”***

Responsible Coaches keep players’ “Emotional Tanks” full. What do we mean by this? A person’s “Emotional Tank” is like a car’s gas tank. When it’s full, we can go anywhere we want to, but when it’s empty, we can’t go at all.

Players with full Emotional Tanks give Responsible Coaches some distinct advantages. Players with full Emotional Tanks are:

- more coachable and likely to listen and respond without resistance
- more optimistic
- better able to handle adversity

So, how do Responsible Coaches fill their players’ Emotional Tanks? By striking the right balance between specific, truthful praise and specific constructive criticism. Educational research indicates a “Magic Ratio” of 5:1, five praises to one criticism, which fosters the ideal learning environment.

Many coaches find this hard to believe because most of our own experience as youth athletes, sons, daughters and pupils has taught us that “coaching” equals “correcting,” and therefore, praise is not coaching. But a Responsible Coach who fills Emotional Tanks corrects players correctly!

The key is avoiding empty, unearned praise. Remember, the praise must be truthful and specific (i.e., not “Way to go,” but, “Tim, I’m glad to see you stepped up to clear that ball before the striker had time to get to it.”).

Truthful, specific praise for other positions may include:

- “David, way to shoot right away instead of taking too many extra touches.”
- “Diego, I’m glad you pulled your hand back in time; that saved us a penalty.”
- “Hope, even though you’re on the bench, I love the way you support your teammates.”

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Be sure your non-verbal communication also maintains the “Magic Ratio.” You fill Emotional Tanks when you listen, nod, clap or smile. Tank drainers include ignoring players, frowning, head-shaking, eye-rolling and yelling.

The following page provides guidance in introducing these concepts to your youth soccer players and a tool to help you Fill Emotional Tanks.

### ***Introducing “Filling the Emotional Tank” to Your Team***

At the start of the season, let your players know that:

- 1) **Each one of them has an Emotional Tank** that fills and drains when they receive praise and criticism.
- 2) You don’t want to be alone in Filling Tanks. You want them to act as **tank fillers for each other.**
- 3) In an environment where players are receiving five tank fillers for every one tank drainer (the **5:1 “Magic Ratio”**) their enjoyment and performance will increase.
- 4) Teams that play at home have a 60 percent chance of winning. We can take this “home field advantage” with us wherever we play, if we focus on filling each other’s tanks with **truthful and specific praise.** This will help us win more.

### ***Positive Charting***

Coaches often think they add value only by correcting players. But it is equally important to point out when players are doing things correctly and to reinforce them, so players will continue to do them. “Positive Charting” is a technique for recording positive efforts and plays made during training or matches.

Your positive chart can simply list of all of your players with space to note two or three of their specific positive acts. The role of filling in the chart can rotate between your assistant coaches, your bench (if players are mature enough) and even parents. Reading the completed chart to your players to start the next training session never fails to fill tanks.

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## ***Responsible Coaching Principle #3: Honoring the Game***

Responsible Coaches conduct themselves by a code, which Positive Coaching Alliance calls “Honoring the Game.” To remember components of this code, remind yourself and your players that Honoring the Game means respecting the sport’s ROOTS, where ROOTS stands for Rules, Opponents, Officials, Teammates and Self.

This aspect of Responsible Coaching lets you lead by example. When your players and their parents see you keep your temper in check, for example, when an official misses a call, they are more likely to check their own tempers. Granted, this is not easy! It is important in stressful game situations for Responsible Coaches to have -- and practice -- a self-control routine. For example:

- take a deep breath
- remind yourself of the discipline required NOT to react
- engage in self-talk (“I need to be a role model. I can rise above this!”)
- turn away from the action
- count to 20 (or 50!)
- quickly refocus on the next play

Later, you can use the experience as a teachable moment with your players: “I was pretty upset with what happened, but I controlled myself so I wouldn’t do anything that would dishonor the game. And that’s an important lesson I want you to learn from sports -- how to develop your own self-control so you will always Honor the Game no matter what.”

Do you think there is an effective way to approach an official after a bad call? You may be able to ask, “Can you tell me what you saw on that last play?” By staying calm, keeping your voice low, giving the official plenty of space and asking what he saw (rather than outright questioning the accuracy of his call), you’ll have the best chance of having a constructive interaction with the official.

Because today’s youth sports environment can so often be volatile, and even violent, it is important to prevent any outraged coach, player or parent from boiling over.

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This page provides guidance in introducing Honoring the Game to your youth soccer players and a tool to help you Honor the Game.

### ***Introducing “Honoring the Game” to Your Team***

At the start of the season, let your players know you want to coach a team that Honors the Game. Honoring the Game means that your team will have respect for the ROOTS of the game:

- 1.) **Rules** — We refuse to bend/break the rules to win.
- 2.) **Opponents** — We value and recognize that a worthy opponent brings out our best, and we take a “fierce and friendly” attitude into competition.
- 3.) **Officials** — We respect officials even when we disagree with them.
- 4.) **Teammates** — We never do anything to embarrass our team (on or off the field).
- 5.) **Self** — We live up to our standards of Honoring the Game, even when others don’t.

### ***During Training Sessions***

Just as we develop activities for improving physical skills, we must create situations in training where players learn how to Honor the Game. For example, during a practice game, make a bad call on purpose and see how your players react.

If they react in a way that is consistent with Honoring the Game, praise them. If they don’t, use that moment to discuss how you want them to respond in a game situation (e.g., not letting the questionable call throw them out of their rhythm). You might also consider having your players officiate during practice games to appreciate the difficulty of officiating.

### ***Responsible Coaching***

US Youth Soccer is dedicated to championing and celebrating responsibility in youth soccer. US Youth Soccer believes that some of the most influential individuals in a young person’s life are parents and youth coaches. US Youth Soccer provides valuable resources and expert advice for youth soccer coaches on how to further improve their commitment to being a positive role model in the lives of youth players. Visit [USYouthSoccer.org](http://USYouthSoccer.org) for more information where you can learn the finer points of these principles and use interactive guides for coaches and parents. Best wishes for a great season!

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Dr. Thomas Fleck**

Dr. Fleck is recognized as the leading authority on youth soccer development and education. In 1997 he was awarded the first National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) Bill Jeffery Award for dedication and commitment to youth soccer. Dr. Fleck holds a doctor of education from Lehigh University and is a certified elementary education educator.

Dr. Fleck is currently the Director of Coaching and Player Development for the Idaho Youth Soccer Association. Dr. Fleck was the Director of Coaching for the Florida State Youth Association for 13 years. He was the first United States Youth Soccer Coordinator, the General Manager of the Philadelphia Fury of the North American Soccer League (NASL), and Head Soccer Coach and Principal of the Centennial School at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Dr. Fleck is a past president of the NSCAA, a senior member of the United States Soccer National Coaching Staff, a technical advisor to F.I.F.A. (soccer's world governing body) and a member of the US Youth Soccer Coaching Committee. However, he is best known as the co-author of the *US Youth Soccer Parent/Coach Series*, an age-appropriate series of coaching booklets.

### **Dr. Ronald W. Quinn**

Dr. Quinn holds the position of Associate Professor, Director of Health, Physical Education and Sport Studies, and Head Women's Soccer Coach at Xavier University, in Cincinnati, Ohio. A member of the US Youth Soccer Coaching Committee and a United States Soccer Federation (USSF) National Teaching Staff. Dr. Quinn is considered one of the leading youth development experts in the country.

As the head coach of the Xavier Women's Soccer Team since 1993, Dr. Quinn has more than twice the number of wins as any former XU Coach at 98-58-9. Xavier has earned a spot in the four-team A-10 Conference Tournament five out of six years, winning the title in 1998 and 2000 and losing in the finals in 1999. He was selected as the Division I Ohio Collegiate Coach of the Year in 1997 and 2000. Dr. Quinn possesses a career record of 259-140-26 (.639 winning percentage) in 21 years of coaching.

He is author of *The Peak Performance: Soccer Games for Player Development* (1991), considered one of the top youth soccer activity books on the market. Dr. Quinn has been a contributing author in *Attacking Soccer* (1999) Human Kinetics Pub., *How to Improve the 7 Speeds of Soccer*, (1998) Performance & Conditioning for Soccer Pub., and *Coaching Soccer* (1996) Master Press Pub. In addition, Dr. Quinn is the author of over 20 articles on youth soccer development and is often quoted in stories dealing with youth soccer.

Dr. Quinn earned a Bachelor of Science degree from East Stroudsburg University in health and physical education, a Master of Education and Doctor of Education from Temple University in physical education and sport administration.

### **Dr. David B. Carr**



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Dr. Carr has over 40 years of involvement in soccer as a player, coach, administrator and educator. He is a member of the United States Soccer Federation National Teaching Staff and is recognized as an expert in coaching education and youth sports. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in physical education from the University of Maine, a Master of Science in physical education from Marshall University, and a Doctor of Education in curriculum development and instructional design from Virginia Tech.

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