

# Player Characteristics

## CHARACTERISTICS OF U-6 PLAYERS

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- Short attention span
- Can attend to only one problem at a time.
- May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- May or may not understand or remember: what lines mean on the field; what team they are on; what goal they are going for. We need to be patient and laugh with them as they get 'lost' on the field.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often. Give "hints", don't criticize.
- Need generous praise and to play without pressure. No extrinsic rewards (trophies, medals, etc.) should be given for winning.
- Prefer "parallel play" (Will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates. Thus, a 3 against 3 game is, in reality, a 1 against 5 game because they all want the ball at the same time.
- Very individually oriented (me, mine, my).
- Constantly in motion, but, with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly.
- Development for boys and girls are quite similar.
- Physical coordination limited. Eye - hand and eye - foot coordination is not developed. Need to explore qualities of a rolling ball.
- Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc..
- Prefer large, soft balls.
- Catching or throwing skills not developed.
- Can balance on their "good" foot.

## INVOLVING THE PARENTS

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It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but the U-6 player still views their parents as the most significant people in their lives. A pre-season meeting should be held with the parents so that objectives and team policies can be addressed. Some topics that you may want to address at this meeting are:

## THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT

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- A means of contacting everyone without one person doing all of the calling. (Phone chains.)
- Choosing a team administrator-someone to handle all of the details.
- Complete all paperwork required by your league or club.
- Discuss the laws of the game.
- Carpool needs.
- Training and game schedules. How you feel about starting and ending on time, what your attendance expectations are, what you think is a good excuse to miss training.
- What each player should bring to training: inflated ball, filled water bottle, soccer attire, shin guards (Cleats are not mandatory.)

- Most importantly, your philosophy about coaching U-6 players. Let them know that everyone plays; that the game does not look like the older player's games; that you are there to ensure that their player is safe and has a good time, as well as learn about soccer.
- What your expectations for them is during game time. How do you want them to cheer? Do they know that they should not coach from the sidelines?
- Above all, try to enjoy yourself. If you do they probably will too

## **COACHING RATIONAL**

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It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 6 years old, in general, do not do so by their own choice. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives. With the above assumptions, let's look at some things that we can do to energize the U-6 players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically initiate the sign up for next year!

- Each session should be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible. Involve the ball in as many activities as possible. Basic movements such as running, skipping, hopping, etc. need to be emphasized. If these can be done while kicking, catching, rolling, or dribbling a ball... all the better!
- Training should not last for more than one hour. This is primarily due to physical fatigue and attention span considerations. Train once or twice a week. Any more than this may lead to their and your burnout.
- Have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can get into one hour. Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!.
- Every player should bring his or her own size #3 or #4 ball.
- Remember, although they may have very similar birthdates, their physical and / or mental maturity may vary as much as 36 months. Activities need to accommodate these individual differences whenever possible.
- Team play and passing is an alien concept to these players. They know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they often will steal it from their own teammates. Do not get uptight if they do not pass, let them dribble to their heart's content.
- Plan for at least 4, 90 second drink breaks, especially in warmer weather. Their "cooling system" is not as efficient as in older players.

## **TYPICAL TRAINING SESSION**

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Here are some items that should be included in a U-6 training session:

**WARM-UP:** A brief warm-up is appropriate in order to get the players thinking about soccer and to prepare them physically for the time ahead. This should involve individual body activities that may or may not involve the ball. They can chase their ball as it is thrown by the coach, bringing it back with different parts of their body. Or, they can chase someone with their ball at their feet. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball. "Soccernastics" activities are very appropriate, like: rolling the ball with the bottom of their feet, with their elbows, backwards, with the back of their neck while holding on to it; throwing it up and catching it; keeping it up with their feet while sitting.

**INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES:** Follow the warm-up with some kind of individual activity, not a real 1 v.1 game, but some kind of activity where players act as individuals in a game environment. An example would be a kind of tag game, or "Red Light - Green Light", or a game where players are trying to knock

their ball through gates. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "looser sits".

## **U-6 PRACTICE IDEA:**

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### **"Your Yard Clean"**

Here is a game that involves kicking and is a good example of parallel play in that it involves all players on the team at one time, but, they are all acting as individuals during the game. This allows for individual differences in skill. The game is simple, fun, and easy to adapt to account for team size and experience.

**THE GAME:** Create a 'neutral area' between the two teams where no player is allowed into. This area can be as small as one yard and as big as 10 yards wide. The width is determined by how far the players can kick the ball.

Each player starts with a ball at his / her feet. On command, each team tries to keep their side of the game free of balls by kicking their ball over to the other teams side.

After an appropriate amount of time (when the balls become too scattered, or, the players are loosing focus), call the game and count which side has the most balls on their side.

Distribute the balls evenly for another try if the players are still interested.

After players have found some success with this basic game, try these variations:

- Players can only use their left foot.
- Throw the ball back.
- Punt the ball back.
- Dribble the ball around a cone that has been set up in the middle of their "yard", then, kick the ball back.

## **U-6 PRACTICE IDEA:**

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### **"Red Light...Green Light"**

Here is a game that should be familiar to most U-6's. Again, the game is fun, simple to set up, and has direct application to the game. The skill that it is targeting is dribbling.

**THE GAME:** Each player has a ball, except the one player that is designated as the "light".

Lines from start to finish should be approximately 20 - 30 yds..

Players start from the line opposite the "light". The "light" then turns away from the group shouting out "GREEN LIGHT". At this signal, the players start to dribble towards the "light". When the "light" turns back around, calling out "RED LIGHT", players must freeze their bodies and their ball.

If the "light" catches players or a ball still moving, that player must take 5 steps back.

The first player to cross the line where the "light" is standing is the winner and becomes the new "light".

You can start the game without using balls for younger players, then have them roll the ball with their hands, then use their feet.