



SSA Under 10 Practice Structure

Players are beginning to develop technically and now have a basic understanding of tactics and begin to anticipate the next play. Transition from offense to defense and defense to offense can begin to be introduced. Players can now be asked to play in a position but should be exposed to different playing positions throughout the season. Players are entering the “golden age of learning”. They have the ability to remember complex instructions, which enables them to become better problem solvers. They also develop an ability to focus longer and stay on task. The improvements in a child’s cognitive and psychomotor abilities mean that coaches can, and should focus on teaching their players the key fundamental soccer techniques. Dribbling and passing are still high on the agenda. Players are sufficiently coordinated to work on feints and fast footwork. Players can also begin to combine passes with teammates to penetrate defenses. Receiving with deception is important to take the ball away from pressure. Juggling is and should be encouraged, especially in a player’s own free time. It is not a coincidence that every star player is also an accomplished juggler. Juggling helps players develop a feel for the ball, improve first touch, balance and coordination, and confidence on the ball. Different shooting and heading techniques can begin to be explored as players begin to be technically able to cross the ball in the air.

Technical training is extremely important. Working on technique in isolation without opponents, such as repetitions of unopposed dribbling or passing moves, should not constitute the only part of the technical content. Players need to practice technique against opponents. This will improve the transfer of skill to the game and will be more realistic, not to mention more fun for the players. A mixture of individual, cooperative and competitive activities should be used to develop technique. Fitness on its own has no place in the training program. Players at this age have not completed their growth spurt and many have not even started their puberty. This means that fitness work with players who have not yet matured physically has limited value since the neuromuscular system cannot yet handle full adaptation to fitness training. The fun games and activities will take care of the fitness needs of these players. Every moment in practice needs to be devoted to ball work.

Technical, Tactical, Physical, and Psychological Characteristics

Technical:

- Continued development on individual technique. Encourage mastery of the ball
- Introduce ball juggling
- Further development of passing and receiving the ball, including flighted balls
- Encourage disguise and deception when passing and correct pace of pass
- Encourage the least amount of touches to control the ball and take away from pressure with 1st touch by opening up their body
- Further development of shooting techniques
- Introduction of heading techniques
- Players should be touching the ball as many times as possible with both feet
- Teach goalkeeping skills
- Involve the ball in as many activities as possible
- Dynamic repetition of skill important

Tactical:

- 1v1 to develop ball mastery
- Build on small group activities like 2v1, 2v2, 2v3, 3v3
- Principles of attack, defense, and transition should be introduced
- Limited positional responsibilities can be taught but they may only get it some of the time
- Continue to rotate players in positions. Do not allow players to specialize in any one position

Physical:

- Boys and girls beginning to develop separately
- There is a great diversity in playing ability and physically mature
- Gross and small motor skills becoming more refined and reliable
- Children can function at increasingly sophisticated levels in the performance movement skills
- Full rest periods, plenty of water breaks needed as prone to overheating
- Players are becoming stronger and faster
- Players gaining better control over their bodies
- Still in motion but not so busy



- Able to pace themselves, to plan ahead

Psychological:

- Players are starting to recognize basic tactical concepts, but not exactly sure why certain decisions are better
- Players begin to understand and see that repetitive practice of a technique results in improvement
- Becoming more "serious" and normally accept that competition is necessary and is even fun. However, girls are more likely to play for friendship than for competition
- They may blame others
- Still need constant reinforcement
- Players begin to appreciate the benefits of cooperation with others
- Players begin to understand and appreciate the need for rules
- Are able to attend to more than one task at a time
- They go in more directions
- Abstract thinking begins
- Players may initiate play on their own
- Psychologically becoming more firm and confident but are still sensitive
- Increased self-responsibility
- Still mostly intrinsically motivated. Peer pressure starting to be a factor
- Prefer identification with a team

Under 10 Practice Structure

- Focus on 1 topic per practice session, e.g. session 1-dribbling, session 2-passing etc
- Split practice session into 4 segments of approximately 15 minutes
- For each segment select an activity from the U10 Practice Activities curriculum or US Youth Soccer U10 Manual/DVD
- Segment 1 – Technical Warm-Up – individual/pair activities related to practice topic, e.g. 1 player-1 ball, 2 players-1 ball
- Segment 2 – Small group activities, e.g. 1v1 to 3v3
- Segment 3 – Large group activities, e.g. 4v4 to 6v6
- Segment 4 – Scrimmage type activities
- Be prepared with an additional 1 or 2 activities that you can swap in if an activity isn't quite working out
- Give players a short water break after each segment
- Dribbling and dribbling moves, passing and receiving, shooting, are the main focuses
- Juggling and heading can be included
- Principles of attack and defense – roles of players (shown below)
- Team formation – ideal formation that team plays during scrimmages (shown below)

Principles of Attack (when team has ball)

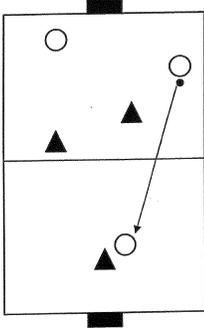
- 1st Attacker (penetration - dribble, shoot, pass)
- 2nd Attacker (support - angle and position to help player with the ball)
- 3rd Attacker (support and mobility - variety of different runs to create gaps in the defense)
- Depth and Width (spread the defense to create space)
- Improvisation (make attack unpredictable through creativity)

Principles of Defense (when team doesn't have ball)

- 1st Defender (pressure - win the ball back as quickly as possible, or delay - gain time to organize the defense through appropriate pressure on the ball)
- 2nd Defender (Cover for the 1st defender in an appropriate position to see teammate, ball, and opponent)
- 3rd Defender (balance - positioning away from 1st and 2nd defender to cover vital areas)
- Compactness (keeping spaces between defenders as small as possible)
- Counterattack (win the ball and go to goal as quickly as possible)

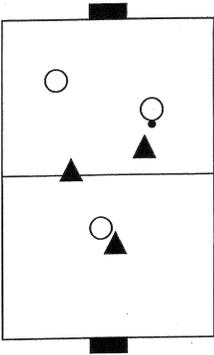
Attacking and Defending Shape

3v3 Attacking Shape



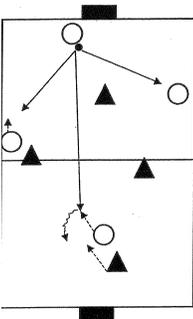
Team of O's have achieved good attacking shape (triangle) by providing length and width on the field. This shape also provides good support to the player on the ball. The close supporting player has taken a position slightly behind the player on the ball while the player in advance of the ball has pushed forward and is available to receive a pass.

3v3 Defending Shape



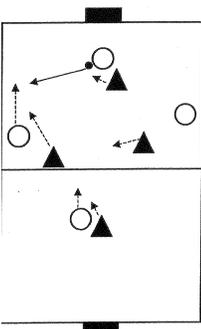
Team of "Triangles" have achieved good defending and starting positions. Pressure is applied to the ball while good cover and balance is provided by the remaining players. Notice the defensive position taken by the defender closet to the goal. The position taken is on the ball side of the opponent so that the defender may intercept a pass into the flank space first. The team of three provides good concentration and depth.

4v4 Attacking Shape



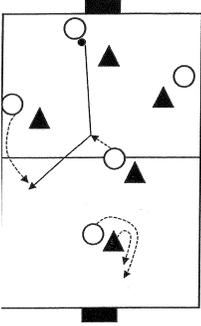
Team of O's have achieved good attacking shape (diamond) and are providing player on the ball with close support on left and right as well as player positioned deep in advance of the ball. Notice the number of passing opportunities provided. Players must achieve these "starting positions" early after recovery of the ball but once achieved they must "free" themselves from close marking by the opponent. Mobility by the individual players to provide good angles and distance of support is important to maintain possession. The through pass is a priority for the player on the ball to achieve.

4v4 Defending Shape



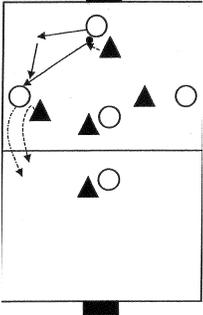
Team of "Triangles" have achieved good defending shape by putting immediate pressure to the ball and limiting the players option to play deep early. The remaining players have concentrated their defensive pressure in the area of the ball. Notice the balancing defender on the right side of the field who is squeezing toward the center. This is made possible by the closet defender immediately closing down the player with the ball and channeling the attacker to the other flank. Also notice how compact the defending team is from front to back.

5v5 Attacking Shape



Team of O's have achieved good attacking shape and are able to provide the player on the ball with a central player in which to play through. Notice the space created in the center of the field by the flank players staying wide. This allows the player with the ball to play a through pass to the checking player. The deep attacking player makes a run away from the space that eventually the wide player will enter on the dribble. This run shows intelligent "playing without the ball" by creating space for the oncoming player by drawing the opponent away.

5v5 Defending Shape



Team of "Triangles" have achieved good defending shape by pushing forward and pressing the attacking team in their half of the field. Notice the position of the central defending player to prevent the attacking team from playing through their central player as well as the flank defender tracking the opponent trying to run behind into space. Transition between attack and defense must be immediate in order to prevent the attacking team from penetrating quickly.

Team Formation

The recommended formation for this age is a 2-line formation of 3 defenders and 2 forwards. Therefore, 1 player in goal, 3 players as defenders (middle, right side, and left side) and 2 attackers. The reasons are as follows:

- Players need to learn how 2 lines interact before they learn how to play in a 3 line system
- Five field players are not enough to make 3 lines viable. If 3 lines are used, play becomes too narrow. Players are constantly scrambling to get wide and tend to receive the ball while still running towards the sidelines, thus facing the wrong way
- The 3-2 formation closely replicates all the passing patterns and movement of the 11v11 game. Hence a better transfer of learning to the game
- The 3-2 formation replicates the modern style of play that starts with numbers up in the back and requires timely and intelligent runs from the back to create numbers upfront
- The 3-2 system has width and depth. The team will attack with at least 3 players with one of the defenders joining the attack. Either a wide defender overlaps or the central defender steps up. If a wide defender overlaps, the other defenders shift laterally to cover. If the central defender steps up, the remaining defenders pinch in to close the gap. These are exactly the type of movements that players need to learn in the modern game
- In the back, we have a numbers up situation of 3 defenders versus 2 forwards. This makes it easier to play out of the back and keep possession. It also makes it possible to introduce zonal defending concepts