



A primary focus for the coach at the youth level, through the U-12 age group, is to provide an environment that comes close to simulating the “pickup” games of our youth. In this setting much of the creativity and personality of kids developed naturally, without the involvement of adults. Kids need to be allowed to play freely, develop their skills and use them in a creative manner. Coaches should organize only so far as it helps to create this environment. Again, Manfred Schellscheidt comments on this idea of “street soccer” and how the coach can help to create this environment.

*Beside the games, what do our training sessions look like? Are they mobile or static? Are the players free to experiment and learn from the game or are they constantly instructed? Is there room for trial and error, or are they simply told what to do and where to go? (Breathing life into soccer) ... is more about converting our training sessions into some form of street soccer in which players, with the help of the coach, experiment with the basic elements of the game in a competitive way... Learning (in this case, soccer) is about experimenting with new things and relating to them. Mastery means coming to grips with things we have experimented with, often with repetition. It is all about developing an understanding and feel for the game. The lessons for all of us will come from the game and so will the answers. In the beginning the person and the game are separate, maybe even far apart. When things get good, the game and the person become one. (Manfred Schellscheidt: Experimenting With The Game)*

With this in mind, try to encourage comfort with the ball and the confidence to use this skill creatively. Encourage the dribbler at the younger ages; your team of 8 to 10 year olds should be full of them. Dribbling, at the younger ages, is the child’s attempt to gain control over the ball. Controlling the ball is the primary skill that every other skill in soccer depends upon. Although controlling the ball may seem to be a simple task, it actually takes an enormous amount of the child’s energy. Do not expect him or her to look to pass or to pass with any level of competence or awareness, until he or she has first mastered this skill. Consider these two points. Children from about age 6 to 12 have an almost limitless capacity to learn body movement and coordination (i.e., motor skills). At the same time, their intellectual capacity to understand spatial concepts like

**CONSIDER THIS:** At the younger ages (6 to about 10), soccer is not a team sport. On the contrary, it is a time for children to develop their individual relationship with the ball. The fact that younger children are placed into team environments is not their fault. Do not demand that the more confident players share the ball. Encourage them to be creative and go to goal. Do the same with the rest of your players. Work to bring all your players up to that level of confidence and comfort with the ball. Coaches should avoid the impulse to “coach” their players from “play to play” in order to help them win the match. Coaches should not be telling their young players to “pass rather than dribble,” to “hold their positions” or to “never” do something (like pass or dribble in front of the goal).

positions and group play is limited. Work to their strengths.



Many kids who have been involved in organized soccer will often look to pass the ball or kick the ball down field as their first option. They have been taught to “share” the ball or they have learned that the best way to keep from making a “mistake” with the ball at their feet is to kick it away as fast as possible. For this reason, it helps if the coach continually encourages the players to make dribbling their first option. It may also help to make the players take at least two touches on the ball before they can look to pass. Remember that making mistakes at these early ages is a very important part of the player’s learning and development. Encourage risk-taking and applaud effort.