



# **U-8 Coaching Manual**

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# Coaching the U-8 Player

## ***CHARACTERISTICS OF U-8 PLAYERS***

- Attention span is a bit longer than U-6 players but still not at a “competitive” stage.
- Inclined towards small group activities.
- Always in motion: scratching; blinking; jerking; rocking....
- Easily bruised psychologically. They will remember negative comments for a long time. Shout praise. Give "hints".
- They want everybody to like them.
- Developing physical confidence.
- Starting to imitate older players or sports heroes. Want the same "gear" as them.
- Lack sense of pace. They go flat out until they drop.
- Skeletal system growing rapidly. Often results in apparent lack of coordination.
- Cardiovascular and temperature regulation system is not developed. Their heart rate peaks quickly and they overheat quickly. Make sure that they get adequate water breaks.
- Limited understanding with personal evaluation. "if they try hard, they performed well" regardless of the actual performance. Thus, they need to be encouraged constantly, and asked "Now, can you do this?" Better at recognizing when the ball is out of play, and remembering what goal they are going for... but, in the heat of battle, they will sometimes still forget. They still find it difficult to really be aware of more than one thing at a time.

## ***INVOLVING THE PARENTS U-8***

**It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but also the U-8 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:**

- Nominate a team mother to help with team duties, which are assist phone calling, scheduling snacks for games at half time and/or end of game, miscellaneous details (this could be a party at the end of the season etc.
- Complete all paperwork required by your league or club.
- Discuss the laws of the game.
- Training and game schedules.
- How you feel about starting and ending on time
- What your attendance expectations are
- What each player should bring to training: inflated ball, filled water bottle, soccer attire, shin guards and soccer shoes.
- You're philosophy about coaching U-8 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/referee from the sidelines?
- Being a Referee! This is a major help for both the team and league
- Volunteering for the club - fieldwork, concessions, fund raising, etc.

**Above all, try to enjoy yourself. If you do they probably will too.**

### ***THINGS YOU CAN EXPECT U-8***

**Some of the players that are playing have had two years of soccer experience and thus have already touched the ball a few thousand times in their lives. This, however, does not mean that these players are ready for the mental demands of tactical team soccer. The emphasis still needs to be placed on the individual's ability to control the ball with his/her body. They are still there to have fun, and because some of the players may be brand new to the sport, it is imperative that activities are geared towards individual success and participation. Following are some more items that a coach of U-8 players should consider.**

- Small-sided soccer is the best option for these players. Not only will they get more touches on the ball, but also it is an easier game to understand.
- Because of rapid growth spurts during this age, players will go through times when they seem to have lost control of their body. What they could easily do 2 weeks ago now seems unattainable. Be patient.
- Passing is not an important part of their game, no matter how much anybody yells at them to do otherwise, it is much more fun to dribble and shoot. Let them.
- Training twice a week is plenty, and should not last longer than one hour and fifteen minutes.
- Each player should bring his or her own size #3 ball to training. Learning how to control it should be the main objective. They need to touch it, as many times as possible during fun activities that will engage them.
- Challenge them to get better by practicing on their own. There is no rule which states that they can't learn by themselves, no matter how important we think we are. Incidental things are important. They are forming the habits that will impact their future participation. Ask them to take care of their equipment (water bottle included), cooperate, listen, behave, and try hard. Realize, however, that they often forget and will need to be reminded - often.
- Ask them to work with others to solve a particular challenge. Start them with just one partner and work from there.

### ***TYPICAL TRAINING SESSION U-8***

**Here are some items that should be included in a U-8 training session:**

**WARM-UP (Ball Gymnastics/Beginning Juggling):** 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. Static stretching is also appropriate at this time, again, hopefully done with the ball.

**INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES (Skill Games: 2 per practice):** 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. Keep players in motion at all times. Avoid having them wait on lines. Play games of "inclusion" instead of games where the "looser sits".

**PLAY THE GAME:** move on to the real game, but make sure it is a 1v1, 2 v 2, or 3 v 3. Switch the game every 5 minutes or so. Be creative. Play with 4 goals, reverse goals, or 2 balls. Play with or without boundaries. Use cones if you don't have real goals. Keep players involved. Have more than one game going on at a time if necessary. It is important that every player has a chance to shoot on goal as often as possible.

**WARM-DOWN & HOMEWORK:** Finish the session with a warm down. Give them some more stretches to do with the ball. You may want to review what you started the session with. Also, give them some homework so that they practice on their own. Think of some ball trick that you would like to see them try to do, like, bounce it off their thigh and then catch it. It is important to finish on time. This is especially essential if the players are really into it. Stop at this point and you will get an enthusiastic return.

# U8 Goals, Coaching Tips, Basic Rules

## Goals

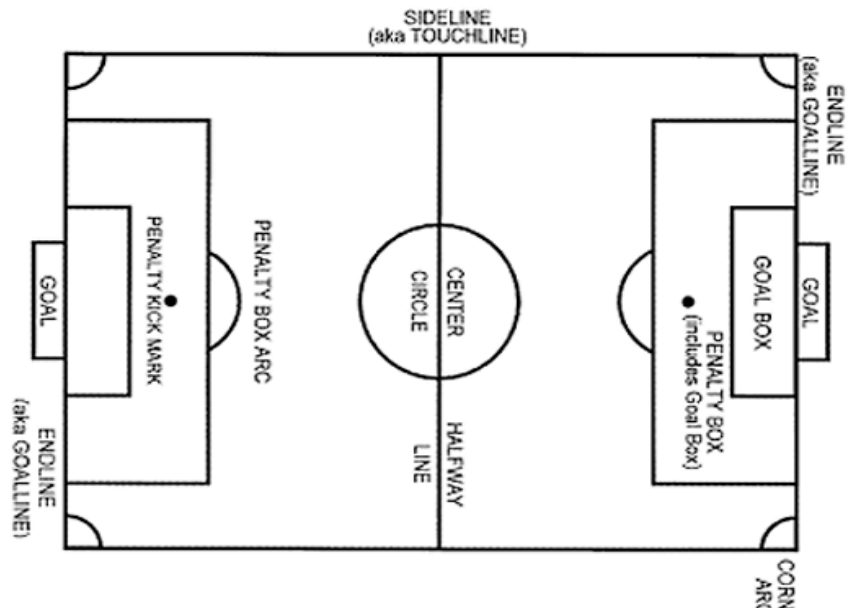
#	Goal	Description
1	Have FUN!	Be silly, make up games/stories. Try to keep their interest.
2	Learn Core Skills	Footwork, Juggling, & Ball Gymnastics – this will give them a good foundation
3	Left & Right Foot	Focus skills on right and left foot.

## Coaching Tips

#	Goal	Description
1	Have FUN!	Be silly, make up games/stories. Try to keep their interest. Play with them.
2	Be POSITIVE	Kids love to hear what they are doing well and will perform better for you. If giving instruction, then sandwich between two positives.
3	Snacks	Know who has snacks and remind them the practice before the game.
4	Plan	Plan your session. Know what you are going to do and what you may need.
5	Remember Plan/Goals	Stick to your goals of your practice plan and for the season.
6	Focus on skills	Don't worry about win or loss. Focus on positives and praise examples of learned skills.
7	Educate Self	Learn basic rules & field terms. Internet is unbelievable resource.

## Basic Rules

#	Rule	Description (Full Rules @ <a href="http://www.fifa.com">www.fifa.com</a> and modifiers @ <a href="http://www.arkansassoccer.org">www.arkansassoccer.org</a> )
1	Equipment	Shin Guards required, Size #3 Ball, Soccer cleats optional (no toe cleat, i.e. baseball)
2	Game Duration	Four – 12 minute quarters. 5-minute halftime. 2 minutes between 1-2 & 3-4 quarters
3	Substitutions	At any stoppage of play. Players wait at midfield line for referee to call onto field.
4	Out of Play	Ball is out of bounds when the entire ball crosses the touchline or goal line.
5	Kick-off	At center circle to begin each quarter and after an opponents goal. Opponents must be out of center circle. Ball must travel forward with first touch.
6	Throw-In	Re-start of play when opponent loses ball fully across the touchline. Player stands behind touchline. Ball thrown with both hands over head. A goal cannot be scored directly on throw-in.
7	Goal Kick	Re-start of play when opponent loses ball fully across team's goal line. Ball is kicked into play from anywhere along team's goal box line. Opponents - 10 yards from start of kick.
8	Corner Kick	Re-start of play when opponents lose ball fully across their own goal line. Ball is kicked into play from the corner arc. A goal can be scored directly from corner kick.
9	Indirect Kick	Re-start of play after a foul or handball. From point of infraction, ball is kicked into play. Opponents must be 10 yards from start of kick. Cannot score directly on indirect kick.



## U8 Core Skills

### Footwork

#	U6 Moves	Description
1	Dribbling	Using any part of the foot to move the ball around. (inside, outside, laces, heel)
2	Sweeps (side touches)	Tapping the ball between your feet. Legs are bent, body is relaxed.
3	Right Foot	Dribble only with right foot
4	Left Foot	Dribble only with left foot
5	Toe Touches	Alternating touching on top of a stationary ball with the sole of the foot in a hopping motion.

#	U8 Moves	Description
6	Sweeps - Forward	Sweeps while going forward
7	Sweeps - Backwards	Sweeps going backward
8	Toe Touches Forward	Toe touches moving the ball forward under control.
9	Toe Touches Backward	Toe touches moving the ball backward under control.
10	Toe Touches Right/Left	Toe touches touching with only left foot, then only right foot. Other foot can touch nothing or can add a side touch, scissor, etc.
11	Pullback/Drag back	Turn 180 degrees by pulling ball back with sole of foot. Repeat with left
12	Rolling/Slaps	Rolling the ball with the sole of the foot in a sweeping motion across the body. Using first the bottom of the right then the left foot.
13	Inside Cut	Cut the ball back with the inside of right foot almost turning 180 degrees. Repeat with left.
14	Outside Cut	Cut the ball back with the outside of right foot almost turning 180 degrees. Repeat with left.
15	Scissors	Step around the ball from inside to outside then dribble in opposite direction.

### Juggling

#	U6 Juggling	Description
1	Kick Right High	Kick the ball with your right foot as high as you can.
2	Kick Left High	Kick the ball with your left foot as high as you can.
3	Punt Right Distance	Punt the ball with your right foot as far as you can to a partner up the field.
4	Punt Left Distance	Punt the ball with your left foot as far as you can to a partner up the field.
5	Punt Right Off Bounce	Kick the ball with your right foot off the bounce as high as you can.
6	Punt Left Off Bounce	Kick the ball with your left foot off the bounce as high as you can.
7	Thigh Catch	Play the ball with your thigh 1-2 feet in the air and catch. Alternate right and left thigh.
8	Kick Catch	Kick the ball with your foot 3-4 feet in the air and catch. Alternate right and left foot.
9	Scoop Ball for Height	See how high you can scoop the ball up in the air.
10	Scoop Ball for Distance	Scoop the ball to a partner.

#	U8 Juggling	Description
1	Feet 3 times	Juggle ball with feet 3 times in a row.
2	Thighs 3 times	Juggle ball with thighs 3 times in a row.
3	Head 3 times	Juggle ball with head 3 times in a row.
4	Punt high, catch	Punt ball in air and catch. Right and left.
5	2 thighs - 2 feet	Juggle the ball 2 times with thighs and feet without hitting ground. Encourage both feet.
6	Foot, Thigh, Foot	Juggle foot, to thigh, and to foot.
7	Bounce Kick 5 times	On bouncing surface, juggle ball letting it bounce between juggles - 5 times in row.
8	10 Feet Catches	Juggle foot and catch 10 times in a row.
9	10 Thigh Catches	Juggle thigh and catch 10 times in a row.
10	10 Head Catches	Juggle head and catch 10 times in a row.

## Ball Gymnastics

#	With Ball in Hands	Description
1	Figure 8 around legs	Ball on ground, feet spread apart further than shoulder width, use hands to move ball in figure 8's around legs. Repeat going opposite direction.
2	Figure 8 around legs (Ball in air)	Feet spread apart greater than shoulder width, without the ball touching the ground, move ball in figure 8's around the legs. Repeat going opposite direction.
3	Circle leg L & R	Ball on ground, feet spread apart, circle one leg at a time using both hands. Repeat for both legs and going opposite direction.
4	Circle leg L & R (Ball in air)	Ball in air, feet spread apart, circle one leg at a time using both hands. Repeat for both legs and going opposite direction.
5	Circle waist	Using both hands circle your waist with the ball. Repeat opposite direction.
6	Throw & Catch	While standing, throw ball into air underhanded and catch. Add Claps.
7	Throw, Stand & Catch	While sitting, throw ball into air under handed then stand and catch.
8	Throw, 360, & Catch	While standing, throw ball into air underhanded then do a 360 and catch.
9	Throw, Sit, Stand, & Catch	While standing, throw ball into air underhanded then sit and quickly get up to catch the ball.
10	Throw, Somersault & Catch	While standing, throw ball into air underhanded then do a somersault, stand up and catch

#	Off to the Races	Description (players in squads of 3 or 4, relay race to cone and back)
11	Carry 3 Balls	Player carries 3 balls and runs to cone and back, hands off the 3 balls to next player, repeat. First squad done wins.
12	Dribble 2 Balls	Player dribbles with feet 2 soccer balls to cone and back, then next player repeats. First squad done wins.
13	Hopping Both Feet	Player hops with both feet to cone and back, next player repeats. First squad done wins.
14	Hopping One Foot	Player hops with right foot to cone and left foot back, next player repeats. First squad done wins.
15	Backwards	Player runs backward to cone and back, next player repeats. First squad done wins.
16	Sole of the Foot	Player rolls ball with sole of both feet to cone and back, next player repeats. First squad done wins.
17	Crab Races	Player crab walks to cone and back, next player repeats. First squad done wins.
18	Bear Crawl	Player crawls on hands and feet to cone and back, next player repeats. First squad done wins.
19	Jump with Ball between Feet	Player pinches ball between feet and hops to cone and back, next player repeats. First squad done wins.
20	Carry 2 and dribble 1	Player carries 2 balls with hands and dribbles one with feet to cone and back, next player repeats. First squad done wins.

## U8 Skill Games

### Dribbling

Game	Description
Red Light, Green Light	10x15 yard grid, Coach says "Green Light" all dribble in grid, "Red Light" everyone stops with foot on ball. If don't stop in time, then dribble around outside cone and back. Progression: Add items: Right/Left Turn = Right/Left foot only, Pumping Gas = Toe Touches, Change Tire= Sweeps, Reverse = Heel kick, Speeding = laces and fast. Encourage all proper surfaces – inside, outside, laces, and heel. Try to encourage other surfaces to diminish toe kicks. Can add silly ones as well –e.g. Chinese fire drill – leave your ball and get another.
Knock Out	20x20 grid. One player is "It" and all others have a ball. "It" tries to knock as many balls out of the grid as they can in 1 min or until they get 10. All players get chance to be it. Progression: Add goal and get 3 pts if "it" gets ball and scores and 1 pt if out of grid. Dribblers use only right/left foot. Can also play where ball goes out, the player out. Play down to a winner.
Sharks & Minnows	5x15 yard grid, 1 shark without ball stands on one end, minnows with a ball on other. Coach says go. Minnows try to make it to the other end, while shark tries to get their ball out. If out then player joins shark, until you have a winner. Progress minnows to just right/left foot.
Name Game	10x10 yard grid; Name each line that makes up grid; Name can be a players, Disney character, restaurant, etc. Players dribble in grid and coach says "right foot on ball on McDonalds", "sit on ball on Mickey Mouse", "toe touches on Jimmy", etc. Progression: may add actual field lines (goal line, touch line, center circle) to learn field. Be silly and creative.
Freeze Tag	20x20 yard grid; One player is Frosty (no ball). All other players with ball. Frosty tries to tag players. If tagged, then place ball over head and frozen. Other players can unfreeze, by a ball passed between their legs. Play till everyone is frozen. Progression: Outside/Inside/Heel ball between legs to unfreeze. Frosty has ball – touch ball or player with ball to freeze (may have 2 Frosties with ball). May just start off with regular tag.
Follow the Leader	Pick a leader and encourage to move all about the field doing all the skills they have learned. Everyone follows and tries to do what the leader does. Change leaders often and give all a chance.
Crab Soccer	5x10 yard grid; Crab in the middle. Fish must dribble from one end to other without crab getting the ball.
Fetch	Coach is in the middle. Tosses player ball out and player fetches ball and returns to coach. Name a body part to return ball with (right foot, head, left elbow, holding on back of neck, backwards, hopping, etc). Name an animal they have to sound/act like as they bring it back .
Simon Says	Play Simon Says doing skills learned and silly things. Let each player take a turn as Simon.
Keep Your Yard Clean	Create a 'neutral area' between the two teams where no player is allowed. 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 field free of balls by kicking their ball over to the other teams side. Recruit parent assistance to keep balls in field of play. After couple minutes, count to see who has the fewest balls in their yard. Distribute the balls evenly for another try if the players are still interested. Progression: Left/Right only, Throws only, punting, Dribble the ball around a cone in the middle of their "yard", then, kick the ball back.
Relay Races	Race to cone, hop, backwards, dribble, dribble right/left only, bear crawl, etc. Ball gymnastics.

Dodge Ball	15x15 grid. Player is "It" with a ball. Dribbles around and tries to hit players below the waist with the soccer ball. If tagged with the ball, that player gets a ball and is "It" too. Continue play until all are tagged. There are many variations of this game out there.
Your Safe!	Each player will need a ball, except those that have been designated as "It". Players that are "It" need to carry a colored pinnie or flat cone. Players with a ball try to dribble without being tagged. If they are, they exchange places with the "tagger" (The "tagger" hands the pinnie to the dribbler and takes their ball). Dribblers are safe in one of the safe zones. Only one player is allowed in a zone at a time. If a new player enters a zone, the old player must leave the zone. Add "taggers" when the players find the game to be easy. It seems about right to have one zone for every 3 players, but this number can be adjusted either way to make the game constantly interesting. This game can also be played by only allowing the "tagger" to "get" someone by kicking their ball away, not just "tagging" the person. Experiment with different combinations of "taggers" and bases to keep the players engaged.

### **Passing**

<b>Game</b>	<b>Description</b>
Target Practice	Cones set up for a target zone (or use center circle); Players stand at cones placed around equally outside of target zone. Players pass into zone. Score point for getting into zone. Players retrieve their ball – dribble back to cone and do it again. First to 5 wins. Can also use with throw ins. Use left and right foot. Increase distance as they improve.
Hit the Coach	15x15 yard grid; All players with a ball. Coach walks around the grid and players try to pass the ball to hit the coach. Players keep score. Progression: limit to right/left foot, inside foot, outside foot, laces. After a score, dribble around outside cone before they can score again.

### **Scoring**

<b>Game</b>	<b>Description</b>
Numbered Goal Game	20x20 yard grid; 3 sides have gates and one side the goal. Gates are numbered 1, 2, & 3. All players divided among the gates. Coach calls "1" everyone dribbles through gate #1, but team #1 shoots on goal. Progress to just left/right foot.
Shooting Game	Place cones around attacking side of field. One server per cone with a ball – name each server (a color, cartoon character, etc.). One shooter in front of the goal without a ball. Coach calls "red" and server named red passes ball into shooter who turns and shoots. Then coach calls another. May put parent at goal to retrieve balls and send back to servers. Shoot until they make 5. Rotate players. Progression: Shoot only left/right. Make a shark zone in front of goal to encourage long shots.
Moving Goal	20x20 yard grid; Every player with a ball. Coach and assistant hold a pinnie to make a goal moving from place to place. The kids try to score as many goals as they can.
Cone Soccer	1v1 attacking and defending the cone. Try to get the ball and knock over the cone.
Numbers Game	15x20 yard grid with goals (or cones for goals) at each end. 2 teams at each goal line. Number the players on each team. Coach rolls out a ball and calls out "2" and the number 2's of each team come out to play 1v1. Progress: call multiple numbers at same time.



## Snack Sign-up Sheet & Code of Conduct

Week	Date	Player Name	Parent Signature
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

## Soccer Parents Code of Conduct

- Parents must not coach from the sideline during matches and training. Be Cheerleaders for all the players.
- Parents should be positive, positive, positive. U6 players respond more appropriately to praise. It's just a game.
- Be your child's best fan and support him/her unconditionally. Don't withdraw your love when he/she performs below their standard.
- On transporting your child home, please be supporting and always focus on the positive aspects of their game.
- Develop a responsibility in your player to gather their gear, clean cleats and bring along water bottle full of water.
- Respect the facilities - our's & opponents'. Clean up after the game.
- Do not criticize your child's coach to your child or other parents; if you are not happy with the coach you should raise the issue with the coach - remember they are volunteers and your soccer club always needs more volunteers.
- Help your player to focus on the performance and not the result.
- Winning is not as important as the performance.
- Support all the players on your child's team. Do not criticize any player.
- Do not criticize the opponents, their parents, coaches or the referee.