

U8 Coaching Resources – Garrett Youth Soccer

Most of the information listed in this document are summarized/taken from the United States Youth Soccer Player Development Model.

U8 players are still developing their basic motor skills but should start to incorporate a ball into more of their play. More games encouraging eye-hand and eye-foot coordination should be included.

Coaches should continue to use a player-centered approach to their coaching. Children in the U8 age group still play predominately as individuals and occasionally with a partner. The coach should set up numerous activities where the players are together but are still involved in individual play.

General Characteristics of the U8 Age Group

- Like to show skills – need approval
- Beginning to develop some physical confidence (most can ride a bicycle)
- Lack of sense of pace – go flat out, chasing the ball until they drop
- Still in motion – twitching, jerking, scratching, and blinking are all second nature physical movements
- Still into running, jumping climbing, and rolling
- Boys and girls are still quite similar in physical and psychological development
- Attention span is a bit longer than the U6 age group
- Developing playmates
- More into imitation of the big guys (sports heroes being important)
- Still very sensitive – Dislike personal failure in front of peers, making ridicule from the coach in front of the group very destructive
- Still do not believe in the intensity of the team at all costs
- Inclined more toward small group activities

Components of the Game for the U8 Age Group*

Technique: Experiment with the qualities of a rolling or spinning ball. Introduce ball lifting, juggling, block tackle, receiving ground balls with the inside and sole of the foot, shooting with the inside of the foot, toe passing and shooting, and dribbling while changing direction. Introduce the push pass.

Fitness: Agility, eye-foot and eye-hand coordination, balance, leaping, bounding, tumbling, catching, throwing, pulling, pushing, warm-up activities and movement education. Continue education on sports nutrition with players and parents.

Psychology: Encourage working in pairs, sportsmanship, parental involvement, how to play, emotional management, creativity, dynamic activities, participation of all players in a safe and fun environment. There is still a short attention span unless the player has peaked (keep interest high). Like to show what they can do – encourage trying new things. Developing self-esteem – activities should foster positive feedback and attainable positive success.

Tactics: Back line and forward line, 1v1 attack and choosing to dribble or pass. Introduce the names of positions (fullbacks and forwards). Institute games of 2v1, 1v2, and 2v2, playing with the ball with a purpose and promoting problem solving.

*Please note that the components of the game are in a priority order for this age group.

Typical U8 Training Session

- Should not exceed one hour.
- Free play or a warm-up, each player with a ball, dynamic stretching and soccerastics – approximately 15 minutes
- Some individual body awareness activities.
- Introduce partner activities.
- A mixture of individual and partner activities. Add more maze-type games. Introduce target games with a variety of player combinations: 1v1, 2v1, 1v2, and 2v2. – approximately 25 minutes
- Conclude with a Small-Sided game of 4v4, two goals and no goalkeepers. – approximately 20 minutes.

Coaches should devote the end of each training session to playing 4v4 practice games. Fun games can also be played involving small numbers, especially 1v1, 2v1, 1v2, 2v2, 1v3, 2v3 and 3v3 leading up to the final activity of 4v4. Through these games, expose the U-8 age group to the principles of play. It is important to ensure each child has a ball and to focus on fun games. The benefit of the increased number of touches on the ball is irreplaceable. Be well prepared and have a selection of game-like activities planned while keeping in mind these young children have short attention spans.