



Best Practices

U6 to U18

By US Soccer

Presentation

- Considerations
- Age Appropriate Recommendations
- Creativity Before Tactics
- Six to Twelve Year Olds
- Fourteen to Sixteen Year Olds
- Eighteen Years and Older

Considerations

- No “One Way”
- Players need uninterrupted play
- Long-Term
 - Prepare each player to successfully recognize and solve challenges on his or her own.
- There are no secrets

Considerations

- Priority is to promote individual mastery of the ball. Creativity will come with it.
- “Drills Destroy Skills”
- Be the “Guide On The Side”
- Development comes in stages
- Know what child is capable of doing
- Development over winning with younger ages.

Considerations

- They are not “miniature pros”
- Know and learn how skills are developed and prepared through phases
- Encourage players to take risks and become creative
- Winning is neither a priority nor should be a consideration
- “Begin with the end in mind”
- Experimenting is ok
- The game is the best teacher

“As a kid you need to touch the ball as much as you can. You should always be with the ball. You should have a feeling that wherever the ball is, you can do anything with it. No matter where it is, where it is on your body, how it’s spinning, how it’s coming at you, the speed it’s coming at you, anything. You can learn the tactical side of the game later.”



Landon Donovan, USA World Cup hero, in *Soccer America*, July 2002

“It’s amazing to me that people put so much emphasis on trying to be tactical and worry about winning when it doesn’t matter when you’re 12 years old. We’re going to have big, strong, fast players. We’re Americans, we’re athletes. But if we never learn at an early age to be good on the ball, then it’s just useless.”



Landon Donovan, USA World Cup hero, in *Soccer America*, July 2002

Only 2 Teams Need To Win....



Age Appropriate Recommendations

- Skills and Creativity Before Tactics
- Player Centered vs. Coach Centered
- Organized Chaos vs. Organization
- Provide a “Pick-up” environment (U6-U12)
- From 6-10 Soccer is not a “Team Sport”
 - Ball should be the focus
 - Don’t demand better players to share ball
 - Bring other players up to their level
 - Coaches should not be “puppet masters”
- Making mistakes is part of the journey

“For some reason, adults – some who can’t even kick a ball – think it’s perfectly okay to scream at children while they’re playing soccer. How normal would it seem if a mother gave a six-year-old some crayons and a coloring book and started screaming? “Use the red crayon! Stay in the lines! Don’t use yellow!” You think that child would develop a passion for drawing? Most important, parents must realize that playing sports is a way for children to express themselves.”

Claudio Reyna, US World Cup Captain

Product vs. Process Learning



Six to Twelve Year Olds

- Ball Control and Creativity
- Recommendations For Training
- Recommendations For Matches
- Recommendations For Tournaments



Pre-Academy Level

U6-U8

- Ball is their toy and should be at their feet!
- Match Format:
 - 3v3 (U6) No Goalkeepers
 - 4v4 (U8) Goalkeepers Optional
- No Organized Matches
- Training Duration:
 - U6: 30 to 45 minutes
 - U8: 45 to 60 minutes
- FUN!!



Academy Level

U10-U12

- Far from being the polished product.
- Match Format
 - U10 6v6 including a goalkeeper
 - U12 9v9 including a goalkeeper
 - U14 11v11
- Development over Results
- Training Considerations: Simple and Player Centered. No more than 60 minutes

Academy Level

U10-12

- Substitution Considerations
 - Let them play for an extended period of time.
 - Minimum 50% of match.
 - Should not be used to punish player for a soccer-related decision.
- Do you notice and uneven skill level within your team?
 - Try 3 balls going at once
 - Putting more confident players together

Academy Level

U10-12

- Role of the coach
 - Be The Guide On The Side!
 - Don't focus on positions!
 - No Information Overload!
- FUN!



Academy Level

U10-12

- Other considerations
 - Number of Matches
 - U10-20 per year
 - U12-30 per year
 - Travel
 - U10-In state travel only with 1 hour maximum time. No standings or awards
 - U12-Limited to day trips with two overnight events per calendar year. No standings or awards
 - Tournaments
 - U10-Attend Few Jamborees or Festivals-No results
 - U12-Organized into a round-robin format

Junior Level

U14-16

- Now playing full-sided
- Focus on team issues as well as individual.
- Consider too many matches-desensitizes players to concept of “match day”.
- Training Duration: 75-90 minutes
 - Sound technical training
 - Set up conditions for players to learn and read cues and clues.

Junior Level

U14-16

- Soccer Age vs. Chronological Age
- Still far from being complete player
- Attention to organization of team but with smaller groups.
- Team Meeting Discussion
- Number of Matches:
 - 30 per calendar year
- Break for an extended period

Junior Level

U14-16

- U16 Age group grasping larger team concepts.
- Need to learn by experiencing the game.
- Tournaments:
 - U14-Travel to competitions within region.
 - U16-no more than 160 minutes in a 72 hour period.

Senior Level

U18 and Above

- Training should contain:
 - Competition
 - Critical Thinking
 - Technical Repetition
- Physical Fitness plays a larger role
- Training Duration-90 minutes
- Number of matches:
 - 30 per calendar year
 - Be Given two days rest per week
- Tournaments-no more than 180 minutes in a 72 hour period.

The Bottom Line is that.....



Is more important than

