

Characteristics of U8 Soccer Players

(Second & Third Grade)

Developmentally Appropriate:

No goalkeepers in the U8 age group, so all players may chase the ball around the field. The kids want to be where the action is; at this age, it is around the ball. This will allow the children to develop their running further, jumping and kicking coordination. These are valuable traits for all soccer players to develop. The smaller number of players considers the egocentrism of this age group and, therefore, allows each child more opportunities for shooting, passing, and dribbling the ball. With fewer players on the field, each child has an increased number of contacts with the ball and more actual playing time. Additionally, the players must make more decisions and frequently experience repeated game situations. The involvement of players will be more consistent. While learning offense and defense, players will become well-rounded and more readily understand teammates' roles and importance. Children in the U8 age group will intentionally play in pairs. The smaller number of players on the field will make it easier and more likely that passing and receiving will occur.

- Physical Development
- Mental Development
- Social Development

Physical Development

- The skeletal system is still growing, and growth plates are near the joints. Thus, injuries to those areas merit special consideration.
- The cardiovascular system is less efficient than an adult's; a child's heart rate peaks sooner and takes longer to recover.
- Temperature regulation systems are less efficient than adults; children elevate their core temperature more quickly and take longer to cool than adults.
- Improvement in pace and coordination from U6; however, the immaturity of a U8's physical abilities is obvious.

Mental Development

- The limited ability to tend to multiple tasks simultaneously leaves little or no "tactical" decision-making capacity.
- The concept of time and space relationship is just beginning to develop, and it will be limited by the capacity to attend to multiple tasks.
- Limited experience with personal evaluation; effort is synonymous with performance.

Social Development

- Self-concept and body image are beginning to develop but are very fragile.
- There is a great need for approval from adults such as parents, teachers, and coaches; people like to show individual skills.
- Easily bruised psychologically by adults; negative comments carry great weight.
- I like to play soccer because it is "fun" and intrinsically motivated.
- Their universe is expanded to the neighborhood.
- True playmates emerge with the inclination toward small group activities.
- There is a desire for social acceptance; they want everyone to like them.

General Characteristics of Children U8

- Their attention spans are longer than U6's, but they are still not at the "team at all costs" intensity.
- Inclined more toward group activities.
- Still in motion - twitching, jerking, scratching, and blinking are all second nature physical movements.
- Santa Claus is no longer a peer topic of discussion.
- Boys and girls still quite similar in physical and psychological development
- Beginning to develop some physical confidence (most can ride a two-wheeler).
- Still into running, jumping, climbing, and rolling
- More into imitation of the big guys (sports heroes becoming important)
- Unfortunately, at present, few are soccer players.

U8 Players STILL LACK A SENSE OF PACE – THEY WILL GO FLAT OUT.

(They will chase the ball until they drop)

Typical U8 Training Session

- A typical U8 training session should not exceed 1 hour.
- Warm-up, each player with a ball, dynamic stretching and (soccernastics, juggling), (15 min.)
- Introduce partner activities.
- A mixture of individual and partner activities
- Maze-type games introduce target games. (25 min.)
- Conclude with a small-sided game 4v4 to two goals, no GK's. (20 min.)

U8 Coaching Activities Checklist:

- Are the activities fun?
- Are the activities organized?
- Are the players involved in the activities?
- Is creativity and decision-making being used?
- Are the spaces used appropriately?
- Is the coach's feedback appropriate?
- Is the coach guiding or controlling the players in the activity?
- Are there implications for the game?