

# Training the U6 Player

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## Principles of Youth Coaching

- Developmentally appropriate activities
- Clear, concise and correct information
- Simple to complex progression
- Safe and appropriate training area
- Opportunities for players to make decisions
- Implications for the game

## Game/Activity Checklist

- Are the activities FUN?
- Are the players involved in the activities?
- Is creativity and decision making being used?
- Is the space appropriate for the age group and number of players?
- Is the coach's feedback appropriate?
- What are the implications for the game?

## Understanding the U6 Player

Five and six year olds have a limited attention span, coordination and body awareness; and most are just learning to appreciate the difficulties associated with something as simple as a soccer ball. They can dribble in straight lines and turn in wide areas. They can kick with the laces and toes and they can even stop the ball if it is not traveling too fast or coming out of the air. They will pass to teammates if they have time to assess their location and time to coordinate their kick. They are also willing to chase the ball when not in possession. The U6 player has no practical concept of space, teamwork and very little tolerance to complicated rules.

## U6 Coaching Philosophy

Keep it simple and FUN! At the U6 level, the primary concern is age appropriate activities geared toward frequent contact with the ball and making sure the players are having fun. One player, one ball activities, and various "fun games" are excellent compliments to small sided soccer at this age.

## Game Classifications

- **Body Awareness** – activities that emphasize the use of body parts, motion, coordination and balance with and without the ball.
- **Target Games** – activities that involve solving the objective by going from point A to point B. These activities are more directional and defined and can be done with and without the ball.
- **Maze Games** – activities in which the player has the opportunity to move 360 degrees or in a circle environment with and without the ball. Even though the area may be defined, it does not necessarily have a specific target of boundary to go to. These activities allow players to make decisions while moving all directions.

## Games and Activities

### Ball Retrieve (Body Awareness/Target Game)

The coach stands in the middle of the training area and collects all of the balls. The coach then throws the balls in different directions and players must bring the ball back to the coach as quick as possible. The coach can then put various conditions on how to retrieve the ball (example: with one hand, one foot, head only, knees, right foot/left foot alternating, etc.). Once the players have mastered the exercise, the coach can then put additional conditions on the players to solve.

### **Body Part Dribble (Body Awareness)**

Each player has a ball in an area such as a 20 x 30 space. Players dribble their ball in the space and avoid touching other players. While they dribble, the coach calls out certain body parts (example: foot, knee or head) and the players respond – similar to a “Simon Says” activity. After the player has touched the body part to the ball, the player should then immediately continue to dribble. This activity promotes listening skills and reinforces the knowledge of body parts and coordination.

### **Glob (Target Game)**

Players like this so much they would likely perform this activity for the entire training period. Begin with a ball. Use cones to outline the sidelines and the finish line (20 x 30) space should be adequate. Stand in the middle of the area and talk and act like a Glob, challenging the players to try to run (without the ball) across the space without being tagged by the Glob. Once the players have mastered the game, the players must accomplish the same task but must dribble the ball while the Glob tries to get their ball. Re-entry to the game can be done by toe-taps on the ball or otherwise.

### **Everybody’s It (Maze Game)**

This activity borders on the edge of controlled chaos. In an appropriately sized space (20 x 30), develop boundaries. Each player runs around while staying inside the boundaries, trying to tag as many players as possible without being tagged themselves. Give a signal when to begin and let them play for a minute or so. Add a ball to their feet once they have mastered the game. It’s a game about vision and awareness. They need to learn how to move into spaces (tag) and out of spaces (avoid being tagged).

### **Gates (Maze Game)**

The coach places cones throughout the training area (20 x 30) in pairs about a yard apart. Upon command, players dribble a ball through as many “gates” in the time specified by the coach (one minute or so). Each player keeps count of how many “gates” they were able to go through. Add conditions as the players become master of the exercise (example: right or left foot only, alternate feet, inside or outside, etc.). Each player repeats the exercise and task with the opportunity to beat their own score. It is appropriate for younger players to learn to compete against themselves.

### **Freeze/Tunnel Tag (Maze Game)**

Every player starts without a ball in a designated area with (2) “taggers” in different color bibs. Once the coach says begin, the “taggers” begin to tag as many players as possible. If tagged, they have to freeze with their legs apart and they can be unfrozen if a player crawls through the frozen players legs. Swap “taggers” every minute or so. Add a ball and call the activity **Tunnel Tag**, but the players must now dribble (pass) the ball through the frozen player’s legs to release them.

### **Minefield (Body Awareness, Maze Game and Target Game)**

Divide your players into two teams. Designate a training area with appropriate size. Use disc cones and spread them out evenly throughout the area. Put ½ the cones upside down and the other ½ right side up. Have one team try and turn the cones upside down, while the other turns them right side up. The team who turn the most cones over as designated wins. Start the exercise over with the team who won having to turn the opposite team’s cones over which put them at a disadvantage to begin. Introduce a ball once they have mastered the exercise. Note: once the Minefield Game is complete, use the cones in the area as Minefields while dribbling – teaching the player’s ball control in a fun and challenging environment. Increase the conditions on the players as they master the exercise (example: right foot only, inside foot, right/left foot alternating, etc.).

It is important in all games and activities to have the players begin without a ball. Once the players have adjusted to the rules and objective of the games, introduce a ball and increase the challenges to the players.

**Keep it simple and FUN!**