



# U8 Soccer Coaching Fundamentals

Fall 2014

# Introduction

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- ▶ Many U8 coaches are parents/volunteers that may or may not have experience playing or coaching soccer. This presentation is specifically intended to provide a baseline understanding for coaches that will ensure the players and the coaches have a fun season.
- ▶ For some players, this will be their first formal soccer team, while others have been playing for 4+ years competitively. If each player does not feel like it is fun, they likely will not continue playing soccer. It is important to assess the various skill levels and focus on improving each player through the season based on their level.
- ▶ It is important we coach our U8 players based on their mental and physical capabilities. Players will achieve their maximum potential and sense of accomplishment if we provide them the best opportunity possible to grow as soccer players.



## Before the Season Starts

*'Football is a simple game made complicated by people who should know better.'*

*~ Bill Shankley,  
Liverpool Mgr,  
1968*

# Getting Your Season Started

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- ▶ Contact all players via email or phone to welcome them to the team, leaving your contact information and acceptable ways to contact you throughout the season. Make sure everyone is contacted, may need to email and then follow up with phone calls. Ask everyone to RSVP so you know they are aware of the schedule.
- ▶ Send out a team introduction email with a list of your expectations for the players, parents and spectators. Some of the items to mention in your email are:
  - ▶ Philosophy and Objectives
  - ▶ Uniforms
  - ▶ Schedule
  - ▶ Equipment (Cleats, Shin Pads, Bug Spray, etc)
  - ▶ Expected Behavior and Code of Conduct – include link to BYSA Rules  
(<http://bridgewateryouthsoccer.com/bysa/downloads/BYSA%20Rules%20Regs%200909.pdf>)
  - ▶ Medical Conditions
  - ▶ Where and when to meet for the first time



# Getting Your Season Started

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- ▶ Look for an assistant coach. Paying attention to everyone's needs during the practice and game is a multi-person job!
- ▶ Assistant coaches can handle the sideline players while you focus on coaching.
- ▶ You can also split the substitution duties between the two of you (you handle offense/midfielder subs, they handle defense subs).
- ▶ All coaches and assistant coaches need to fill out a CORI.
- ▶ When emailing your parents for the first time, be sure to say, 'I will do my best to ensure equal playing time for all players throughout the **SEASON**'.



## Coaching U8 Players

*Kids don't care  
how much you  
know, until  
they know how  
much you care.  
- Unknown*



# Characteristics of U8

- **tend to play well in pairs** – unlike 6 year-olds, these children enjoy playing in pairs. Try to set up the pairs yourself to control the games and manage the personalities.
- **are now able to take another's perspective** – they now have a sense of how other people are feeling.
- **heating and cooling system still less efficient than adults** – still make sure to give frequent water breaks.
- **still much prefer playing to watching** – keep everyone active during practice and remember, no lines.

- **limited attention span (on average 15-20 seconds for listening, up to 20 minutes when engaged in a task)** – this may vary greatly on any given day depending on school, diet, etc. Try to get a gauge each day and do not fight crankiness.
- **have an understanding of time and sequence** – they now understand “if I do this, then that happens”.
- **many have incorporated a third or fourth speed into play** – not all players, but many players now have incorporated a speed or two between stopped and as fast as possible.

# Characteristics of U8

- **seek out adult approval** – be supportive when they ask about their performance or try to show you skills. They very much need reassurance and you need to help build their confidence to try new things at this age.
- **extremely aware of adult reactions** – be very aware of your verbal and nonverbal reactions, as they look for your reaction frequently.
- **begin to become aware of peer perception** – a social order is beginning to develop. Be sensitive to this.

- **wide range of abilities between children at this age** – children all develop at varying paces. Your challenge is to manage this range in your practice in a way that challenges each player at a level that is reasonable for that player.
- **some will keep score** – the competitive motors churn faster in some than others. We do not need to stress winning and losing at this age. Results should not be important at this age.
- **beginning to develop motor memories** – by attempting beginning technical skills they are training their bodies to remember certain movements.



# Technical Development of U8 Players

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- ▶ The U8 player is now ready to continue development of dribbling skills, and begin passing and shooting, however touches on the ball and fun are still the focus from a technical standpoint.
- ▶ The skill priorities of U8 players are:
  - ▶ Dribble with all sides of both feet
  - ▶ Dribble out of trouble
  - ▶ Dribble past someone
  - ▶ Shielding
  - ▶ Soft first touch
  - ▶ Introduce proper shooting technique
  - ▶ Introduce passing



# Challenging Situations

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## ▶ Aggression

- ▶ Needs to be addressed so safety of others is protected.
- ▶ Provide 1-3 'Strikes' before disciplining the player (sit out practice)
- ▶ Return to removed player after 1 minute and ask what they did to be removed. If not compliant, give more time for player to cool down.
- ▶ Communicate with parents and BYSA if chronic or serious problem.

## ▶ Hyperactivity

- ▶ Ask yourself if the hyperactivity is disrupting the team/players before addressing it.
- ▶ Try to think of ways to use their energy (pick up cones for me).

## ▶ Withdrawn Behavior

- ▶ Some children just need a 'safe bridge' into group play which could be you, an assistant coach or a teammate asking to be their partner.



# Running a Successful Practice/Game

## **The Bottom Line**

*Prepare -  
Prepare -  
Prepare!*



# Practices

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HAVE A PRACTICE PLAN!!! Come to practice with an idea of the activities and points you want to stress. Always have 1-2 favorites in your back pocket in case an activity is not working out. Don't be afraid to stop an activity if it isn't going well.

A good format for preparing your practices is:

## 1. Warm Up

Technical warm up complementing the practice theme

## 2. Small Sided Activity

1 v 1 or 2 v 2 activity

Does not have to be directional

## 3. Expanded Small Sided Activity

3 v 3 or 4 v 4

Should be directional

Keepers are optional

## 4. Scrimmage

Always end with full field, full numbers scrimmage

Include keepers

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# Practices

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- ▶ Each team is expected to have one 1 hour practice each week.
- ▶ Activities should last approximately 8-12 minutes each.
- ▶ Take sufficient water breaks.
- ▶ Always position yourself so that you can see all players.
- ▶ **BE ENERGETIC AND ANIMATED!!!** The players will respond to your demeanor. Remember, a focus of U8 players is seeking out adult approval.
- ▶ The best teacher is the game. Coaches who create a game-like environment foster success.
- ▶ Remember, this is the first time many players are learning positions. Spend ample time explaining the four positions and the primary roles of each (Quadrants).
- ▶ **No Lines, No Lectures, No Laps!!!**



# Practices

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- ▶ Keep your instructions to a minimum. Do not talk for more than 20 seconds at a time.
- ▶ Position next activity while the last one ends or during a water break. Down time allows loss of attention for the players.
- ▶ Keep all players involved as much as possible. If you play a knockout game, ensure those that are knocked out are not sitting long. Instead, perhaps have them perform a task on the sideline to get back in (toe taps).
- ▶ In early season practices, teach a few fundamental things that they can use in games right away.
  - ▶ Turn the ball around
  - ▶ Dribbling with both feet or all sides of your feet
  - ▶ Proper shooting and passing technique
  - ▶ Dribbling to a target (goal)

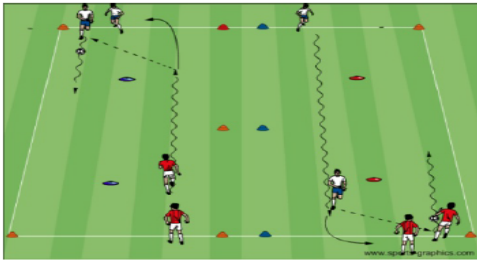
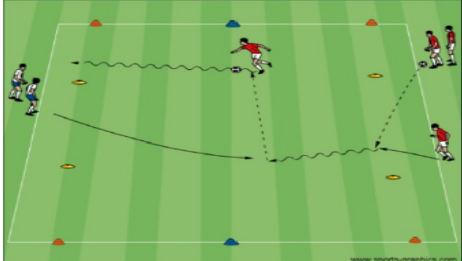



# Sample Practice Plan

NAME: Instructor

TOPIC: Dribbling – Running with the Ball

Objective: To improve the player's ability to run with the ball at his/her feet

<p><b>Technical Warm up</b></p> 	<p><b>Organization</b></p> <p><b><u>Man Utd. Running with the Ball:</u></b>            Make a grid 10 yds. x 30 yds. long. Divide the grids in two 5 yd. lanes. Place at least two players of different teams at the end of the lanes to the right of the grid.            The activity starts by one of the players running with the ball. When the player in possession of the ball runs by the second cone he/she can pass the ball to the next runner.</p>	<p><b>Coaching Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take an aggressive first touch forward into space</li> <li>• Push the ball forward with the instep (Laces and outside of the foot)</li> <li>• Each touch of the ball should push it a few steps ahead of the dribbler</li> <li>• Keep a natural running stride</li> <li>• In between touches, the head is up and the eyes scan the field</li> </ul> <p><i>Time: 10 minutes</i></p>
<p><b>Small Sided Activity</b></p> 	<p><b>Organization</b></p> <p><b><u>2v1 to End Zones:</u></b>            In a defined area place two attackers behind the end zone and the defenders behind the opposite end zone. The attacker will score by dribbling (running) the ball into the end zone. If the defender gets the ball he/she can also run with the ball into the end zone.            The activity starts when the player with the ball passes to his/her partner. The Dribblino receives the ball and runs with the ball. If the defender confronts the dribblino, he/she has the option to pass to his/her partners to run the ball into the end zone and score.</p>	<p><b>Coaching Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get the ball out of the feet – good first touch</li> <li>• Run quickly with the ball</li> <li>• Minimum number of touches</li> <li>• Use the front of the foot – laces, to push the ball in front</li> <li>• Use an unbroken stride and head up</li> <li>• When confronted with defenders take them on by changing direction of the ball and take a big touch</li> </ul> <p><i>Time: 12 minutes</i></p>
<p><b>Exp. Small Sided Activity</b></p> 	<p><b>Organization</b></p> <p><b><u>3v3 to End Zones:</u></b>            Two teams play in a defined space with each team attacking an end-zone defended by the opponent. Teams score points when a player dribbles into the End-Zone.  <b>Coach:</b> Encourage players to recognize opportunities to burst and run with the ball into space under control.</p>	<p><b>Coaching Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get the ball out of the feet</li> <li>• Use the front of the foot – laces, to push the ball in front</li> <li>• Use an unbroken stride and head up</li> <li>• When confronted with defenders take them on by changing direction of the ball and take a big touch</li> <li>• Work together to score</li> <li>• Use support players to make attacking decisions</li> </ul> <p><i>Time: 12 minutes</i></p>
<p><b>Free Scrimmage 5v5 – 6v6</b></p> <p><b>5v5 – 6v6</b></p>	<p><b>Organization</b></p> <p>Play with Goalkeepers and encourage him/her to communicate with teammates</p>	<p><b>Coaching Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching in the game</li> </ul> <p><i>Time: 12 minutes</i></p>
<p><b>Cool Down</b></p>	<p>Activities to reduce heart rate, static stretching &amp; review session.</p> <p><i>Time: 5 minutes</i></p>	

# Mosston's Slanty Line Theory

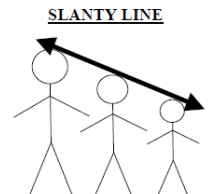
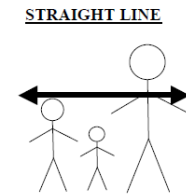
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Not every player will have the same skill, maturity and ability. The goal is to run a practice that will challenge each player at a level that befits their ability.

Everyone has the chance to improve, no matter their position on the slant line they are at in ability.

Put more skilled players at more challenging positions and weaker players in less challenging positions, without drawing attention to the changes. Examples would be:

- 3 v 1 for four most skilled players
- 3 v 2 for five less skilled players
- Most skilled player is extra in 3 v 3 +





# Games, Playing Time and Positions

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- ▶ Before every game, introduce yourself to the other coach and the referee.
- ▶ Playing time must be equal – no exceptions
- ▶ Positions in U8 are two offensive players (forwards), two defensive players (defense) and one goalie.
- ▶ Explain to players the main responsibility of Offense (to score goals) and Defense (to keep the ball out of your net), though all players are responsible for all aspects of the game.
- ▶ Each player should try every position at least once. At this age, players should not be relegated to one position, even if they ask. Players need to learn the skills needed at each position.
- ▶ Wins and losses mean absolutely nothing. While you should be mindful of the score to encourage a competitive game, do not stress it with players.



# Mismatched Games

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- ▶ You will play teams much weaker and stronger than you. All games are opportunities for players to learn, we just need to make appropriate adjustments.
- ▶ Rule of thumb – 5 goal lead is time to make adjustments to your team.
  - ▶ Play with a sweeper and only one forward
  - ▶ Defense and midfielder can't pass half field
  - ▶ 5 passes before shooting
- ▶ When losing by large deficit, continue to motivate your players to compete. Also, use the other teams tactics and skill as an example for players on the bench. Try to find positives to take out of the game:
  - ▶ We lost the first half 6-0, but tied the second half 1-1, huge improvement...
  - ▶ You kept fighting all the way to the end, be proud of yourself
  - ▶ Every player has games they lose, what is important is that you give 100% and learn from every game



# Injuries

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- ▶ Stop play and ask all players to take a knee.
- ▶ Determine if the injury is real or just needs a little attention.
- ▶ Medical kits are located at half field.
- ▶ If the injury requires attention, you may want to call the players parent over to assist and make decisions on how to treat.
- ▶ Follow up with parent after the game if needed.
- ▶ Report the injury to the BYSA if needed.



# Parents and Spectators

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- ▶ As parents and players are often new to the game and world of soccer, it is extremely important to communicate with parents.
  - ▶ Setting expectations before the season is vital to prevent confusion and stunt potential problems. Sending out an introductory email or handout at the first game with team expectations insures that your words are not being misconstrued. Also, if there is a problem down the line, you can reference that document. In this document, you should cover:
    - ▶ Team Goals – Have fun...
    - ▶ Style of Play – Try new things and be creative
    - ▶ Attendance – Let me know if you can't make it
    - ▶ Discipline – Policy for handling bad behavior
    - ▶ Communication – Phone numbers, email, text or in person meeting if needed
    - ▶ Sideline Behavior – Be mindful of your comments on the sideline about your own child and other parents children.
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# Coaches Code of Conduct

## **The Bottom Line**

*You, your  
assistant coach,  
your players and  
the parents on  
your team all  
represent  
Bridgewater  
Youth Soccer -  
act accordingly*

# MA Youth Soccer Code of Conduct

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- ▶ Before, during and after the game, be an example of dignity, patience and positive spirit.
- ▶ Before a game, introduce yourself to the opposing coach and to the referee.
- ▶ During the game, you are responsible for the sportsmanship of your players. If one of your players is disrespectful, irresponsible or overly aggressive, take the player out of the game at least long enough for him/her to calm down.
- ▶ During the game, you are also responsible for the conduct of the parents of your players.
- ▶ It is imperative to explain acceptable player and parent behavior in a preseason meeting.
- ▶ Encourage them to applaud and cheer for good plays by either team. Discourage them and you may need to be forceful and direct from yelling at players and the referee.



# MA Youth Soccer Code of Conduct

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- ▶ During the game, you are also responsible for the conduct of spectators rooting for your team.
- ▶ During the game, do not address the referee at all. If you have a small issue, discuss it with the referee calmly and patiently after the game.
- ▶ If you have a major complaint, or if you think the referee was unfair, biased, unfit or incompetent, report your opinion to your League. Your reactions will be taken seriously if they are presented objectively and formally.
- ▶ After the game, thank the referee and ask your players to do the same.



# Final Thought

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- ▶ Your example is powerful, for better or worse.
- ▶ If you insist on fair play, if you concentrate on your players' enjoyment of the game and their overall, long term development, and if you support the referee, your players and their parents will notice.
- ▶ If you encourage (or allow) your players to play outside the rules, if you're overly concerned about results, and if you criticize the referee harshly, your players and their parents will also notice.





## Useful Web Sites

*The following sites offer a host of drills and skill sessions to make practice planning and execution simple and easy.*



# Useful Web Sites

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- ▶ [www.mayouthsoccer.org/coach's\\_corner.aspx](http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/coach's_corner.aspx)
  - ▶ [www.weplay.com/youth-soccer/drills](http://www.weplay.com/youth-soccer/drills)
  - ▶ [www.soccerxpert.com](http://www.soccerxpert.com)
  - ▶ [www.footy4kids.co.uk](http://www.footy4kids.co.uk)
  - ▶ [www.sportsessionplanner.com](http://www.sportsessionplanner.com) (go to “Sessions”)
  - ▶ [www.soccer-training-guide.com/soccer-drills.html](http://www.soccer-training-guide.com/soccer-drills.html)
  - ▶ [www.freeyouthsoccerdrills.com](http://www.freeyouthsoccerdrills.com)
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  - ▶ [www.bettersoccercoaching.com](http://www.bettersoccercoaching.com)
  - ▶ [www.youthtoprosoccer.com](http://www.youthtoprosoccer.com)
  - ▶ [www.soccerdrills.net](http://www.soccerdrills.net) (limited free material)
  - ▶ [www.soccerpracticebooks.com](http://www.soccerpracticebooks.com) (pay site)
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# Sources

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- ▶ Massachusetts Youth Soccer Coach Curriculum
  - ▶ G-D level course materials
- ▶ Salmon Creek Soccer Web Site
- ▶ Mass. Premier Soccer Handbooks
- ▶ Twitter
  - ▶ Tony Taylor @Tad690
  - ▶ Coaching Family @coachingfamily
  - ▶ Lee Merricks @cosmosoccerCA
  - ▶ Rob Parker @goaliecoach00

