

# Characteristics of U6 Soccer Players

(Kindergarten, First Grade)

## Developmentally Appropriate:

No goalkeepers in the U6 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 coordination of running, jumping, and kicking. These are valuable traits for all soccer players to develop. The smaller number of players considers the egocentrism of this age group, allowing each child more opportunities for shooting 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. It is important to note that children in the U6 age group are egocentric (me, my, and mine)! The smaller number of players on the field will make it easier and more likely that dribbling, shooting, and scoring will occur.

- Physical Development
- Mental Development
- Social Development

## Physical Development

- The skeletal system is 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.
- The immaturity of U6's physical abilities is obvious, as they cannot pace themselves and struggle with balance and coordination.

## Mental Development

- The limited ability to tend to more than one task at a time leaves little or no capacity for tactical decision-making.
- The concept of time and space relationship has yet to develop, and it will limit the capacity to attend to multiple tasks.
- Limited experience with personal evaluation; effort is synonymous with performance.

## Social Development

- Early stages in the development of self-concept, body awareness, and self-image through movement
- Egocentric see the world only from their perspective. Demonstrated through parallel play
- 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.
- Need generous praise. Play without pressure.
- An influential person in their life is most likely their mother or significant parent.
- May verbalize team but does not understand group or collective play.
- 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: U6 Players have NO SENSE OF PACE – THEY WILL GO FLAT OUT.** (They will chase the ball until they drop)

- Short attention span
- Mostly individually oriented (me, my, mine)
- Constantly in motion
- Psychologically easily bruised
- Little or no concern for team activities

- Believe in Santa Claus, but will not discuss with peers
- The physical & psychological development of boys & girls are quite similar
- Physical coordination immature
- Eye-hand and/or eye-foot coordination is primitive at best
- Love to run, jump & roll
- Like to roll on the ground
- Enjoy climbing
- Prefer large soft balls (e.g., nerf balls)
- Skills required to catch a ball are not developed
- Can balance on preferred foot

#### **Typical U6 Training Session**

- A typical U6 training session should not exceed (45) minutes
- Every child should have a ball
- Warm-up activities should include balance coordination and agility; all activities should be done with a ball.
- Thinking games/creativity games: encourage players to use their imagination. (15 min.)
- Games Activities, mostly of a body awareness type, and some maze games. (20 min.)
- Finish with 3v3 game to small goals, NO GK's (10 min).

#### **U6 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?