

Training the U10 Player

By Greg Maas, UYSA Technical Director

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 U10 Player

Nine and ten year olds can be very creative in their play. The best young players at this age move well with the game, move the ball quickly between teammates, defend with power and aggression and generally play soccer in a way that can be exciting to watch. For the best ten year olds, the vision to determine “what next” starts before the ball arrives and their ability to apply sound technique are becoming evident. Nine and ten year olds can understand the value of technical repetition and are much more willing to practice independently. They will head the ball and are more likely to try to control balls coming out of the air. Their passing range is vastly increased and they can pass and control the ball comfortably with most surfaces of their feet. Feinting and “faking” are common features of play for the more gifted players at this age.

U10 Coaching Philosophy

Keep it simple and FUN! At this stage, players start to identify themselves with a “team” and will be much more motivated to attend to formal instruction and repetitive practice activities; therefore, individual play, ball movement, support and small group tactics are vital to successful training. Improving and refining individual play through technical repetition is an important goal of this period and small group tactical awareness can be rapidly expanded. Improved vision and support are the tactical markers of this age and improved ball movement is achieved as players understand about possession and rhythm of play. The better players in this age group will begin to combine with each other and goalkeepers should be frequently rotated. It is very important that players are exposed to playing every position frequently.

U10 Training Session Format

- Should not exceed more than 1 hour.
- Warm-up, each player with a ball and stretching (10 minutes).
- A mixture of individual and partner activities (25 minutes).
- Conclude with small sided games of 4 v 4 to 6 v 6 with or without goalkeepers (20 minutes).
- Cool down with dynamic movements (i.e., high knees, heels, skipping, etc.) and stretching (5 minutes).

Games and Activities

Crazy Box Dribble

Players dribble the ball in a confined area while demonstrating various dribbling techniques. Players must learn to avoid each other while maintaining control of the ball and themselves. Players focus on decision making, technical ball skills and movement into space. Change the exercise by adding one or two defenders without a ball who then attempt to steal the ball away from the attackers. If they successfully steal the ball, the defender keeps the ball and the attacker then switches to defender.

Tunnel Tag (Freeze Tag)

One or two players are the taggers; all other players dribble a ball within a confined area. Taggers attempt to tag as many players as possible. If tagged, a player must freeze and place their ball above their head and spread their legs apart to create a tunnel. Teammates can “un-freeze” players by passing the ball between their legs. Once a player is unfrozen, they dribble as before. Rotate taggers until everyone has had the opportunity to tag.

Knockout (Sharks and Minnows)

All players dribble a ball in a confined area. On the coaches’ signal, players must control their ball, while at the same time, attempting to kick other player’s balls out the area. If a player’s ball is kicked from the area, they must juggle or do toe taps prior to re-entering the game. Players must work to possess the ball and make proper decisions under pressure.

Change Game (Musical Balls)

All players dribble a ball in a confined area. At the end of a short period of time, the coach yells “change” or blows a whistle; players must then get to someone else’s ball as quickly as possible and sit on it or do toe taps. Last player to a ball loses their ball, but stays in the game and attempts to get a ball back on the coaches’ next signal to “change.” The game can continue until all but one ball is left. Players must work on ball control, vision and quickness.

Shadow Dance

Players are set up in pairs each with a ball. The first player dribbles the ball utilizing deceptive dribbling techniques, feints and fakes. The second player must keep their ball within the first player’s “shadow.” Players demonstrate individual dribbling techniques, tracking, creativity and soccer fitness.

Ball Wars

Everyone has a ball dribbling in a confined area. Each player can score a point by dribbling and/or shooting their ball into another player’s ball. This encourages individual attacking and defending tactics.

Top Gun

The game begins with two players on opposite sides of the grid (with plenty of balls each). The rest of the players run from one line (length of the area) to the other. Players with the balls, attempt to hit the players running through the area – BELOW THE WAIST. If a player is hit, they become one of the shooters. The “Top Gun” is the sole surviving player. Players demonstrate passing accuracy, timing, quickness, agility and soccer fitness.

Cooler Ball

Divide players into two or three teams. Put a large cooler (or any safe target) in the middle of the field and use one or two balls. Teams compete against each other. To score, a team simply has to hit the target with the ball. This game encourages teamwork, attacking and defending tactics.

Keep it simple and FUN!