DEVELOPMENTAL
STEP 1

Step 1: Me and the Ball U6 - U8

General Descriptions	Important Training Priorities

General Descriptions

- Motor skills are still developing.

- Short attention and concentration spans.

- Players are very "Me" oriented. "My ball". Because of this training should be focused around each player having a ball at their feet.

- Use this "Me" time to develop individual technical skills on the ball.

- Players like to play games. Disguising technical work in fun games is a must to keep players engaged.

- Gracious sportsmanship should be reinforced.

- Learn through trial and error

- There can be large differences in ability at these ages. It is important to keep players grouped not only by age but also by ability. Everyone will develop at different rates.

- Players play because it is FUN!

Important Training Priorities

- Positive reinforcement should be used to get the best response for players.

- Keep your practice sessions simple and fun. Players in step 1 play because it is FUN!

- The game is the best teacher so PLAY! Play as much as you can.

- Individual ball mastery is the foundation at these ages. Introduce activities and skills that will improve players' comfort on the ball.

- Players tends to bunch up - encourage players to find space when they have the ball and when they do not have the ball

- Create opportunities for players to make decisions (U8).

- Encourage and incorporate juggling into your training session. Give specific juggling patterns for players to try. EXAMPLE: start with ball in hands - bounce ball on one (right) thigh and then catch. PROGRESS - bounce ball on right thigh then left thigh and then catch.

Age Appropriate Principles of Play - Attacking			
		How it looks in training:	
U6	Penetration	• On the dribble. • Focus on positive first touch into space. • Running with the ball/overall agility.	• Beating defenders by going around them. • Simple changes of direction. • Finding space-head going up and seeing where to dribble.
	Improvisation, Creativity	• Individual ball mastery is critical. • shielding, ball manipulation.	• Change of speed and direction • Introduction of simple 1v1 moves to beat a defender. • Try different moves. Be creative and don't be afraid to fail.
	Mobility	Recognition that standing will not help you. Players should always be mobile, and moving during games and practice to help themselves and their teammates.	
	Support	Not a main priority for this age.	
	Width	Not a main priority for this age.	

Age Appropriate Principles of Play - Attacking			
U7	Penetration	• On the dribble. • Focus on positive first touch into space. • Running with the ball/overall agility.	• Beating defenders by going around them. • Simple changes of direction. • Finding space-head going up and seeing where to dribble.
	Improvisation, Creativity	• Individual ball mastery is critical. • shielding, ball manipulation.	• Change of speed and direction • 1v1 moves to beat a defender at a higher tempo • Try different moves. Be creative and don't be afraid to fail.
	Mobility	Recognition that standing will not help you. Players should always be mobile, and moving during games and practice to help themselves and their teammates.	
	Support	Not a main priority for this age.	
	Width	Not a main priority for this age.	

Age Appropriate Principles of Play - Attacking			
U8	Penetration	• On the dribble or with a pass • Focus on positive first touch into space. • Running with the ball/overall agility.	• Beating defenders by going around them. • Simple changes of direction. • Finding space-head going up and seeing where to dribble. • Recognition of when to dribble and when to pass
	Improvisation, Creativity	• Individual ball mastery is critical. • shielding, ball manipulation.	• Change of speed and direction • 1v1 moves to beat a defender at a higher tempo • Try different moves. Be creative and don't be afraid to fail.
	Mobility	Recognition that standing will not help you. Players should always be mobile, and moving during games and practice to help themselves and their teammates.	
	Support	Recognition of needing to help teammates. Important to help a teammate that has the ball.	
	Width	Recognition of needing to help teammates by using the whole space available.	

Coaching Characteristics:

The energy you bring as a coach to a U6-U8 training session is contagious. High energy from the coach will transfer to your session and the kids will have more fun! U6-U8 players are not World Cup ready so don't expect perfection, but be sure to encourage players to strive toward perfection. Must be passionate about the game and enthusiastic when working with younger kids. Must be a good teacher. A high priority on creating an environment in which the players have success is key. Emphasis on keeping the game fun is very important with these age groups because players quickly become dis-interested if they are not having fun. Encourage the players to make mistakes and take risks and use their skills. Ask a lot of questions instead of giving them the answers - "I don't know" is not an acceptable response.

Age Appropriate Principles of Play - Defending

		How it looks in training:
U6	Immediate Chase	• Getting back behind the ball after loss of possession.
	Pressure	• If your team does not have the ball, you want to get it back. • Closest player to the ball should pressure the player who has it and try to win back possession. • Try to keep ball away from your goal, to the outside of the field.
	Cover	• Not a priority at this age.
	Balance	• Not a priority at this age.
	Compactness	• Not a priority at this age.

U7	Immediate Chase	• Getting back behind the ball after loss of possession
	Pressure	• If your team does not have the ball, you want to get it back. • Closest player to the ball should pressure the player who has it and try to win back possession. • Try to keep ball away from your goal, to the outside of the field.
	Cover	• Not a priority at this age.
	Balance	• Not a priority at this age.
	Compactness	• Not a priority at this age.

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U8	Immediate Chase	• Getting back behind the ball after loss of possession. • If you lose the ball, quickly try to win it back.
	Pressure	• If your team does not have the ball, you want to get it back. • Closest player to the ball should pressure the player who has it and try to win back possession. • Try to keep ball away from your goal, to the outside of the field.
	Cover	• Second defender in an area to prevent penetration, usually behind the first (pressuring) defender. • In a position to become the 1st defender when teammate is beaten on the dribble.
	Balance	• Not a priority at this age.
	Compactness	• Not a priority at this age.

Juggling:

Juggling is a very important aspect of younger player's development. Not only will it improve their touch on the ball, their ball control while the ball is in the air, their general technique, but it will also improve their confidence with the ball, and their concentration level. If a player can juggle a ball 10 times, they can juggle a ball 1,000 times. The only difference is the level of concentration it takes to get to 1,000 juggles. The confidence part comes into play whenever the ball is bouncing or in general, not on the ground during a game, which happens quite a bit, especially with younger players. If players feel confident when the ball is in the air when they are practicing their juggling they will in turn feel much more confident in games when the ball might be bouncing or in the air near them. Encourage your players to juggle when they arrive at practice while you are setting up for your session. Allow time during practice to juggle-first 5 minutes, and last 5 minutes.

When designing your training session each of these categories need to be addressed to provide for appropriate organization.

Principles of Play
- Attacking
- Defending

Objectives
- In relation to the principles of play.
- What are you trying to accomplish? - Keep it simple for U6-U8.
- Do the activities bring out your objectives?

Sub-Principle (Defending)
- Immediate Chase
- Pressure
- Cover

Activities
- Need to be age appropriate
- Activities need to flow together from stage to stage
- All activities for U6-U8 need to be fun and engaging

Sub-Principle (Attacking)
- Penetration
- Support
- Mobility
- Width
- Improvisation/Creativity

Field dimensions
- Always start bigger and decrease size if you need
- Easier to decrease the size of the field than to expand
- With younger ages keep fields big enough where ball is not always out of play

Model Training Session - Comfort with ball at feet - Introduction to turns and changes of direction

TRAINING SESSION

The Network

- Dribbling
  Running with the Ball
  Agility
  Coordination & Balance
  Perception & Awareness
  Basic Motor Skills
- U5 to U8
- 6 to 12 Players
- balls/cones
- Intensity: Low
- 12:00 min
  (6 x 01:00 min, 01:00 min rest)

Objective

To develop movement abilities: Agility, balance, coordination.To develop dribbling with the head up.To develop running with the ball.To develop turning the ball.

Description

Place different colored cones if available. Each player starts at a cone. Starting cone is called "home". Ask players to move from cone to cone in a variety of ways. At first try the activity without the ball. Consider the following movement actions: A) Run and touch a cone. See how many they can touch before "home" is called. B) Run and hop over a cone with two feet. C) Run and touch a cone with their hand. Then add a ball. Progression: A) Dribble from cone to cone. Don't touch the cones. B) Dribble around a cone and then go to a new one. C) Dribble around a cone and then go to a different colored cone.

Key Points

Running with the ball using pinky toe or laces.Turning the ball with the inside or outside of the foot.

TRAINING EXERCISE

1v1 Coach is Ball Master (Attacking)
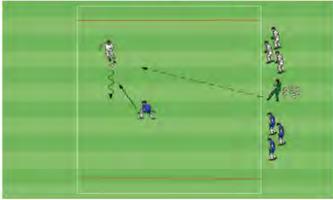
- Defending Principles
- U5 to U8
- 6 to 12 Players
- cones, bibs, balls
- Intensity: Medium
- 12:00 min
  (2 x 05:00 min, 02:00 min rest)

Objective

Introduce players to competition. Challenge players to use moves/turns and knowledge of dribbling to find space to beat defenders. Allow players to score by dribbling into an "end zone" giving them more space to exploit.

Description

1v1 Coach is ball master and controls the tempo of the game. Players must beat defender and score by stopping ball past the red end line.

Key Points

Be the first to the ball when the coach plays the ball into the field.Get ball under control and find the space on the field - Get head up to see fieldUse moves/turns or changes of speed and direction to get past defender and then quickly go to the goal (end zone)

TRAINING SESSION

Small-sided game to an endzone (2v2-4v4)

- Dribbling
  Running with the Ball
  Turning
  Ball Control
  Individual attacking
  Transition
  Attacking Principles
  1v1 Defending
- U5 to U8
- 6 to 12 Players
- balls/bibs/cones
- Intensity: High
- 12:00 min
  (6 x 01:00 min, 01:00 min rest)

Objective

To develop how to dribble to keep the ball.To develop how to dribble to penetrate or go around an opponent.To develop how to run with the ball into a space.Introducing Attacking principle of play: Penetration

Description

Create a playing area in a rectangular shape. Each team attacks a zone on opposite ends of the playing area. Dimensions: For 2v2 approximately 15 yards long by 10 yards wide. For 3v3 approximately 25 yards long by 15 yards wide. For 4v4 approximately 35 yards long by 25 yards wide. Dimensions can vary. Create an end zone for both teams. A point is scored when a member from a team can dribble into an end zone and stop the ball.

Key Points

Keeping the ball close but also away from an opponent.If going forward with the ball is not an option then pass the ball to a teammate.

TRAINING SESSION

4v4 Game

- Dribbling
- U5 to U8
- 6 to 12 Players
- Balls, cones, bibs, goals
- Intensity: Medium
- 12:00 min
  (2 x 05:00 min, 01:00 min rest)

Objective

Allow players to play. Most important part of the session.

Description

Free play. Coaches should step in to reinforce coaching points from earlier activities, but try to let the players play with minimal interruptions.

Key Points

Reiterate coaching points from earlier exercises