

Individual Technical and Tactical Issues for U-5 and U-6 Players

COORDINATION AND BASIC MOTOR SKILLS

- Coordinate and control body movements and dynamic balance.
- Directional sense, spatial awareness, basic motor patterns such as hopping, skipping, jumping, bounding, and running.

GOALKEEPING

- No training necessary.

CONTACTING THE BALL

- Experiment with 6 surfaces of foot (instep, inside, outside, toe, heel, sole).

PASSING

- Pass with *purpose* if given time and space.

SHOOTING

- Reinforce purpose of game – SCORE GOALS.
- Encourage shots from different angles and distances.

BALL CONTROL

- 3 most important elements to improve comfort level: time, space, and repetition
- Tactical applications of dribbling: move away from pressure, run into open space, dribble towards goal.
- Soft first touch (preparation touch).
- Discourage kicking ball away.

DRIBBLING

- Stops, turns, change of direction, 6 surfaces.

HEADING

- None.

SUPPORT

- Do not restrict player's movement on field.

SPACES VERSUS POSITIONS

- Positional coaching is irrelevant and should be discouraged.

DEFENDING

- No more complicated than encouraging players to “win” the ball back when possession is lost.

TRANSITION

- Encourage players to react as quickly as possible to a change in possession.

CREATIVITY

- Encourage players to experiment with the following: changing speed or direction, moving their bodies from side to side to unbalance a defender, using different parts of their feet when dribbling and different body parts when receiving.

Individual Technical and Tactical Issues for U-7 and U-8 Players

GOALKEEPING

- Still no formal training necessary.
- Skill focus: picking up ball, basic shot-stopping, distribution as a means to clear ball (no tactical purpose).

CONTACTING THE BALL

- Players should be challenged to expand their range of surfaces.
- All dribbling and juggling practice should encourage the use of both feet.

PASSING

- Passes should have a purpose, rather than simply kicking ball forward, in an effort to maintain possession.
- The “thinking” behind a pass is more important than the outcome.
- Players should pass within their technical range.

SHOOTING

- “Can I score a goal from here?”
- Reinforce the objective of soccer.

BALL CONTROL

- Make sure there is sufficient time, space, and repetition to encourage players to reduce the numbers of touches necessary to control the ball.

DRIBBLING

- Encourage changes of pace and direction to maintain possession or beat an opponent.
- Creating a positive attitude towards dribbling is far more important than presenting a variety of ‘moves’ to players.
- Encourage players to dribble the ball quickly into open space.
- Encourage players to look up when in possession.

HEADING

- Still not necessary to train this skill.

SUPPORT

- Encourage players to pass and move with the game as opposed to passing and standing still.
- Encourage players to move into open spaces when not in possession of the ball.

- Positional coaching is still irrelevant and should be discouraged. Instead, players should be encouraged to “find new supporting positions away from teammates so that passes can be exchanged.

DEFENDING

- Emphasis should still be on simply trying to win the ball back when losing possession.
- Tackling the ball to regain possession should be encouraged over simply kicking the ball away from an opponent.
- No slide tackling until U-10.

TRANSITION

- Encourage players to react as quickly as possible to any change in possession.
- Players should start to demonstrate an awareness of *immediate recovery* and *counter-attack* to goal.

CREATIVITY

- Encourage improvisation and creativity when solving tactical problems.
- Never scold a non-standard technique that is used to solve a tactical problem.

Individual Technical and Tactical Issues for U-9 and U-10 Players

GOALKEEPING

- 2/3rds of training should be as field player.
- Skill focus: basic catches, controlled collapse, getting in line of shots, closing down angles.

CONTACTING THE BALL

- Continue to encourage the use of all 6 foot surfaces.
- Introduce 7 ways ball can be kicked: driven, chipped, volley, half-volleyed, side-volleyed, curled, and lofted.
- Players must train both feet at every chance.

PASSING

- Encourage disguise and deception when passing (use of hips and outside of foot).

SHOOTING

- Encourage players to take shots that are placed, driven, chipped, curled, volleyed, half-volleyed, side-volleyed, or improvised using any legal body part.

BALL CONTROL

- Challenge players to think about “what’s next” before the ball arrives.
- Have players assess the availability of space around them before receiving a pass.
- Vision before the ball arrives and a positive first-touch away from pressure should be encouraged.
- Demand that players open their body towards their opponents goal when they have space to do so.

DRIBBLING

- Dribbling practice should include basic moves to turn away from pressure and moves to beat an opponent.
- Players must be encouraged to quickly dribble the ball into open space.
- Encourage the use of the outside of the foot when “speed dribbling”.
- Encourage players to look up when they are temporarily clear of opponents (in open space and not touching the ball).
- Encourage a combination of dribbling moves and abrupt changes in direction to be unpredictable when in possession.

HEADING

- Heading becomes more common at this age and can be trained with lighter balls to help players get over the initial fear of performing this skill.

SUPPORT

- Encourage passing sequences involving two or three players.
- Encourage players to “find: new supporting positions as the ball travels.
- The appreciation for supporting positions that provide width will come before the appreciation of supporting positions that provide depth.
- Introduce passing lanes, when and how to run for the ball, controlling and turning with the ball, and how to disguise these movements when playing with your “back to goal”.

DEFENDING

- More advanced players can grasp the concept of “marking” an opponent and “picking up” an opponent when not in possession.
- A concentrated emphasis on “team” defending should still not be a focus.
- Continue to encourage tackling the ball and retaining possession as opposed to simply kicking the ball away from an opponent.

TRANSITION

- Players in immediate support of the ball on a change of possession should be encouraged to react quickly and provide support for their teammates.

CREATIVITY

- Three elements impact creativity: technique, tactical awareness, and confidence.
- Encourage the player who is willing to take risks even though their technical deficiencies may prevent them from succeeding.

Individual Technical and Tactical Issues for U-11 and U-12 Players

GOALKEEPING

- Specialty GK training.
- Skill focus: catching, collecting, smothering, diving, dealing with crosses.
- Communication with defenders.
- Increased tactical awareness, especially in regards to offsides rule.

CONTACTING THE BALL

- Players should be proficient in using a majority of surfaces with both feet.
- Encourage players to expand their ability to use different textures (weights and spins).

FINISHING

- Players should refine the skills necessary to put the ball in the goal (shots can be placed, driven, chipped, curled, half-volleyed, side-volleyed, and volleyed).

VISION AND BALL CONTROL

- Players should improve their ability to quickly assess tactical options.
- Improve vision, positive first touch, and turning body sideways-on to the game.

DRIBBLING

- Encourage rapid and abrupt changes in speed and direction and the use of shoulders and hips to disguise intentions.
- Improve speed of play through cleaner technique and faster reading of the game.

HEADING

- Encourage the use of headers to score goals, pass the ball, and clear the ball defensively.

TACKLING

- Incorporate sliding skills when tackling to keep balls in play, reach wayward passes, to cross balls from the goal line, and to extend reach.
- Encourage tackling techniques with both the inside and outside legs (relative to defender).

COMBINATION PLAY

- Encourage more formal combination play (take-overs, wall passes, double passes, up-back-through combinations, overlaps)

USE OF SPACE

- Attacking players need to understand how to open up the field to create time and space to play.
- Defending players need to understand how to close down spaces, decreasing attacking options for their opponent.
- Attacking players must understand how to play with their immediate small group or to stay away from the ball.
- Defenders must understand how to move as a defensive block.
- Attackers need an understanding of the importance of width, depth, support, and mobility.
- Defenders need an understanding of pressure, cover, balance, and compactness.

PLAYING WITH “BACK TO GOAL”

- Players must understand the tactical possibilities for: receiving balls to feet and into space, identifying passing lanes and open spaces, judging when and how to run for the ball, how to lay the ball off to a supporting player or turning with the ball, and how to disguise all of these movements.

DEFENDING

- Individual decision-making in defense should follow this basic hierarchy of thinking: try to win the ball back; try to knock the ball away from your opponent; deny opponent space to run with the ball; try to keep immediate attacker running towards a sideline or into other defenders; recover behind ball and help your team defend.

TRANSITION

- Make sure practice activities incorporate elements of transition as often as possible.
- First thought in attack should be to score a goal, while passing forward to the furthest player possible is the next best option.

DECISION MAKING

- This decision-making hierarchy must be adhered to: Can I score a goal? Can I set up a goal? Can I play forward and maintain possession? Can I play sideways or backwards and maintain possession? Am I under enough pressure to warrant a clearance?

CREATIVITY

- Creative players are necessary for making teams unpredictable and must always be encouraged to do so...sometimes at the expense of their coachability.