



Player Development Guidelines

U7 & U8 Boys and Girls Soccer

Medfield Youth Soccer Overview

Medfield Youth Soccer Mission

Medfield Youth Soccer (MYS) is dedicated to providing all children of Medfield a place to play soccer. Our primary focus is on player development, having fun, and providing a safe environment.

- Player Development – our goal is to teach the players how to play soccer to the best of their ability. To accomplish this all players are to be given equal playing time during games and attention during practice.
- Having fun – the number one reason to play is to have fun. The number one reason not to play is that it's not fun. To promote fun we will encourage equal participation in practice and games, matching athletes' ability to their challenges, and by helping to set performance goals, rather than outcome goals.
- Safety first – it is important to always make sure that a safe and age appropriate environment is set for games and practice.

Player Development Guidelines

The goal of this document is to:

- Establish clear and age appropriate goals and objectives so our coaches, players and parents know what we are working toward
- Establish objectives so coaches have a common understanding of which skills players should have when they proceed to the next age group
- Establish age appropriate priorities and focus areas in the four elements of the game (technical, tactical, psychological, and physical)
- Ensure consistency among our programs so we're all teaching the same way and using the same vocabulary
- Create confident coaches that are better prepared

U8 Player Development

As we move up the age ladder from the U8 level to the U10 level there are many differences we must attend to in order to provide an optimal experience for young players of this age. However, there are also many similarities. Just as in parenting, it is important to be consistent in coaching and we must make sure that we follow a progressive trend of development for young players. To this ends, we need to continue to focus on technique during our practices, as we did at the younger ages. Creating environments in which players get maximum repetitions of technical skills is key.

Typically a U8 player that starts at age 6 will have 4 seasons of play before he/she moves up to U9/10's. A fall and spring season at age 6 and the same at age 7. Our goal is to develop their basic skills so they are prepared to move up to the next level. We can't expect these young players to master everything below in a single season, but taught consistently from season to season they will get it over time. Keep this in mind as you read through this document.

During the Fall, players move up in age groups so you will probably have a number of players on your team that have never played at this level before.

Key Objectives for the U8 MYS Program

- Have fun (players, coaches and parents)
- Get players as many touches on the ball as possible
- Basic skills
- Individual and pairs activities

Transition Considerations

During the Fall, players move up in age groups so you will probably have a number of players on your team that have never played at this level before.

U6's moving up to U8:

- May be aware of positions (Wing, Center, Fullback, Goalie) but still lack the discipline to play any type of formation, used to playing mostly swarmball at U6

- Are playing on a bigger field
- Are used to 3v3 vs. 4v4
- Are not used to playing goal or being able to use their hands in goal
- Have no clue what a goal kick, throw-in, corner or free kick is.
- Are not familiar with the 12 yard line or any goalie box
- Are not used to games being officiated

Typical Characteristics of U8 Players

Below is a list of typical expectations and characteristics you can expect from U8 players in the MYS program

Typical Characteristics of U8 Players

1. *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
2. *are now able to take another's perspective* – they now have a sense of how other's are feeling
3. *still unable to think abstractly* – still do not have this capability, be patient
4. *heating and cooling system still less efficient than adults* – still make sure to give frequent water breaks (every 8-10 minutes)
5. *still much prefer playing to watching* – keep everyone active during practice and remember, no lines
6. *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
7. *have an understanding of time and sequence* – they now understand “if I do this, then that happens”
8. *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
9. *extremely aware of adult reactions* – be very aware of your verbal and nonverbal reactions, as they look for your reaction frequently
10. *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
11. *begin to become aware of peer perception* – a social order is beginning to develop. Be sensitive to this
12. *wide range of abilities between children at this age* – children all develop at varying paces. You may have an 8 year-old who seems

more like a 10 year-old and one that seems more like a 6 year-old on the same team. 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

13. *some will keep score* – the competitive motors churn faster in some than others. Surely some parents are fueling the motors with their own. Regardless, we do not need to stress winning and losing at this age. Results should not be important at this age
14. *beginning to develop motor memories* – by attempting fundamental technical skills they are training their bodies to remember certain movements
15. *less active imaginations than U6 players* – still have active imaginations by adult standards, but some of the silliness that 6 year-olds allowed will not be appreciated by this group. Still use their imaginations, just watch their reactions to games to read how far you can go with things.

Player Development Objectives

This document will help to identify key objectives within the four key areas of player development. The priority areas will evolve for each age group progression. The key areas of player development across all age groups and levels are:



Technical Development– These are the skills used to play the game, i.e. the “fundamentals”. This includes things like dribbling, passing, shooting, receiving, tackling, juggling, heading, etc.

Along with making sure players have fun, skills is probably the most important area for youth players to focus on.



Tactical Development – Tactics for youth soccer focuses largely on decision making, i.e. how players can make the correct decision given a particular situation. We should try to understand the progression of tactics and develop the players in the proper sequence, so that players are comfortable solving easier problems (1v1, 2v1) before they move on to solve more complex ones (4v4):



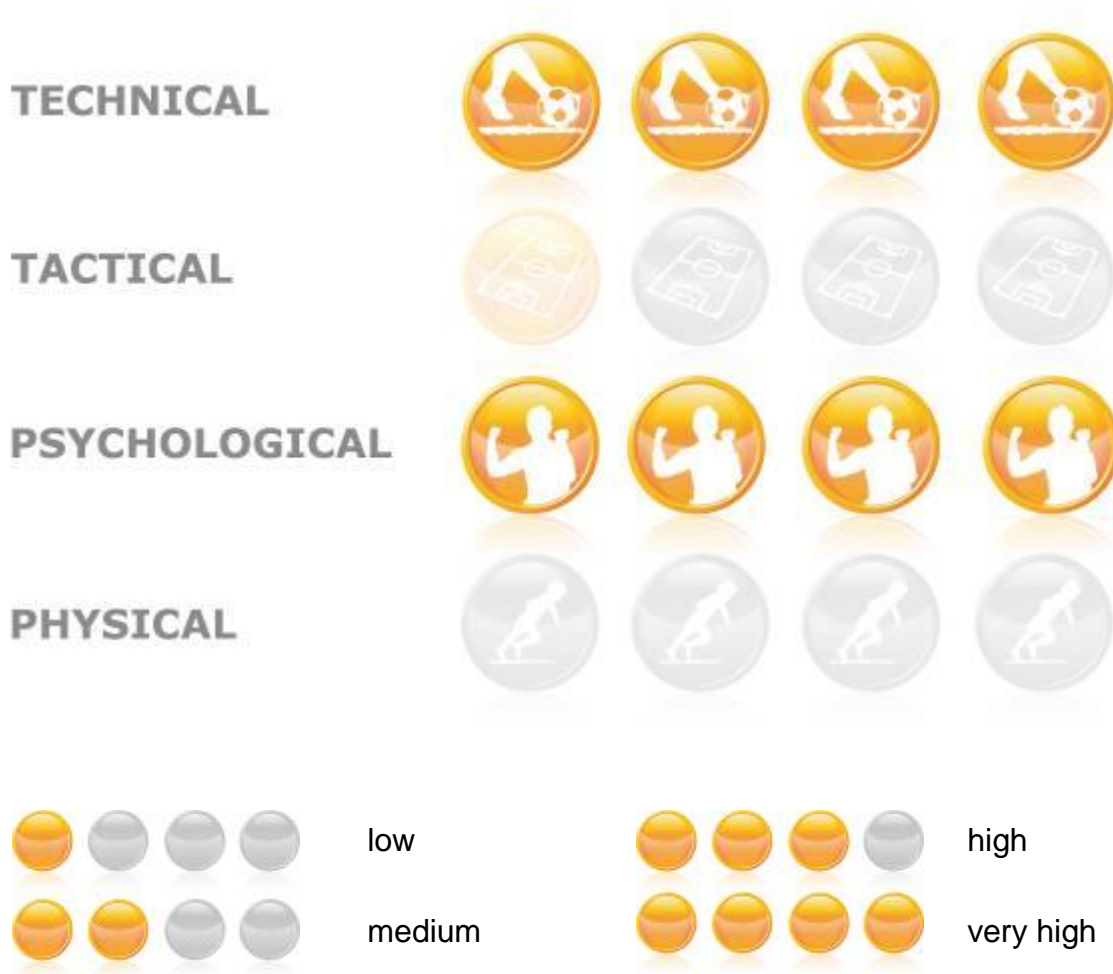
Psychological Development – For youth soccer, this relates to whether the player is having fun playing soccer, and other aspects such as how they deal with winning and losing, their level of motivation, and how they interact with teammates, coaches and their parents.



Physical Development – Fitness for youth soccer players can be largely achieved by just letting them play soccer, although some of the older age groups (U14 and maybe U12) may start incorporating speed and conditioning into practice games and activities.

U8 Player Development Objectives

The following key training priorities are recommended by US Youth Soccer and Mass Youth Soccer for coaches of U8 players. A focus on helping players develop these skills and very basic tactics is critical as it will serve as the foundation for skills and tactics that will be introduced when these U8 players move on to the next age group. The key focus is still the technical aspects of the game and ensure all the players are having fun.



Over the next few pages we will go into the specific elements within each area that players will be encouraged to learn before entering the next age level.



U8 Technical Skill Priorities

Technical focus at U8 level should be a progression of those skills learned at lower levels plus the following:

Field Play - Technical Skills:

- Dribble with all sides of both feet (inside, outside, sole)
- Dribble out of trouble
- Dribble past someone
- Changes of direction and turns
- Soft first touch
- Introduction to shielding – Players should develop proper technique to shield the balls from opponents
- Introduce proper shooting technique (with inside of foot and laces)
- Introduce passing only to players who can dribble out of trouble
- Introduce juggling with both feet (allow one bounce between juggles if needed)

Players should spend equal time developing both feet – this is very important!!!

Although U8 children may begin to be far more physically and maturationally advanced than U6 children, we must remain patient and not try to force them to develop too quickly. Dribbling still needs to be the primary focus of our efforts, though passing and shooting should be introduced at this age as well. U8 players tend to work best when in pairs and we should allow them to work in pairs (coach selected) often. Similar to the U6 children, we need to make sure that fun is a central theme in practice. Player development will occur most appropriately and expeditiously if all players are enjoying themselves.

Dribbling is the Technical Focus Area

The most important skill for beginners is dribbling. The ability to dribble the soccer ball is absolutely critical for youth players in the U6 and U8 age groups as it is the foundation for all the other basic skills of soccer such as receiving,

passing and shooting. When a player is comfortable with the ball at his or her feet, the game becomes easier and more fun.

It takes many years to be a confident dribbler and the process takes a lot of trial and error on the part of the young player. In the beginning, there will be a lot more failed attempts at dribbling than successes in both practices and games, but be assured that with each attempt to dribble the ball, the player is figuring out what works and what doesn't work. As coaches and parents, we need to be patient with the young players as they learn how to dribble. There will be many times, especially during games, when we will have the urge to yell "kick it" or "boot it" to the player, but we should refrain from this as it will likely send the wrong message and discourage him or her from learning this very important skill and using it in a game-like environment.

We also need to encourage players in this age group to take risks and be creative in their dribbling. Ronaldinho and Mia Hamm weren't able to pull off their great moves when they were six or eight years old – but they might have been thinking of those moves at that age!!

Goalkeeping - Technical Skills:

- Introduce proper positioning (hands and body)
- Ball distribution (throwing, rolling, punting)



U8 Tactical Skill Priorities

Coaches should not try to teach young players about tactics at this age. This will lead to frustration both for the players and the coach. The focus for U8 players should be learning technique, especially dribbling. Just let them play!!!

Field Play - Tactical Skills:

- No Tactics!!!

For players or teams who are the more advanced end of the technical spectrum, simple introduction to attacking and defending could be introduced. Problem solving and making decisions for themselves are critical tactical elements in young players and simple 1 on 1 drills can help introduce these concepts. Below are some of the tactical skills to focus on at this age-level.

Players could be exposed to these simple tactical scenarios and understand how to both attack and defend these game contexts.

- 1 v 1 (attacking and defending)
- 2 v 1 (attacking and defending)

1 v 1 and 2 v 1 duels could be incorporated into practice sessions to allow all the players to get plenty of opportunities to learn how to dribble past an opponent and how to stop one.

Goalkeeping - Tactical Skills:

- Calling for the ball when receiving with defending players



U8 Psychological Development

Psychological focus at U6 level is another major priority. Fostering an environment where our players can grow in confidence, try new things and have fun whilst doing it are critical to developing well rounded players.

- **Keep it fun and enjoyable!!!** This will help foster a desire to play (intrinsic motivation)
- Need approval from adults
- Need constant positive coaching
- Encourage imagination and creativity
- Being part of a team

The most important aspect of psychological development for young players in the U8 age group is for them to have fun. As a coach, you should strive to create an environment where the players, parents and you, the coach, are all having fun.

Young players are constantly seeking adult approval. As such, positive coaching is critical for this age group. In addition, positive coaching can help build the young player's confidence, which is a very important in their psychological development.

At the U8 age group, players start recognizing the fact that they are part of a team and they begin to associate themselves with their team. This is a great opportunity to start teaching young players about the value of teamwork and what it means to be part of a team (i.e. trusting your teammates, not criticizing them, etc.). Certain fun teambuilding activities can be done during some practices, especially in the beginning of the season when players may not be familiar with each other.



U8 Physical Development

Physical development is not a priority for U8 soccer. Encouraging all players to play and participate and give their best is really all that's required.

- Just play soccer

U8 Player Development Resources

Mass Youth Soccer week by week practice plans offering proper coaching technique and example drills:

http://www.mayouthsoccer.org/coaching/practice_plans_u8.aspx

More information about player development can be found on the Medfield Youth Soccer player development web page at:

<http://www.medfieldsoccer.org/content/player-development-0>

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