

# Rookies Coaching Guide



The intent of this manual is to give U5 and U6 coaches an idea of what they're signing up for. Most coaches at this age group are player's parents who want more involvement in their kid's activities. I hope you get an understanding of what can be reasonably expected from 4-5 year olds, some basic practice plans, and game expectations.

### General Rules for Games and Practices

- Have fun
- There are no scheduled practice times for any Rookies Teams. Practices are held before each game at the coach's discretion. We encourage you to use this time for practice.
- There will be one community practice per week for each age group. Players will practice as a group and not with their respective teams at these practices. Footskills and repetitive touches on the ball are emphasized.
- There are no referees. Coaches are responsible for the mayhem that we call Rookies soccer.
- General rules of the game should be followed. Use your discretion as to what should and should not be called.
- All games must end on time. It's up to the coaches to agree on when to end practice and begin the game.

## Traits of U5/U6 Players

- Short attention span.
- Can attend to only one problem at a time.
- May understand simple rules that are explained briefly and demonstrated.
- May or may not understand or remember: what lines mean on the field; what team they are on; what goal they are going for. We need to be patient and laugh with them as they get 'lost' on the field.
- Easily bruised psychologically. Shout praise often. Give "hints", don't criticize.
- Need generous praise and to play without pressure. No extrinsic rewards (trophies, medals, etc.) should be given for winning.
- Prefer "parallel play" (Will play on a team, but will not really engage with their teammates. Thus, a 3 against 3 game is, in reality, a 1 against 5 game because they all want the ball at the same time.
- Very individually oriented (me, mine, my).
- Constantly in motion, but, with no sense of pace. They will chase something until they drop. They are easily fatigued but recover rapidly.
- Development for boys and girls are quite similar.
- Physical coordination limited. Eye – hand and eye – foot coordination is not developed. Need to explore qualities of a rolling ball.
- Love to run, jump, roll, hop, etc..
- Catching or throwing skills not developed.
- Can balance on their "good" foot.

## Things to Expect from U5\U6 Game

As coaches of these younger players there are things that we know that we can expect during training and games. If we know what to expect, we will be more effective in dealing with the hundreds of situations that come up. This will help us relax, and, in turn, allow us to enjoy the unpredictable nature of working with these children even more. Here are some of the things that we can expect.

- Most players cry immediately when something is hurt. Some cry even when something is not hurt.

- No matter how loud we shout, or how much we "practice" it, they can not or will not pass the ball.
- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field in need of a toilet.
- Twenty seconds after the start of a game, every player will be within 5 yards of the ball.
- Several players will slap at the ball with their hands, or pick it up. Several parents will yell at them not to do that.
- A bug, plane flying over, a pile of sand, nets, or even grass will divert their attention.
- During a season, you will end up tying at least 40 – 50 shoe laces.
- They will do something that is absolutely hysterical. Make sure that you laugh.

## Involving the Parents

It is imperative that coaches get the parents involved. Not only are they a major resource for your team, but the player still views their parents as the most significant people in their lives. Engage your parents on your team, most are willing to help out if you ask.

Some topics that you may want to address are:

- A means of contacting everyone without one person doing all of the calling. (Phone chains.)
- Discuss the laws of the game.
- Training and game schedules. How you feel about starting and ending on time, what your attendance expectations are, what you think is a good excuse to miss training.
- What each player should bring to game: inflated ball, filled water bottle, soccer attire, shin guards (Cleats are not mandatory.)
- Most importantly, your philosophy about coaching U-6 players. Let them know that everyone plays; that the game does not look like the older player's games; that you are there to ensure that their player is safe and has a good time, as well as learn about soccer.
- Do they know that they should not coach from the sidelines?
- Above all, try to enjoy yourself. If you do they probably will too.

# Coaching Tips

It is important to understand at the outset that players coming to any sport prior to the age of 6 years old, in general, do not do so by their own choice. As a result, their coaches need to give them something about which to get excited. Further, at this age, learning to play soccer is secondary to most other things in their lives.

With the above assumptions, let's look at some things that we can do to energize the U-6 players, and, hopefully, get them to the point where they will enthusiastically initiate the sign up for next year!

- Each session should be geared around touching the ball as many times as possible. Involve the ball in as many activities as possible. Basic movements such as running, skipping, hopping, etc. need to be emphasized. If these can be done while kicking, catching, rolling, or dribbling a ball... all the better!
- Have as many different kinds of activities ready as you can. Emphasis needs to be placed on what is FUN!.
- Every player should bring his or her own size #3.
- Remember, although they may have very similar birthdates, their physical and / or mental maturity may vary as much as 24 months. Activities need to accommodate these individual differences whenever possible.
- Team play and passing is an alien concept to these players. They know that if they pass the ball, they may never get it back. In fact, they often will steal it from their own teammates. Do not get uptight if they do not pass, let them dribble to their heart's content.
- Encourage them to play, but also allow them to sit out when needed. It may take a while to get some players to get off the bench.

