



COACHING U11/U12 IN THE DUBLIN SOCCER LEAGUE

PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS:

- ▶ Players are more serious about their play.
- ▶ This is a huge year for them to start putting all of the pieces together in both playing the game and combining with teammates.
- ▶ The concepts of time and space are making sense to them and they take these into account when playing the game.
- ▶ They are able to grasp some tactical concepts, like switching the field of play, making runs, holding versus serving the ball in.

COACHING OBSERVATIONS:

- ▶ Short, clear and concise directions with a positive tone will be most effective. Give simple instructions such as look up when you're dribbling, look for a pass or dribble towards the goal. Coaching off the ball is very effective to get players in good positions to keep possession and defend together.
- ▶ Encourage them to play the ball on the ground to each other. Encourage them when dribbling the ball to look up and try to find an open teammate with passes on the ground. Discourage them playing kick and chase soccer with no purpose. There should be very few balls simply being booted down the field, unless they are trying to clear a ball out of the box.
- ▶ To kick off, have players connect a pass with each other (can go forwards or backwards) and try to keep possession.
- ▶ In training (while you are scrimmaging) and games, work with them on how the players should be positioned when your team has a goal kick. Have players kick in their goal kicks preferably out wide and towards a sideline to a player on their team. If players in the middle of the field can "front" a player to help the ball on that would be the best.
- ▶ Encourage your team to move forward and back together as a "unit" and try to stay in a formation. Watch for players staying way back standing in front of the goal they are defending while the ball is in the attacking half. Encourage them to push up and support their team and attack with 9 players (with 1 or 2 players in support defending ball side).
- ▶ In training, introduce players on to be positioned when your team has a corner kick. Work with them on serving the ball in towards the front of the goal so that they have a chance to score. Encourage your defenders to stack up front and back to provide support if ball bounces out. It is helpful to line up multiple players in the box on attacking corners. On defending corners it is helpful to leave 1 player "high" on the field and the remaining back defending in the box.
- ▶ Encourage the GK to push up towards the top of the box when the ball is at the other end of the field. They should be out towards the top of the box, as they can be used as a field player if needed and can come up to intercept any long balls that have been booted down the field and pass them back up the field to a teammate.
- ▶ Work with the GK to not be so quick to distribute the ball after securing it. Have them wait until teammates have made their way up field before distributing the ball. Distribution of the ball should be wide and high. Also work with them on using their entire box, as this will give them a 15-yard advantage before throwing or



punting the ball. In training, encourage the GKs to distribute the ball out wide to their defenders when they are open without pressure. If they are under pressure then have them punt it wide and downfield.

▶ In training, work with the field players on the outside to get wide and use all of the width of the field. At this age they need lots of space to play in but they tend to clump together in the center of the field. Keep asking them to spread out from each other.

▶ Encourage the team to "keep their shape"; which is to try and stay in the team formation that they are playing, which will typically be a 1-3-3-2 (1 GK, 3 defenders, 3 midfielders and 2 forwards). A 1-3-3-2 formation is a classic 9v9 formation. It offers fantastic balance and is incredibly easy for young players to grasp and will help them when they transition into 11v11. Three defenders will have help with three hard-working midfielders offers plenty of support at the back without overloading defensive areas. Encourage the outside midfielders to make runs up and down the sidelines and get back and help defend when you lose the ball. Ask the forwards to move with each other ball side, with one forward closer to the ball and one stay center and as high as they can without being offsides. Give forwards freedom to move freely up top (try not to assign specifically right or left forward so they don't feel like they have to stay in a certain spot).

▶ Teach the defenders to slide over to support ball and stay connected together always supporting the other. If the ball is on the right side, the right defender will slide and support the right midfielder while the center and left defender slide over to support the ball but still keeping their shape. Every time the ball moves the defenders will adjust their positioning off the ball.

▶ Teach players to play with a purpose. Encourage them to dribble the ball to look up and try to find an open teammate with passes on the ground. If they need to clear the ball out of their box then encourage the longer ball. If they are in the middle or attacking half really ask players to try and keep possession of the ball, try dribbling more and to get a good first touch. Discourage players from just kicking the ball randomly.

▶ Try and coach players off the ball as much as possible. Do not be a play-by-play announcer the entire match—"Pass it to Billy, pass it to Billy, pass it to Billy..."—Soccer is a game that involves a series of puzzles to be solved by the players. Let them solve them. Make notes of areas that the team seems to need to work on and address them at your next training session. Coaching off the ball will allow players to get into good positions to win the ball and keep possession.

▶ Make sure that all parents are always sitting on the correct sideline. Only coaches and players are permitted on the coaches sideline.

POTENTIAL COACHING QUESTIONS:

▶ **What can I expect mentally from players at this age?** Players are starting to be able to keep a little bit longer attention span at this age. Still keep all instructions brief. No longer than one minute.

▶ **What can't I expect mentally from players at this age?** They are now at the age where they will want to play the game more than being told how to play. It is still key to demonstrate to them what it is that you want them to do. Keep instruction short and to the point, get them playing again quick.

▶ **What can I expect physically from players at this age?** Players can go for longer periods of time before needing to take a break, endurance increases at U11/U12.



- ▶ **What can't I expect physically from players at this age?** They are ready to do more refined foot skills drills both with every player having a ball and also in pairs. Don't let them abandon using both feet at this age, remind them to work hard at it and to be patient with this. It is critical for them to become more proficient at using both feet.
- ▶ **What can I expect mentally from players at this age?** They are coming to the age where they will want to compete against one another as they struggle to find their "place" on the team, sometimes to the detriment of the exercise and the team. This is natural. It is still key to demonstrate to them what it is that you want them to do. Also, have players help demonstrate to help keep them engaged in the training and teaching moments.
- ▶ **How do I expect every player to act?** They should learn to be a good sport at all times against all opponents, regardless of the other team's behavior. Stress the importance of taking the high road in a difficult situation. You will now see the natural born leaders that may make good captains start to emerge at this age. Demand players are respectful of the opponents and the other team.
- ▶ **What is the attention span for players at this age?** They should be able to understand tactics and strategies which they can incorporate into their games. Still keep instructions brief and you will keep their attention. You can also start to make your training sessions progressive in nature. For example, the theme for the training might be keeping possession of the ball in the final third. You would start out with more simple exercises and then work your way up to more complex and game-like exercises before playing your game.
- ▶ **How long should each training session be?** At this age, 1 hour 15 minutes or no longer than 1 hour 30 minutes in length is plenty of time. Get them going right away and on time. Gage on when you think players need a water break. More breaks should be given on days when the temperatures are higher.
- ▶ **What should I talk about before each training session?** Tell them in 1 minute or less what it is that you will be focusing on in training that day. Many times, you can tie it in with things that didn't go as well as hoped in the prior match.
- ▶ **How should I warm them up before a training session?** At this age they are starting to develop muscle groups and it wouldn't hurt for them to be stretched and warmed up. If they are running around and shooting the ball before you start your session, they're already on their way. It is important to include a ball in their warm up with some sort of dribbling/footwork activity. Try and incorporate a fun game in this warm up that includes the ball. Dynamic stretching (stretching while your moving) can be incorporated into the ball work.
- ▶ **What should we work on in training?** Dribbling, passing/receiving, and striking a ball should be a priority at this age group. Getting players comfortable with the ball is key to player development. Dribbling is still encouraged to be high on the list of topics to work on. Training tactics in small groups or the scrimmage portion of the training is a great way to teach decision making at this age.
- ▶ **How do I get each exercise in a training session going?** Ideally it is best to have all cones set up before you show the players the next activity. Tell them in words in 1 minute or less what the exercise is and then demonstrate it. For example, if it's one that is done in pairs, select a player to be your partner for the demonstration. As you begin doing the exercise, repeat verbally to them what it is that you're doing as you're doing it. Then tell them to get a partner and get ready to start quickly.
- ▶ **How much of a training session should be spent on just playing soccer?** Always have the players play the game at the end of a training session. In a 60-minute training session, spend the first 40 minutes doing soccer



exercises/drills. You can use the last 20 minutes of a scrimmage at the end. Adjust if the training session is longer.

POTENTIAL MATCH QUESTIONS:

► **What formation should I play?** The formation of a 1-3-3-2 (1 GK, 3 defenders, 3 midfielders, 2 forwards) is a common 9V9 formation. It offers fantastic balance and is incredibly easy for young players to grasp. It is also a good formation to know to easily transition to 11v11. Three defenders being helped by three hard-working midfielders offers plenty of support in the back. Encourage the outside midfielders to make runs up and down the sidelines when the opportunity presents itself. When one midfielder does this, the other two simply slide over to cover the space by the midfielder making the run. Ask the center midfielder to “stay home” in the middle of the field so they can be the connector. In training and games, work with the outside midfield players to get wide and use all of the width of the field when the ball is on their side. Ask the forwards to move with the ball and stay connected. One forward will support the ball high while the other is more central and as high as they can go without being offsides. Coaches can start to match players abilities to certain positions.

► **What should I talk to them about before the match?** Let players know where they are starting the match. Try and rotate players to start (don’t always start with the same players). Try and make sure all players get at least 50% playing time over the course of the season. Remind players to try and do what they have been working on in practice (using their skills they have been working on in training).

► **What should I talk to them about at half time?** Make sure that the players that were on the field and just came off are all doing okay. When chatting with the players make sure all attention is on you and the players are not facing into the sun. Pick 3 things to focus on with at least one of them something good they are doing. If you can “paint a picture” with cones or a whiteboard to get across one of your points players really respond to that (make your comments quick!). Before taking the field for the second half, go over the names of the players and positions that will be going onto the field. Remember that less is more. Don't over coach them, let them play. A quick team cheer and off they go to take the field!

► **What should I talk to them about after the match?** After they have acknowledged and clapped for their opponents, tell them to make sure to get everything that they brought with them and to not leave any trash on the sideline. Regardless of the outcome, in a minute or less be 100% positive to them as you talk about the effort that they put out, how hard that they played, passed the ball to each other, etc. Maybe highlight a player or two each game who did exceptional. A hand pile and team cheer is always a nice way to end things. Again, do this consistently and the players will learn that this is their routine to follow.

COMMUNICATION AND COACHING STYLE:

► **What should I expect from the parents?** It is ideal to have a team parent meeting early on, at the end of a training session while the kids are scrimmaging. Remind them that we are here to try and teach them the game and have a lot of fun. Ask parents not to coach any of the players from the sidelines. Encourage the parents to cheer for everyone and be positive at all times. If a player will not be at practice or a game, parents need to let you know so you can plan accordingly. Make sure that they all have your email and phone number to reach you should something pop up at the last minute. At this meeting, ask if someone would like to coordinate the snack schedule. This will help parents get to know one another as well.



► **How often should I communicate with the parents?** Ideally once a week. Do so via e-mail after setting up a distribution list for all families. In the initial e-mail, remind them of the upcoming schedule and that their child needs to bring a properly inflated size 4 soccer ball, plenty of water, soccer shoes and shin guards to every training session and match.

► **What should I wear to all training sessions and matches?** Dress the part. You might have another career during the day, but when you show up at training please dress the part. It is best to wear tennis shoes or soccer boots if you have them. Don't wear sandals or go barefoot. Also please do not wear baseball caps or sunglasses. They need to be able to see into your eyes and you into theirs. For matches, always wear your DSL COACH shirt and the same type of shorts and tennis shoes or soccer boots that you do to training.

► **What should my coaching style be?** That is up to you and what your personality type is. Exhibit enthusiasm for the game and the kids and remember that you're coaching U11/U12. The more fun you are having the more it will influence the players to have a fun experience as well. They will look to you for guidance and as a mentor, so be a positive influence for them. **Have Fun!**

QUESTIONS DURING THE SEASON?

► Please contact **Mo Razack** mo@pyrinex.com or **Dom Hoecherl** dominiquehoecherl@hotmail.com