



## COACHING U8 IN THE DUBLIN SOCCER LEAGUE

### PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS:

- ▶ Attention spans are growing.
- ▶ Some players can handle more than a few tasks at a time.
- ▶ Technical skills can start to develop at more of a rapid pace.
- ▶ Exhibits capacity to start to understand others actions and feelings.
- ▶ Some of them will start to understand time and space both with and without the ball.

### 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.
- ▶ To kick off, have two players connect a pass (ball can go forward or backward) and 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.
- ▶ This format we use throw-ins to restart the ball on the sideline. In training, work with players on how to set up when your team has a throw when the ball has gone out of bounds along a sideline. Encourage players off the ball to move around so the player throwing it in has options for them to play it to. It is best to practice this in the scrimmage. In the warm up of your first few practices have all players practice throwing the ball in over and over again moving across the field (all players have their own ball and go at the same time). Ball needs to go straight behind their head and both feet must stay on the ground. It works best if you can teach players to "drag" their back toe as they throw. Repetition is key here.
- ▶ 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 5 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.
- ▶ Goalkeepers will start becoming a bigger part of the game at U8. Start the season with a training session that all players have a ball and are introduced to catching the ball (all types). The more fun you can have with this the more interest there will be with players wanting to play GK. In games, try and rotate players in goal and if players show interest slide them in goal more often. Players can punt or throw the ball for distribution. In games and scrimmages, work with the GK's 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 if possible. Work with players to use their entire box, as this will give them a 10 yard advantage before



throwing or punting the ball. In training, encourage the GK's to distribute the ball out wide to their defenders when they are open. 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 somewhat stay in the team formation that they are playing, which will typically be a 1-2-1-2 (1 GK, 2 defenders, 1 midfielder and 2 forwards). A 1-2-1-2 should look like an X if their shape is good. Another option for a formation is a 1-2-2-1 (1 GK, 2 defenders, 2 midfielders, 1 forward). This will allow for help defending with the 2 midfielders.
- ▶ Teach the defenders to slide over to support ball and stay connected together with one always supporting the other. If the ball is on the right side, the right defender will slide and support the right midfielder while the left defender slides over and about 10 yards behind the right defender closer to the middle of the field. 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.
- ▶ Encourage them to learn the names of all of their teammates, as they will be playing with all of them throughout the year. Encourage them to talk to each other on the field, with simple things such as "Billy, I'm open". Encouraging them to talk in training will carry over into the matches and at the same time will engage all of them in the match. All of their communication with each other should be positive at all times. This is all critical in making the players comfortable and creating a good team environment.
- ▶ Make sure that all parents are sitting on the correct sideline at all times. 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. Keep all instructions brief taking no longer than one minute.
- ▶ **What can't I expect mentally from players at this age?** At this age, some of them will not understand what it is you want them to do from only words. It is key to demonstrate to them what it is that you want them to do. Have players help demonstrate as well as it will help them stay engaged with the training.
- ▶ **What can I expect physically from players at this age?** Players are starting to gain a bit more endurance, balance and coordination at U8. Read your group and depending on their energy level and attention span quick 1-minute water break to regroup and set up for a fresh new drill.
- ▶ **What can't I expect physically from players at this age?** That they will play with both feet. Be patient with this, as they have to learn how to play with their dominant foot first. Once they've built up some confidence using their dominant foot, you can start getting them to use their weaker foot. It is critical to get them using both feet at an early age. Remind them to work hard at it and to be patient with this.
- ▶ **How do I expect every player to act?** No two kids are alike, so don't expect them to all act alike. Give them some room to be themselves at this age; but they all need to be respectful of all coaches and players at all times. When you are talking, they aren't talking, all eyes and ears are on you.



- ▶ **What is the attention span for players at this age?** It's starting to increase, so be patient! Keep all instruction short and sweet and you will keep their attention. Participating in some of the exercises yourself will help to engage the players more. Variety is important to holding their attention and make them look forward to what you will be doing next.
- ▶ **How long should each training session be?** At this age, 1 hour 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 don't really have developed muscle groups that need 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. This would also be a great time to work on thrown in's (not standing in a line).
- ▶ **What should we work on in training?** Dribbling should be a priority at this age group. Getting players comfortable with the ball is key to player development. Do not spend a lot of time on tactics in training. Save working on spacing and such in the scrimmage portion of the training. Teach them the correct way to strike a ball when passing it by using the inside of their foot. Encourage them to learn the names of all of their teammates, as they will be playing with all of them throughout the year. Encourage them to talk to each other on the field, with simple things such as "Billy, I'm open" and "Billy, man on" and "Billy, take a shot". Encouraging them to talk in training will carry over into the matches and at the same time will engage all of them in the match. All of their communication with each other should be positive at all times.
- ▶ **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 is an activity 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.

#### POTENTIAL MATCH QUESTIONS:

- ▶ **What formation should I play?** With six players including the Goalkeeper ("GK") you should have them play in a 1-2-1-2 (1 GK, 2 defenders, 1 midfielder, and 2 forwards). Why? Because it naturally provides the most triangles on the field, which are key to soccer. You want to get them all together on your half of the field and put the players in the exact spots that they will be playing when the match begins. This makes it much easier for them to become familiar before they play in a game. Also tell the players that will be coming on for them to see where they will be going on the field. While this may be a bit bumpy going at first, you'll be surprised how quickly that they will catch on to it. Another option for a formation is a 1-2-2-1 (1 GK, 2 defenders, 2 midfielders and 1 forward). This will allow the 2 midfielders to help defend a bit more.



► **What should I talk to them about before the match?** Let players know where they are starting in the line up. Try and rotate players to start (don't always start with the same players). Remind them that you will be subbing at the mid-quarter mark, and that you play four quarters in a match. Try and play everyone at least two of those quarters. 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!).

► **What should I talk to them about in between quarters?** Make sure that the players that were on the field and just came off are all doing okay. Then, immediately go over the names of the players that will be going onto the field for the second quarter. Repeat this process after each quarter. It may seem overwhelming to you during the first match, but it will only get easier, as the players come to know the routine. Don't over coach them, let them play. Try and coach players off the ball as much as possible getting into a good supporting positions for each other.

► **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 (first season of a size 4 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 U8. The more fun you are having the more it will influence the players to have a fun experience as well. **Have Fun!**

#### **QUESTIONS DURING THE SEASON?**

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