



COACHING U9/U10 IN THE DUBLIN SOCCER LEAGUE

PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS:

- ▶ Players start to become more serious about their play.
- ▶ Peer pressure starts to become more of a factor in their lives.
- ▶ Technical skills can start to develop at more of a rapid pace.
- ▶ A greater divide among the playing ability and physical maturity among the players becomes more evident.
- ▶ They are becoming more aware of tactical concepts, like changing the point of attack and concepts of time and space.

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.
- ▶ To kick off, have players connect a pass (can go forwards or backwards) on the whistle to try 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.
- ▶ 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 7 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 U9/U10. 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.



- ▶ 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.
- ▶ 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. There should be very few balls simply being booted down the field.
 - ▶ 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 1-2-3-1 (1 GK, 2 defenders, 3 midfielders and 1 forwards). A 1-2-3-1 formation is a classic 7v7 formation. It offers fantastic balance and is incredibly easy for young players to grasp and will help them when they transition into 9v9. Two 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 when the opportunity presents itself. When one midfielder does this, the other two simply slide over to cover the space vacated by the midfielder making the run.
 - ▶ 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 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.
 - ▶ 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. Have players help demonstrate every now and then to help keep them engaged. 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 U9/U10.



► **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.

► **How do I expect every player to act?** Respect. When you are talking, they aren't talking, all eyes and ears are on you. You may start to see some natural born leaders emerge at this age. Don't discourage this in them.

► **What is the attention span for players at this age?** It's now at the level where you can accomplish things within exercises and drills with all of the players and not just a select few. 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 rudimentary 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 – 1 hour 15 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.

► **What should we work on in training?** Dribbling should still 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. Passing and the idea of possession should be introduced more at U9/U10 age groups.

► **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 1-2-3-1 (1 GK, 2 defenders, 3 midfielders, 1 forward) is a common 7V7 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 9v9 and then 11v11. Two 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. 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 once that they are whistled out to take the field. 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.

► **What should I talk to them about before the match?** Initially, remind players that they'll be playing 2, 25-minute halves with a 5-minute half time. They should pay attention to the match when they're on the sideline, both because it's helpful in continuing to learn the game, and so they're ready to sub in from the midfield line at any time. 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 the 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 U9/U10. 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?

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