

## U6 Coaching Guidelines

Lancaster Youth Soccer is a recreational soccer development program. What does this mean? Recreational means it's about having fun playing soccer, we are not an Olympic development program. Development means the primary focus is to teach fundamental soccer skills at each level of play. Have fun, but do so playing soccer. This Fall we will have the largest Kindergarten class in Lancaster in 351 years! We will have 8 teams instead of just 6 this Fall, and have several new coaches in our ranks as well. With this jump in enrollment and new blood it's a good time to establish some guidelines to help focus our soccer program.

The **goal of this document** is to:

- ensure consistency among U6 coaches so we're all teaching the same way and using the same vocabulary
- establish goals so coaches have a common understanding of which skills players should have under their belts when they move up to U8's
- offer suggestions on drills, sportsmanship, discipline, to create a fun learning environment
- create confident coaches that are better prepared and more willing to move up through the ranks
- Finally, this is a living document, to be updated with your feedback for future coaches... All feedback is appreciated.

Typically a U6 player that starts at age 4 will have 4 seasons of play before they move up to U8's. A spring and fall season at age 4 and the same at age 5. Our goal as coaches should be 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.

- **Safety** first
  - Shin guards are mandatory.
  - Frequent breaks as needed.
  - Lots of water when it's hot.
- Every player should play **equal time**.
- We **DON'T** keep **score** at the U6 level.
- No **goalies**, you should not have a player permanently stationed in goal.
- Avoid **blowouts**. While we strive to create competitively balanced teams, inevitably you will find yourself running over the opposing team or have a player or two that run wild scoring goal after goal. Look out for these situations, anticipate them, be prepared to change your lineups so your

players are challenged without running up the score. No one likes losing 20 to zip... Some ways to deal with this:

- After your Allstar has scored 2 or 3 goals, make them your fullback and don't let them cross the midfield line.
- Make him/her the captain and have them pass up front to the players who have yet to score. Great lesson in sportsmanship.
- If your whole team is dominating, play pass-pass-shoot. Kids can't shoot on net until they pass twice... (Pass? At this age level? Give them a chance and they'll amaze you!)
- Bring a **blanket** for kids to sit on during games.
- Bring oranges for halftime, delegate a different week to each parent.
- Get a **team parent** to watch the kids on the blanket while you're coaching the players on the field during games.

### **Maximize touch time**

- The more time kids spend touching the ball the faster they will develop.
- To maximize player development coaches should schedule a 1 hour practice mid week in addition to the Sunday game. Do not combine practices and games because "it's convenient".
- During drills, no lines or keep them short, every player should have a ball during practice to maximize touches... (and fun)
- Besides, the more they idle in line the more trouble they will get into.
- Keep them moving.
- During games try to play 3v3 rather than 4v4, keeps the swarm smaller. Rotate the players frequently (every 4 minutes or so) to keep their attention focused on the game.

### **Positions**

- Forwards (Left wing, Right wing, Center), and Fullbacks.
- Not offense and defense. Every player is on offense when their team has the ball and every player is on defense when the other team has it.

### **Start play**

- To begin the game or 2<sup>nd</sup> half, and to restart play after a goal is scored, the ball is placed at center of midfield line. The ball should be kicked by a player to another player on his/her team. Opposing team lines up 3 steps back from midfield line.

### **Throwins**

- Both feet on the ground, feet on or behind the line, two hands, over the head.
- Throwin from the sidelines, not next to the goal.

### **Out of bounds**

- Enforce out of bounds. Loosely perhaps at the beginning of the season. But this enforces the concept of ball control and prepares them for U8's when it is strictly enforced.

### **Team Name and Chant!**

- I've read up a good bit on soccer, and I've heard it said that young kids don't grasp the team concept till sometime after the U6 level. Nonsense! For years now I've come up with a team name based on the color of the shirt: Orange Crush, Red Devils, Blue Sharks... and a very simple, repeatable chant for the kids - "Who are we? - *Orange Crush!!!* And what do we do? *Play hard and have fun!!!* They love it and little things like this focus their attention and make the kids want to come and participate. AND it makes your job easier and more rewarding. Be creative and come up with something that works for you.

### **Ball Control**

- This is the primary goal of U6 coaches/players, improve their ball control skills. If you focus on this and nothing else you'll come out way ahead at the end of the season.
- How many feet do you have? 2!!! Teach them to use them both when dribbling. Also, teach them where their inside and outside of the foot is and how to use it.
- Remind them to keep their **head up** when they dribble, don't stare at the ball. This way they can see their teammates to pass to and defenders to stay away from.

### **Drills**

- Dribble along the white lines using both feet. Again with just the left. Then just the right. Remind them to keep their head up.
- Sprints, dribbling from one side of the field to the other, again alternate both feet, left only, right only.
  - Keep the ball close in crowds, longer dribbles when sprinting distances...
- Set up discs/cones and have them dribble around them, again using both/left only/right only...
- The best way to teach 4 and 5 year olds and generate enthusiasm is through games. Red Light Green Light, Freeze Tag, Sharks and Minnows, Coconuts..... To the kids they're playing a game and having fun. However, it's important as coaches that you recognize what soccer skills these games emphasize as these games are a teaching tool.

- Red Light Green Light - teaches them to start moving with the ball-dribble-and stop, which happens continuously throughout a game. To them their just having fun. (The stop-move is simply placing their foot on top of the ball when you blow the whistle.)
- Freeze Tag - in one half the field have the kids dribble around while you chase them. Again, they're practicing ball control without knowing it. (dribbling away from you, staying within the lines, and not bumping into other players)
- Sharks and Minnows - line the players up at one end of the field, they're the minnows and you're the shark in the middle of the field. Blow the whistle and have them dribble past you to the other side of the field. The shark tries to kick a player's ball out of the field of play. These players then become sharks and join you in the middle of the field. Regroup and run it again till all the minnows are caught. (hand out pennies to identify those minnows turned shark)
- Coconuts - place a ball on top of a disk in the middle of 2 players spread 15 feet apart. Players kick the ball and try to knock the coconut out of the tree. If the player misses, the other player is there to stop the ball and kick it back. First team to 5 wins. Teaches accuracy, the stop move, introduce the shovel pass (kicking the ball with inside of the foot instead of the toe).
- Scrimmages - always wrap up your practices with a scrimmage. The game of soccer is the best teacher!
- Remind them to keep their heads up...
  - Encourage them to practice at home.
  - Other favorites? Let me know!

### **Passing**

- Optional for the more advanced players.

### **Aggressiveness**

- Explain what aggressiveness means - go after the ball. Many young players either run away from the ball or don't engage. Soccer is not a spectator sport, encourage them to be aggressive and go after the ball.
- Remind them this does not mean pushing, shoving, hitting are allowed...

### **Sportsmanship**

- Sportsmanship is paramount and begins at this young level!
- "Good game" only when shaking hands after the game. Watch out for the "ha ha we beat you" or "you stink"... Remind them when they line up all you want to hear is "good game".

- Respect for teammates, opponents, and coaches.
- No one likes a ball hog.

### Discipline

- Ah, the best for last. Kids at this age frequently are enrolled in Pre-school where they are taught and expected to behave for what, 3+ hours? It is NOT too much to expect them to behave for 60 minutes of soccer. The more time you spend disciplining the less time you have to spend teaching, and this takes away time from those players who behave and come to play. Parents should keep their kids in line which I hope to address in a separate parent/player code of conduct letter. However, they are after all only 4 and 5 year olds and can't be expected to be perfect angels all the time. You will often times have your hands full, when they cross the line let them know it, if necessary return them to their parent so you can focus on your team. (From a practice strategy standpoint, try to exhaust their nervous energy that they come to practice with early in the practice with a couple laps/sprints before easing into teaching drills.)

Lastly, you may be thinking, "What? We're talking about U6's here." Given the chance, these kids will amaze you! Not teaching them, or at the very least not exposing your players to these fundamentals, is an artificial limitation YOU as their coach are imposing on them. While they may not be able to execute everything you begin teaching them in a single season, keep in mind that over 4 seasons of consistent training they will get it! The more advanced players will perform, and the other players will learn from them. Push them, they can take it.

At any point during the season if you have any questions don't hesitate to contact either Donna or myself. These are intended as guidelines only, use them as you see fit. These by no means represent an exhaustive list, view them as a beginner's guide. Let me know what works and what doesn't. If you have favorites that work for you I'd love to include them.

Thanks again for your time, here's to a great, safe season!

Jeff Parrow  
Lancaster Soccer President